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URBAN DESIGN AND THE SENSE OF THE CITY

PROJEKTOWANIE URBANISTYCZNE I SENS MIASTA

Abstract

What exactly means the term 'the sense of the city'? How can we answer this question precisely if we are not sure what a city is? Is it an accident on a map or form of art? Is it a symbol of culture or symbol of power? We could multiply questions but there is no simple answer. But we are professionals and people living around are waiting for our reasoning; therefore, we have to verify visible trends in the 21st century city that apply to all, both new and old, approaches to city planning. Ultimately, we have to try to build the model of the City of Harmonious Development meaning.

Keywords: urban design, new planning, harmonious development

Streszczenie

Co dokładnie oznacza termin „sens miasta”? Jak odpowiedzieć precyzyjnie na to pytanie, skoro nie jesteśmy w stanie powiedzieć, czym jest miasto? Czy jest przypadkowym znakiem na mapie czy formą sztuki? Czy jest symbolem kultury czy symbolem władzy? Takie pytania można mnożyć, ale nie znajdziemy na nie prostej odpowiedzi. Ale jesteśmy profesjonalistami i ludzie żyjący wokół nas oczekują naszych wypowiedzi. Nie mamy więc wyjścia i musimy weryfikować trendy widoczne w XXI-wiecznym mieście, które biorą się z dawnego i nowego podejścia do planowania miast. W końcu musimy próbować zbudować model Miasta Harmonijnego Rozwoju.

Słowa kluczowe: projektowanie urbanistyczne, nowe planowanie, rozwój harmonijny

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Visible trends in the 21st century city

1. Cities within our part of Europe are distinguished by their history of development, reflecting the characteristics of the political, social and economic structures of nations. However, today there are features that are common across all European cities.
2. Firstly, they have a certain specific image, and because of this, the phrase 'European City' (EC) means something to us. This image is a kind of identification mark. It is not only rhetoric figure, it is true: EC is kind of mark in economic sense.
3. Each of those different images of EC it is a spatial expression of a city's self-identity. 'It is hoped that city residents feel that they can identify with the city in which they live; moreover, that they can identify with any European city. The synthetic image of an average EC keeps helping Europe in rivalry with other continents, but EC has as well features which do not help in anytime.
4. One of the unwanted features of our regional cities is that, as is the case with other European cities, they are far from ideal – nowadays, despite cultural diversity, they are becoming more difficult to physically distinguish. Natural areas within and around cities tend to disappear under economic pressure. Reductions in the amount of open and public space (including agriculture land) and less biodiversity in cities pose a threat to the quality of city life. The state of the urban fringe around most cities is declining. One can observe: increasing internationalisation of metropolitan regions as regards both capital and labour; changes in the distribution of responsibilities between the public and the private sectors; a stronger role for a few major cities within a country; social and economic polarisation within cities; intensifying competition among cities, especially the large metropolises.
5. One of the most characteristic features of modern cities is sprawl. In many cities, the original compact cores have become surrounded by a kind of 'parallel city'. Transportation and other infrastructure networks that serve and connect these dispersed activities degrade city neighbourhoods and landscapes – the major non-renewable natural resource.
6. The networks of small and large cities create an urban continuum – this is already evident in many parts of Europe. The classical cities become just a component of such networks. Within this urban continuum, both spatial and social fragmentation occurs, each as a consequence of the other. If nothing is done to stop this shift from integration to segregation, cities will break up into separate sectors: on the one hand, overprotected areas and on the other, dangerous ghettos and 'outlaw zones'.
7. From the other side we have to remember, that cities are not just territories where social transformations take place, they are an active part of the transformation process. Cities can be driving forces that play the role of incubators of innovation and an alternative to any crisis, hopefully.. The development of such cities should be, first and foremost, sustainable – they should be "based on the principle of fulfilment of present needs without compromising the possibilities for development of future generations. Therefore, balances must be found between economically based urban development and healthy conditions for living.
8. Capitalising on the cultural and natural attributes of cities and regions, managing their historical character, and promoting their uniqueness and diversity with regard to their character and identity can be a significant advantage for cities in our region.

9. It means there is a need to control the outward expansion of urban areas (urban sprawl) and limit trends towards suburbanisation. This requires increasing the supply of building land in towns and cities. **Therefore, 21st century city development is unthinkable without effective land-use planning and proper planning instruments, at all levels.**
10. **The revival of urban design will be a key element of the renaissance of cities.** This should improve social communication and interaction and facilitate the integration of facilities of any type. Urban regeneration is essential for promoting and enriching the quality of the urban environment for the benefit of those who live and work in towns and cities. Apart from the regeneration of inner cities/historical cores, the regeneration of large housing estates, former industrial sites (now left derelict) and deprived/degraded or inhumanly planned pieces of the urban fabric should be enhanced.
11. **The public realm should be recreated, to be used again as the place where the sense of community is developed.** However, even in cities that are able to play an eminent role in the processes of the globalisation of the economy, poverty, fragmentation and insecurity can persist. This can be a consequence of paying too much attention to the economic role of cities instead of balancing it with the social, cultural, psychological and spatial dimensions of development. **Thus, the progressive ‘vision’ or ‘ideology’ of the city development can also serve as the driving force.**
12. What are the other prerequisites for cities to become the driving force for development? Except of the items mentioned above we understand as crucial “new approach to planning” and “new urban design”.

New approach to planning

13. Sometimes, cities are victims of routine practices and myths. Sometimes, plans place more emphasis on the plan as a product rather than on setting in motion a dynamic process. Sometimes, they tend to remain physical in nature, attempting to cover every square meter with an ideal pattern.
14. **Lack of inspiration is another planning handicap – inspiration is rarely used in relation to urban planning.** However, it can be a powerful force when it comes to trying to achieve an outcome. Visioning through graphic and verbal descriptions of the future have been developed for centuries and are popular tools in urban planning. Focusing first on the outcome – what the world will look like – and then on actions, **visions are a participatory inspiring technique. They help to reframe problems by changing beliefs into new activity patterns.**

What are some methodological innovations that can contribute to new approaches to planning? What other creative inspiring techniques can be used in a participatory planning process to inspire action? What are some criteria to assess whether the plan is a good?

How can millions of inhabitants be invited to participate in the planning of their cities and what kind of systems and processes should be in place to create an all-inclusive atmosphere? How can we achieve the city that we want?

Urban design strategies to create more liveable cities

15. Historic centres of EC are in danger, because life is moving from them to distant suburbs. These historic places are where the city image is born and where it is transferred from the past to the future, places copied in Californian malls and Las Vegas hotels. All is on move and growth dynamics of peripheral centers (as volumes, number, diversity and distance from old downtown are involved) is still bigger.

The question to ask is whether or not it is possible to stop or to reverse the trend mentioned above as massive suburbanisation and/or urban sprawl? If not, there is necessary to look for tools to civilize.

16. **One of answers to the sprawl is the organisation of a polycentric network of settlements.** It is necessary to help each settlement (city, town) and the network to have a chance to be dense enough and to have open, green spaces and morphologically defined public space. Experiences of traditional, historic ‘polycentric concepts’ could help – as a result, new “connected city” could appear.
17. **The second answer to fighting sprawl is urban design.** Today, city suburbs are some kind of landscape nightmare. Only traces of harmonious, regular forms can be found outside of city centres in small old towns. The chaos and ugliness of suburbs derive from the lack of care for spatial, urban composition, and the lack of thought given to aesthetics – the word ‘beauty’ is forgotten. In character, it reflects and anticipates changes of civilisation and culture. However, if we treat the human environment as a three-dimensional work of art which is bringing us peace, happiness and the development of human intellect, this must be changed, mostly through urban design. It is one of the most attractive tools of creativity, exerting an important influence on all relevant parties (inhabitants, authorities, developers, planners, architects) involved in city development. In such a sense urban design strategies are to create more livable city.
18. In this context, **urban design strategies should be part of urban policies that address the social exclusion of urban peripheries.** Depending on the contexts, these are related to the consideration of the urban structure as a whole. Urban design strategies focus the city on two levels – from within and from without – this is related to their immediate and wider surroundings. This implies that urban design strategies from one side can shape and influence the ‘grain of the city’ and systems of public spaces, green areas, meeting places, squares, streets etc.; and from the other side, the elements of the region – centres, districts, transport corridors etc.
19. It is important that urban design strategies at the regional level balance highway and road network with ‘human – scale corridors’. Streets lined with trees and building entries, tramways, reuse of historic boulevards, pedestrian friendly origin and destination of each trip, serve as catalysts to transform new settlements into mixed use areas. However, mixed use is not the only panacea, and it happens when social, economic and market conditions are sound enough. All of these can give us the City of Harmonious Development (CHD).

The City of Harmonious Development

20. **Particularly important in constructing a CHD is the creation of a cityscape (spatial order) and thus, the composition of space.** It is believed that a crisis within the area right now is created by procedures which only favour small-scale design. Larger fragments of the city ‘crystallise’ the layout of a city and proved that they have a ‘gravitation field’, i.e. a zone where space becomes integrated around them.
21. Sadly, implementing these seemingly simple rules on urban order is not easy, and not only because of economic issues or property ownership issues, although these constitute considerable obstacles. It is worth attempting to identify more obstacles. The reason (one of) is that instead of stimulating urban development we only make attempts to recompense the results of the city’s self – (organic) development, results of sprawl in the matter of fact.
22. One thing should be kept in mind: **if all the space-creating factors are reduced to maximising profits, then in the competitive world, this profit would depend upon the standard of the goods offered.** Standards are judged via the quality of living which we will be able to offer at the developed location. Quality of living is again determined by the comfort of habitation, and work and travel between one and the other. These shall cause our negative or positive responses and as we know well enough, social life will put emotions before facts. This is why real facts are worth investing in. The outlay will bring in multiplied profits in the future.

