

Social and cultural aspects of a city public space transformation. Case study of Poznan, Poland.

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Abstract

The public spaces of Poznan, are defined by a system of squares, parks and streets connecting them. The Old Market Square and downtown district markets and other squares are the nodes of the system. The main shopping streets radiating from the Old Town are the connectors between the squares - unfortunately transected streets with significant traffic or railway tracks. The problems associated with the dominance of a transport in the city center causes a significant reduction in the attractiveness of inner-city neighborhoods. The negative impact of these conflicts and above all, the decrease of the spatial and social attractiveness of the public space within the most valuable area of a city centre, is the main reason for its functional fall. The low level of an attractiveness of a downtown affects the increase of a development in periphery areas and an outflow of capital to these areas. Today, there are more shopping malls on the periphery than in the Old Town in Poznan. This results in even greater collapse of the most valuable tissue of the city and its slow but permanent degradation. In these circumstances, the idea of a specific downtown renewal was invented and called MAD city for people. It is based on two directions. The first is related to the formal actions to improve engineering solutions. The second one focuses on the socio- economic decline and aims at its revitalization through the implementation of a creative device into urban public spaces. The author appears in two different roles when commenting on the ongoing changes in Poznan city space. As a designer of traffic regulations and a transport infrastructure on one hand and as an activist for the revitalization of a public space.

Keywords: public space, urban design, social engagement

Introduction

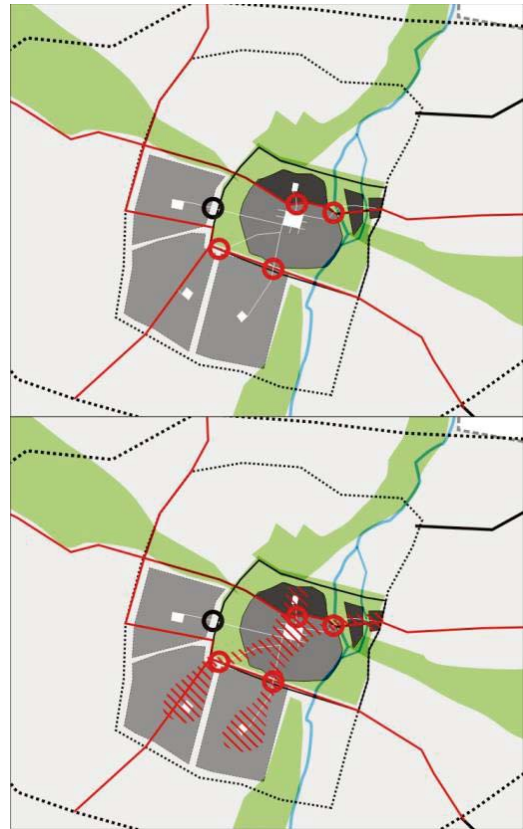
The city of Poznan communication scheme in the plans of Joseph Stübgen 1 from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century consisted on the peripheral system with radiant green wedges. That form was a result of the previous adaptation of the old stronghold based on ring-shaped system of forts. The radial elements were made of roads leading from the city center toward the outer forts. The peripheral ones were made of ring-shaped fort system and a network of internal roads within a fortress. This system was treated for a long time as a frontier of the planned spatial development of the city.

The subsequent plan was developed at the Municipal Planning Office of the city of Poznan headed by Wladyslaw Czarnecki. It was during the interwar period after the next enlargement of Poznan. The main idea was a development of the communication system on the right bank of Warta river as well as its completion owing to the introduction of the third ring road. That is how this new road system was associated with the outer parts of the forts ring system. The following plan of Poznan spatial development was created during the occupation time, in 1940, by German architect Walther Bangert. There was another spatial alteration introduced after the next enlargement of the city limits. The communication scheme was changed into a frame-shaped one, which is valid to this day.

¹ Kodym-Kozaczko G., Rozwój Poznania w planowaniu urbanistycznym w latach 1900-1990. W: Architektura i urbanistyka Poznania w XX wieku. Red. Jakimowicz T., Poznań 2005



Pict. 1. Theoretical and real traffic system in a city of Poznan.



Pict. 2. Collision between main public spaces and main routes as a significant problem of downtown districts activation

The reconstruction of a city of Poznan after the Second World War, in 1945, was maintained in the spirit of not only rebuilding but also modernizing the city. The development of various means of transport - public and private ones - caused the need to correct the pre-war communication system and road infrastructure. The system of three concentrically located frame-shaped roads from a city centre to outer parts was planned to be realized in separate steps and implemented gradually. Thus, efforts were made to create favorable conditions to relieve the city centre from a transit traffic. Unfortunately, the work was being delayed and never successfully realized full-time. As a result, nowadays the main communication system still depends on the nineteenth century ring-shaped scheme surrounding Poznan Old Town.

Unfortunately for the city, there were in the early 60s made some improper modifications within the heavily congested ring-shaped communication system. This led to the undesirable spatial situation, in which the downtown area was cut into several parts. This resulted in an extensive demolition of the historical tissue of Poznan downtown. Later, it turned out that many of these demolitions were unnecessary because the planned thoroughfares were finally not implemented. There was another very important and undesirable effect of this separation of the districts within a historic center. It resulted in a loss of continuity of public space system, either in functional or spatial aspect. This unwanted situation touched especially the shopping streets and market squares - this was the first step to the collapse of the Poznan city center and neighbourhood areas.

The undesirable urban processes in Poznan city centre started in the 90s of the twentieth century and were caused by several crucial factors. Firstly, the slow decline of inner-city public spaces caused a significant reduction in the attractiveness of this part of the city. At the same time was observed an increase of the suburban areas attractiveness which was hastily converting into a residential single-family housing zone. Lots of people dream about living in an own house surrounded by nature. That is why the suburban zones turned to be very competitive in comparison with city centre

areas. This caused immediately a sharp increase in the number of cars which unfortunately reinforced this undesirable effect. There were also not enough parking places in the city center so the number of problems increased. The number of the city centre residents has declined in favor of the increase in the number of suburban neighborhoods inhabitants. That also caused another trend - more and more huge shopping malls were located on the outskirts of the downtown areas and they were more and more needed. The change of social preferences in the field of making everyday purchases: from the frequent ones and practised everyday into one-week big purchases in shopping centres, weakened the local entrepreneurship focusing around the local markets and central shopping streets. Overlapping and mutual fueling of these negative phenomena has created a kind of unwelcome synergy deepening the degradation of the historical urban substance.

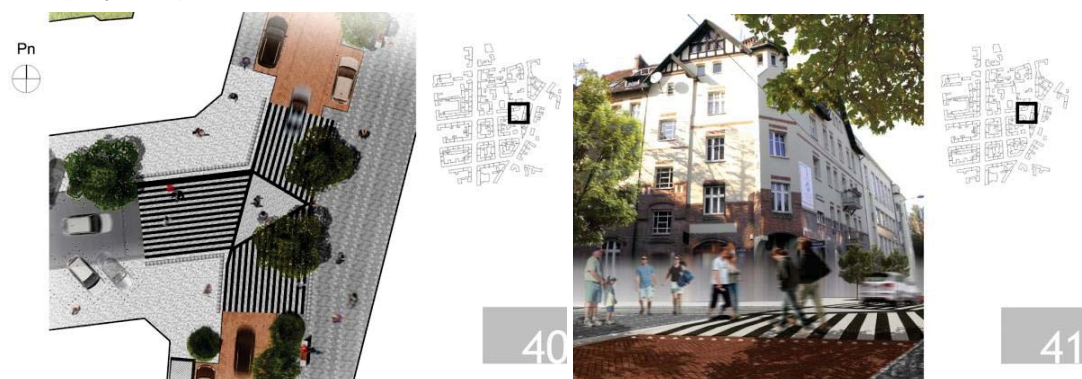
Corrective actions

This problem of losing a competitiveness of a city centre does not concern only a city of Poznan. The similar phenomenon can be observed in most Polish cities of various scale. The problem of a communication system dominance and nuisances associated with automobile traffic especially in inner parts of a city are the most important factors of this unwelcome functional and spatial situation. This trend was closely connected and provoked by political changes of the early 90s. At that time, the first rapid increase in the number of cars per capita was observed in Poland and touched especially central districts of Polish cities.

Therefore, in 1999, there was adopted in Poznan a document setting out the Municipal Transport Policy in accordance with the principles of sustainable development. That document helped to decrease the trend but not to stop it. According to the statistics, in 2008, the situation was still not very impressive - there were 494 cars for each 1000 of the inhabitants.

The sustainable urban transport has become nowadays not just a buzzword but the first need. There is still a pressing need to correct the situation and stop this unwelcome trend. For it is a process of re-arrangement of some spatial solutions, these problems and urban conflicts cannot be solved at once, it must be done steadily, step by step so as to achieve the intended results.

The restoration of public spaces appropriated by traffic has become one of the main activities realized by Poznan Municipality. The first major project made, was the introduction of the restricted parking zones to the city center and the gradual expansion of the Limited Staging Zone within downtown districts. Next, the introduction of the legal arrangements providing the gradual calming of a traffic in the inner parts of the city - Zone 30 km / h. At the same time, the public transport and cycling are being promoted. What is worth accentuating, the introduction of the traffic changes within a city central districts was always associated with several public consultation meetings with both the representatives of Poznan Municipality and representatives of Local Councils.



Pict.3. Traffic regulation was the first step of spatial reorganization of a public space within Poznan city centre.

The first actions taken in order to restrain the dominance of cars in the city center was the introduction of the Limited Staging Zone. The author of the paper had the opportunity to perform the project of the public spaces arrangement within the downtown district of Wilda. The urban design work covered the areas adjacent to the Old Town and extending until Wildecki Square - the main square of this district. The objectives of the project were as follows: the traffic calming within the main street connecting Wildecki Square and the Old Town. Another important thing was the regulation and reorganization of the

parking spaces within this road leading to minimization of their negative impact on the city space perception by pedestrians. There were introduced a new arrangement of existing and newly designed squares and green zones.

There were promoted in the project new solutions not used so far in Poznan - so called shared space communication which is used by various forms of transport and pedestrians, such as the junction with the lock for pedestrians, an improvement of an access to the sidewalk levels, as well as already known in Poznan traffic calming elements of road infrastructure additionally with greenery or small architecture elements. The aim of these implemented or proposed solutions was to adjust vehicles speed to 30 km / h. Another example of the urban programme aiming at the reduction of the car dominance owithin the downtown areas and promotion of pedestrian and cyclist fluent movement is the ZONE TEMPO 30 or designation of areas with restricted maximum speed limit to 30km / h. There is also needed the reorganization of traffic so as to prevent movement of transit through the Old Town areas.



Pict.4. The proposal of the reorganization of traffic, rearrangement of a pavement and urban furniture within Poznan city centre.

The Poznan Municipal Traffic Office proceeded to draw up a reorganization concept of a communication system with a new spaces for pedestrians within one of a city centre main street of St. Martin. Once it was the main shopping street of city. Currently, badly organized, overgrown with features incongruent to its previous rank is facing a deep decline of functional, spatial and social attractiveness. Author's project made on behalf of the Poznan Municipal Traffic Office brought for discussion not only specific engineering solutions, but also the announcement of a wider participation of experts and activists in decision making concerning the transformation of one of the most important public space in Poznan.

Social and cultural role of a public space

Contemporary global economy has, on the one hand, the possibility of building ever higher standards of living, on the other hand, represents a threat to the centuries-old cultural traditions and historical values. In this situation, cultural values play a very important role in a creation and maintainance of the identity and city individualism. Enhancing local awareness and

building urban strategies based on the unique characteristics of individual districts may be the beginning of a long process of a downtown areas renewal both in the spatial and socio-economic aspects.

One of the most important elements of urban structure which role is precisely to create a unique identity is a system of public spaces within a city downtown areas. The public spaces consisting of markets, squares, streets and parks are very important as for these are places of increased social interactions and contacts. Within the public spaces the cultural heritage and historical values are manifested the most. They reflect the uniqueness of a city and the level of social culture and everyday life. This is why all the design decisions taken both in an architectural and urban scale must be taken very cautiously. So as to develop or activate these spaces in a process of decision making there must be considered not only spatial and functional aspects but primarily social ones.

The downtown public spaces play crucial role in a city life and city structure for its spatial equipment and destiny. They must therefore a subject of continuous evolution and spatial changes so as to attract and make the city users stop. They are also very important in social and cultural aspects. That is why it is so urgent to combine in a homogenous way the existing historical and cultural values with some modern spatial solutions. Both the authenticity and the alterations are needed. The best way to provide a high level of a downtown attractiveness is to infill the gaps in a central urban tissue with some modern elements or investments. This is what is promoted by the idea of a compact city¹.

New paradigm

The places where people are particularly keen to stay longer and come back again are distinguished by some unique and interesting features and spatial offer. They are conducive to enable social interactions or contacts, as they represent places which are livable, comfortable, safe and attracting to come and stay. This attractiveness is due to the right urban scale of public spaces, proper and city users favourable communication solutions, adaptation to the physical and perceptual possibilities of people. There is also the rift and welcome diversification of an offer range, the desirable level of a aesthetic and visual attractiveness and functional quality of an offer, repeated in different forms in relatively short distances, which does not allow the monotony.

This offer means not only public and commercial services, communication facilities but also a cultural one understood as the material (spatial) and intangible (feelings of downtown users) features. There is also a need to provide innovative and creative functions so as to increase the spatial attractiveness. The cafes open to streets, souvenir and arts and craft shops, small art galleries - these are the functions requiring the right spatial context enabling them to mark their existence in the public space. These kind of places are distinguished by something special, so called spirit of the place. They can act as an inspiration for creative actions perform by creative people, they encourage the users to experience the city space, to explore it and perceive with all the senses. They can be variable in form, scale, meaning, but they always draw the user's attention and provoke to take part in this specific game.

"The city of the future means something different than the city of the past. The city encouraging its residents to use their imagination goes far beyond the paradigm of urban engineering in urban planning. [...] Today, this so called hard infrastructure must go along with the soft one which helps people in the city to start interactions, contacts, exchange of ideas and thoughts². The social and political changes that took place in Poland during last 25 years and global trends cause significant increase in a social awareness in the field of a spatial order. The need to rescue and revive the inner parts of cities is felt by both the local societies and the city authorities. The creative approach to the problem of social and spatial revitalization of urban public spaces in Poznan is a desirable way but still an area of much research and trials.

The creative and innovative approach to urban planning means creation of the right conditions for local activities in the field of solving a city problems. The creative and intellectual potential can be useful for a wide range of actions: in n aesthetic, social and even economic aspects. Such a creative potential was used so as to create a catalogue of Poznan inner-city public spaces, which is a part of the research programe entitled MAD city for people, conducted on Poznan University of Technology, Faculty of Architecture in the study naukowych³. MAD means: meaning, action and design in a city that is

¹ Zwarta przebudowa polskich miast? Zarządzanie rozwojem miasta poprzez strategiczne gospodarowanie terenami, Zeszyty KIN, Kraków 2000

² Landry Ch, Kreatywne miasto, Warszawa 2013, str.34

³ MAD city for people is an idea invented and promoted by dr Dominika Pazder, dr Bartosz Kazmierczak during Poznan Design Days 2014. The authors of the concept are also involved in a research entitled "Art in a city space - obiekt as a tool of the creation and

open and oriented for people - its users of various needs, aims and aspirations. The catalogue created within a framework of a MAD city for people - scientific concept - is to assist the Poznan Municipality in the field of determining the function of specific places within a city centre in accordance to a specific allocation. The research conducted led to the spatial definition of a meaning and nature of the selected streets, squares and parks of a downtown area. Owing to a MAD concept there were identified three main factors describing the state of the Poznan central area: meaning - understood as a role of a place in the mental map of the city inhabitants, action - as social behaviors and interactions taking part in these spaces, and design - widely understood as aesthetics and usability of a given space. The idea of MAD could be helpful to determine the best function and its spatial scenography according to the location and spatial role and an equipment of specific public spaces within a downtown area of Poznan.

Discussion

Starting a public debate on the future development and reorganization of Poznan public spaces as well as an active participation of the municipal representatives and expert groups, indicates a greater openness of the city authorities to the needs and demands of the inhabitants. On the other hand, there is observed for several years a positive trend of a city centre revival concerning local groups of activists, creative environments, non-profit organizations and others for whom the matter of a balance among various functions and development aspects has become a common idea.

An opportunity to create a platform of cooperation between a municipality, business and non-governmental organizations is a mutual willingness to cooperate and to take common actions. The idea to rescue the city center from a decline is supported, on the one hand, by a large representation of all kinds of groups and associations, on the other hand, by the willingness of a public authority which esteems the sufficient force of these actions to create conditions for mutual exchange of ideas and cooperation. Unfortunately, the threat is minimal interest in the joint operation of the business sector. There is also a lack of appropriate tools in the hands of the authorities to direct and control the actions taken by private investors. This situation leads to uncontrolled development and unwelcome spatial decisions which do not satisfy local societies giving at the same time an extraordinary freedom for private investments. The business sector witnesses the weakness of the authorities and for that is not interested in the profits reduction in the name of social demands. In most cases, the authorities are often not able to affect the private investors to change or modify the proposed solutions to make them more pro publico bono.

Conclusion

Być może opracowania przygotowane przy współudziale autora nadadzą społecznej dyskusji nowy wymiar. MAD city for people łączy w sobie pierwiastek swobody działań artystycznych z planowaniem i prognozowaniem przyszłych zmian. Projekty regulacyjne jak przykład Wildy, św. Marcina kierunkują działania czysto infrastrukturalne w stronę pobudzania życia miejskiego i kultury. Zarówno społecznie inicjowane działania miękkie jak i publiczne przedsięwzięcia infrastrukturalne są niezbędnymi elementami budowania nowoczesnych strategii dla odnowy śródmieść. Wzajemne współdziałanie jest kluczem do sukcesu jakichkolwiek procesów społeczno-ekonomicznych. Właściwie zaprojektowana przestrzeń, uwzględniająca potrzeby wszystkich użytkowników i kreująca nowe postawy obywatelskie a przy tym estetyczna i wygodna jest zarówno zaczynem jak i efektem pożądanym przemian.

There is a hope that perhaps the projects and scientific research in which the Author cooperated will help to give a new dimension of a social discussion about a future of Poznan public space. The concept of MAD city for people combines the element of freedom of artistic design with regular planning practices for forecasting future spatial changes and reorganization of existing urban situation. These projects can be found useful in the process of directing the infrastructural rearrangement of an urban tissue or communication system toward more complex actions like a stimulation of an urban life and social culture. Both socially driven soft actions and public infrastructure projects are essential elements of a modern strategy creation for the renewal of degraded and asleep Poznan city center. The mutual cooperation is the key to the success of any social and economic processes. Properly designed spaces and places - with material and immaterial values are the ones that are designed in accordance with needs of all the users. The proper and desirable public space

transformation means a creation of the new sensible citizenship along with comfortable and high quality places suitable for all people, inspiring them and making them stay and come again and again.

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