

DYNAMICS OF RELATIONS IN THE URBAN SPACE

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Abstract

Questions about sense usually accompany the times of breakthrough, when we recognise a crisis of certain values and we helplessly face realistic threats and changes. If experiences incessantly call for answers to the questions concerning the truth, the question concerning the sense provides a broader reference and reaches for an answer about the source of the truth, as well as the source of the crisis.

The deliberations below constitute a continuation of the reflections contained in papers [Kantarek, 2012] and [Kantarek, 2014] *Skomponowana sieć sieci (Composed Net of Nets)* and *Czas i przestrzeń miasta (The Time and the Space of the City)*.

The former presents the city in the dimension of its composed three-dimensional form, which is hierarchic and stabilised by some parts and areas of the city. One such element is in particular diversified housing environments, valuable in terms of their functions and space, as well as in terms of culture they stand for.

A three-dimensional form of the city constitutes an arrangement of a broader reality referred to as *the net of nets* – which is to illustrate the existence of numerous levels of relations, also the extrasensory ones.

The term 'net'¹ (Latin: Reticulum) is used as a definition of a set of elements which on one hand is irregular, disorderly and heterogeneous, and on the other bears the features of stability and cohesion. Compared to the system characteristic for order and a rational holistic approach, the net stands for indeterminableness and factualness.

The structure of a net is based on nodes, their links, and the space between them. A net offers a chance to bring balance by means of flexibility towards the dynamics of changes.

Therefore, a net of nets stands for – without limitations – the generic differentiation of its elements, the multitude of nodes and links, the maintenance of dynamics and flexibility (stability), and it defines the state of synthesis within a three-dimensional space in time.

In the dynamic reality of events, composing, that is arranging, shall be subjected to the confrontation with competitive and isolated elements. Competition (as a denial of arrangement) and isolation (as a denial of combination) intrinsically destroy composition.

¹ <http://siec.blox.pl/2010/06/Siec-definicja.html> <http://www.sjp.pl/sie%E6>

The latter paper (*Czas i przestrzeń miasta. The Time and the Space of the City*) depicts the sense of the city in the lives of its community – both in the individual and social dimension. The questions referred to the quality of this life in light of the danger of non-substantiality.

The paradox consists in the fact that – if we adopt Aristotle's mode of thinking² - substantiality connected with the independent being exists in view of accidents, properties which are not essential, but which are determining. Quantity, quality, location, relations, time, possession, activities – these are accidents.

At the same time space and time shape our lives and it often seems that they are the only chance for our self-awareness and responsibility.

And despite Aristotle's warnings, architects and urban planners are usually deeply convinced about the importance of three-dimensional space for the shape of the history of our lives, in the scale of our individual fates, as well as in a broad social dimension.

The notion of *net of nets*, where we constantly search for our substantiality, was completed with the picture of configurations of places and the stories they tell³. Such a vision of the city gets closer to K. Wejchert's notion of *spatial city*⁴ - buildings and open space create a rich *space continuum*.

Urban space

Today we are unable to present a clear definition of the city, perhaps merely numerous scopes that define requirements towards communities and spaces we live in.

The dimension of the community and its culture and the dimension of the place constitute two most important determinants of the definition of the city. Subsequent characteristics connected with the population statistics, the quality of function, the area or external conditions specify the type of the definition in more detail.

Instead of a definition, we use a convenient phrase of 'phenomenon', which cleverly summarises our helplessness and provides an excuse for the inability to rationally control its existence and development⁵.

Considering the multitude of notions that characterise the city, it is worth paying attention to those properties which stand up for themselves in light of different categories. If it is not the size, the spatial and functional separateness, if not the type of the spatial cohesion of the area that decide about its definition today, what basic criterion can be adopted then?

If we remain faithful to the general notion of a certain phenomenon defined by the life of a specific community in a specific area, with a developed culture of life and its dynamism, we can talk about a unit, a settlement form, or – to put it in simpler terms – urban (urbanised) space. Urban space is a more general notion than the city is. It signifies each space inhabited by people and exhibiting some internal organisation which shapes its spatial dimension.

More and more land has been becoming urbanised space nowadays. It is not just the fact that more and more people want to live in cities; not only uncontrollable greed for urban space, not

² Aristotle 384 B.C. – 322 B.C.

An independent being, that is substance, stands only for specific objects (also animated 'objects' which have a soul). Substance – form (general properties) and matter (individual properties) remains unchanged. Substance has the nature of an independent being which exists in itself and it remains unchanged amongst changing definitions.

³ As a combination of the differentiation of Y. F. Tuan between space and place, as well as according to the concept of Ch. de Portzamparc's *intervention* allowing to build maintaining the cultural continuity of the environment. [Tuan, 1987], [de Portzamparc, Sollers, 2008]

⁴ [Wejchert, 1974] p. 22.

⁵ [Dziewoński, 1990, pp. 37, 38] '*The notion of the city is used in order to determine a certain phenomenon in the life of the society; a phenomenon which occurs not only statically – in space, but also dynamically – in time. The city is a historical fact and therefore it cannot be exhausted with words.*'

only more and more efficient organisation of metropolises, but also a different organisation of life that is responsible for the fact that dispersion of some functions, and not their accumulation, provides better opportunities of spatial arrangement.

Such organisation is fostered by numerous well-known forms of relations between city centres and suburban areas, built for a long time. The tradition of garden cities, or the American *Peripheral Model*, *planned suburb (exurb)*, *TOD*, *Edge* systems, or *Gateway Cities* are manners of structuring developed simultaneously with thinking in a broader and broader metropolitan and regional scale. A parallel process is the process of strengthening of the existing rural centres and numerous forms of uncontrolled development – *dispersed* and *squatter settlements*, or *the Urban-Rural Shift* and uncontrolled forms of slums, which assume different qualitative and quantitative forms.

It seems necessary to search for the urban space which obviously enables, arranges and motivates, but also which relates, stores and commemorates, and in doing so enables, arranges and motivates. The space which together with natural areas constitutes elements of a dynamic mosaic of the *net of nets*.

Today, more than ever, this *spatial continuum* is an anchor ground for not spatial relations, and it is extremely important to realise that the value of such extra spatial relations can in no way take place at the expense of this realistic Euclidean space, but it develops in absolute conformity with it, although obviously the newly emerging reciprocal relations must be taken into consideration.

Hence it is important to consider several crucial elements that in a special way shape the new image, or new 'contents' or urban spaces today. These are:

1. Dynamic relation of the real / virtual / spiritual,
2. Dynamic relation of the local / global / universal,
3. Multidimensionality of conditions of the orientation in urban space and variable conditions of perception of the environment, including attention processes,
4. Dynamic relations of space of a local or transit nature,
5. Existence of space and forms as well as programme contents which disintegrate the unity or the reasonableness of urban spaces,
6. Spatial proximity vs. hybrid contents of urban space,
7. Architecture in the *spatial continuum*.

Dynamic relation of the real / virtual / spiritual

Discussions devoted to the real / virtual relations focus on problems which in their essence should not be important for the spiritual integrity of a person⁶. Both references pertain to the relations between a human being – a person and the external world; they do not, however, determine the type of intervention of such worlds on the internal structure of man – his physicality, mind, and spirituality.

Virtuality can be understood as a special type of reality (virtuality is enrooted in the reality, it exists through reality; virtuality, on the other hand, does not exist without reality) as the non-updated reality⁷. The relations between the real and virtual world (absent reality, potential reality) in their dynamics create a certain whole of the external world, towards which man as a person constructs the relations of commitment and individuality. It is, however, absolutely

⁶ The Author sees man according to the personalistic Christian vision, bestowed with self-consciousness and volitional approach to the responsibility of one's life. Cf.: [Kantarek, 2009] pp. 62-65

⁷ 'In the philosophical context, virtuality, especially virtual worlds, constitute a certain potentiality. The real existence – realistic, but not current. It is a certain existence without presence...' [Ługowska, 2009] p. 108

different in terms of substantiality. In the Aristotelian approach a person is in opposition to elements exhibiting the properties of accidents.

New relations between reality and virtuality have a different effect on the spirituality of man – on human conscience, will, cognitive abilities, imagination, but in no way do they replace it, and they certainly should not suppress it.

Dynamic relation of the local / global / universal

Globalisation processes constitute another challenge for the locality of our cultures and historically formed civilisations. The discussion devoted to the relations of the global – local comprises all imaginable scopes. Progress in the field of science and the development of technical opportunities, information exchange and accumulation, or new communication options and cultural unifications they have brought have been presented in a simplified picture of a *global village*⁸, which contains a more futuristic vision with hopeful intuition of change than it proved to be an implemented vision of the future.

The question arises to what extent globalisation helps build and dynamise the local culture, and to what extent it destroys it. It is locality as the exemplification of our life and possible implementation of our attitudes that shapes our references and notions pertaining to relations, the mundane and most obvious ones, as well as the most sublime ones, and defines our outlook on life. The process of building our identity towards universal values takes place at the local level as it happens in us, and not beyond us.

The problem with understanding this value of locality consists in the fact that more and more of us live in several spatial localities, frequently simultaneously. And then the question concerning consistency arises.

*Multidimensionality of conditions of the orientation in the urban space and variable conditions of perception of the environment, including attention processes*⁹

*Orientating codes of the urban form*¹⁰ organise our orientation in urban space. Complexity of spatial relations, overlapping of different modes of moving around in this space, and differentiation of travelling and destinations is responsible for the fact that more and more frequently we reach for passive forms of orienting in space. *The Global Positioning System*, that is *GPS*, enables to efficiently define one's location and to navigate, as well as releases us from the need to stay alert all the time. Our attention can be directed to some other thing at this time, which increases the feeling of abstracting from the three-dimensional space, or extends simultaneity.

In practice, orientation is based on the form's own codes to a lesser and lesser extent. This situation is also fostered by the fact that traffic relations are dominated by the transit traffic, functional plots of land are isolated in urban space and advertising is extremely aggressive.

Introducing balance in the orientation in the urban space is an extremely difficult task, if not impossible at all. The public space, whose attractiveness is measured by the strength of its dynamism, is an arena of a constant struggle for our attention and interest. The message connected with history and memory of places and events does not always manage to stand the

⁸ *global village* according to H. M. McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* [McLuhan, 1975]

⁹ [Maruszewski, 2001] pp. 85-116, [Kantarek, 2009] p. 101, 102

¹⁰ In: [Kantarek, 2009] *orientating codes of the urban form are codes of culture, the form's own codes, signalling codes, and mass media codes.*

competition of everyday information, and the defence of cultural messages pertaining to the entire community often yields to the wave of privatisation of meanings.

Dynamic space relations of a local and transit nature

An important level of arrangement is the question of extension of the transit network, necessary in the scale of the entire municipal or regional organism, while maintaining cohesion of local development complexes.

The modernist proposal of a solution to this problem by means of superblock system led to sprawl development and failed to solve the problem of protection of the existing cities centers.

The efforts to restore open urban space to pedestrians and persons wishing to spend time in this space, undertaken for years now, have been bringing numerous good solutions¹¹. The lack of continuity of pedestrian systems in public spaces have become a concern for numerous towns and cities. Very effective revitalisation measures of transport areas have been in progress¹². At the same time, new proposals appear,¹³ e.g. concerning providing the cycling traffic with a transit quality, the effects of which may have a negative impact on the cohesion of local spaces. Will the bicycle, like the car before it, contribute to the disintegration of the urban space?

Existence of spaces and forms, as well as programme contents which disintegrate the unity or sensibility of urban spaces

Reconciliation and composition are fundamental spatial values in the urban scale. The lack of sustainability in space development is manifested in thousands of ways. The appearance of the car disintegrated the traditional tissue of the city and we still experience new forms of this disintegration. We also allow to build public spaces which are in fact private and serve inhabitants under principles dictated by private owners. We also exclude gated communities from the urban space, where the feeling of safety of their users is provided at the expense of the deterioration of the quality of areas located in their vicinity and servicing them. Spatial parasites...

Ever since the moment of destroying the logics of the urban block arrangement, where the spatial form separated the open public space from the private space, placing structures at the border between them that skilfully governed their mutual relations, there have been numerous attempts to define mutual relations of open spaces. It seems, however, that more accurate solutions have not been found. Only appropriate structures situated between the private and the fully public, offering attractive formal completion of the programme of such spaces and at the same time regulating the division of form, are an appropriate solution.

¹¹ It is difficult not to mention the names of Jan Gehl or Herman Knoflachner in this context.

¹² About this subject, e.g. K. Dudzic-Gyurkovich [Dudzic-Gyurkovich, 2015]

¹³ Works on the system of 'cycling highways' have been launched in Germany. Some of them are to be built in the Ruhr district. The first 5 km of the cycling highway has been put into use – it is a part of a planned 100km route in the region of Mulheim an der Ruhr. <http://capovelo.com/germany-opens-first-5-kilometers-of-its-bicycle-autobahn/> Munich is also planning to build 14 cycling highways, which are to link the city centre with the suburbs. The system is to service the area of over 100km². According to the research, so far ca. 7% of cyclists have gone beyond 7km/h [Peters, 2016]

The use of an electric bicycle can also change the role of a bicycle in the transport system.

A good tool for the process of shaping of the composition of open spaces and volumes, private and public ones, and of verifying their quality, is the method of testing of accessibility, visibility, and perceptibility or urban spaces¹⁴.

Spatial proximity vs. hybrid contents of urban space

Hybridity of form, function and cultural contents – this is the picture of today's cities. They struggle to overcome distance and isolation, they eliminate contrasts. Spatial proximity is an attraction – it facilitates the use of space, it multiplies attractions.

Today, hybridity refers not only to the three dimensions of space – it is a four-dimensional category. Changeable arrangements are an answer to the multitude of events; in this context space assumes a working property – it serves many functions. A. Rossi's *fatto urbano* is stronger than its function.

Hence we have two approaches.

A form which lasts longer than the function which it has been built for. Although it can be transformed, it lasts and it builds a place. In time subsequent elements of meaning, function and form are added – a story comes into being.

And a form which allows to forget about itself. Events produce decorations, form shows, withdrawing to the role of a stage portal.

Paradoxically enough, it is the same form – the lasting one and the one that multiplies experiences and senses, visible or vanishing.

Architecture in the spatial continuum

Does architecture still exist in such a complicated *spatial continuum*? Or does it blend, vanish, dominated by nets and events?

I do hope it does not, as it still has some chances.

It is the manifestation of the present and the future, it has to come into being, because we need it for the most mundane and the most sublime purposes.

It constitutes the setting for places, a story, a part of this process of adding meanings which have an urban dimension.

It is an order, or even its fraction, which simplifies the every-day reality, which facilitates relations.

It is something we should be proud of, it stands for prestige.

It is commemoration.

May it just be able -sometimes - to stand aside, to disappear, to be silent, and yield to life and events! Because it is, like urban space, substanceless.

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