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New urban planning: cityscape – a tool of transformation and arrangement of the city space

A decline of the idea of the city based on industry gave rise to the city of information whose structure is characterized by incoherence and chaos. A growing significance of flow and exchange as well as dependence of building of a city on infrastructure and mobility have led to dispersion of the city and to the situation where a polycentric arrangement is formed in which the system of exchanging information is more significant than spatial dependencies, order or hierarchy. Former cities, which had a coherent structure, owed their arrangement to, first of all, stable economy and a legible structure of the society. Nowadays, the economic system of advanced capitalism constitutes the basic factor which arranges urban areas and this, in turn, leads to the deepening degeneration of the existing historical structures, which was already started by modernism.

A number of obvious advantages which are a feature of the existing urban complexes in city centers are a starting point and the basis for new investments. An attractive urban tissue and architectonic value consist mainly in a strong spatial awareness and location. Also important is the aspect of historical depth of a place which is strongly rooted in the residents' awareness and functioning as the centre for a local community. The awareness of the necessity to have a central point defines historical structures as centers of urban activities. This is an ideal basis for development.

On the other hand, chaotic actions and lack of precise tools for organizing investments are the factors which lead to the formation of one-dimensional offer concentrated on unlimited consumption. Balanced commercialism, in spite of dangers, may have a positive influence on supporting and enriching the program. Cooperation between private and public sectors, which is practiced in Western Europe, consists in the creation of new opportu-

nities for the neglected public property through the formation of appropriate conditions of cooperation in order to achieve mutual profits. Thanks to the suitable decision instruments, it is possible to work out the rule *something for something* which is based upon the integration of purely commercial activities with the formation of a cultural cityscape. The development which comprises both the need for profit and the public interest provides the city structure with the increase in a place's attractiveness as regards commercial offer and social value. The process of building strong dependencies by engaging various parties in a joint enterprise is made possible thanks to the creation of coherent political, financial and spatial strategy.

A comprehensive approach to a fragment of a city as regards the space is possible thanks to new techniques which are based upon the principles of landscape formation. Assuming that a given landscape consists of particular elements of a various scale and expression which constitute one coherent spatial composition, we can specify the goal of landscape techniques in the city planning aiming at achieving coherence of a given urban structure.

Presentation of a detailed urban concept against dependencies on changeable market conditions and a lack of possibility to specify precisely the needs of future investors is not the goal of urban planners. On the other hand, a possibility to introduce future changes, i.e. the assumption of maximum flexibility of the project cannot become a reason for too general directives. The aim of modern city planning is specification of imperative goals and the ways of making them stable. This is possible, among others, thanks to the usage of landscape in designing the urban space.

There are miscellaneous methods of the landscape usage in the city planning and they depend on location as well as on individual spatial conditions. It is not only possible to use a natural land form and the landscape elements as the imperative ones in the future complex but also to create an artificial basis or background for the existing components as well as for the designed ones.

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Fig. 1. Project for the city of Paisajismo in Argentina (photo:author)

The general rule is clearly illustrated in the project for Paisajismo a town in Argentina (Fig. 1). The plain area of eighty hectares, which has neither characteristic elements of the land form nor architectonic objects, was covered with a strip arrangement of greenery and recreation areas. The direction of strips is directly determined by the transport system. As a result, the artificial landscape of open areas creates new conditions which were characteristic for the so far anonymous terrain and constitutes a homogenous background for the future investments. Elements of housing estate complexes as well as objects of public utility were freely arranged on "the green carpet" and were connected by a legible transport system. The designing of the landscape as a starting point for the project made it possible to create a homogenous, uniform and elastic system which in turn enabled the staging process and further development.

A similar principle can be observed in the proposal of the Bernard Tschumie Business Park for Chartres. Long rows of newly planted trees in the whole area determine the spatial expression of this area and form a new landscape in this part of the town. Arranging the area of 240 hectares in this way constitutes the element of a long-term strategy. Sport and recreation infrastructure was planned between the lines. The landscape constitutes the mechanism of organization and control of the future land development with a minimum number of details in the plan.

The two above mentioned projects assume the creation of a new environment which is capable of coping with the task of building the identity of the place. These works are concerned with non-urban and uncharacteristic areas. The cityscape created in this way is the basic element of spatial organization.

The employment of the landscape design technique enables the formation of spatial coherence with functional diversity. If various elements of the program are gov-

erned by an imperative principle, it is possible to arrive at a comprehensive urban and architectonic layout understood as a uniform and multifunctional element. Such an action creates possibilities of efficient fitting of new buildings into the existent urban tissue.

A spectacular example of the formation of an artificial landscape in order to standardize a complex spatial intervention is the project of a public transportation terminal in Strasburg (Fig. 2) (Zaha Hadid Architects). The idea of the project is based on permeation of planes and lines which are generated by the movement of cars, trams, bikes and pedestrians. Each of the constituents of the project was subordinated to the concept of determination of a legible connection between the parking place and the station. Slight sloping of the area is further continued in the fact that the lamps bend and so do the lines limiting the parking places. The railway station shelter, thanks to the standardization of materials and controlled crossing of directions in three dimensions, becomes an integral part of the parking place slab which constitutes its extension. The standardization of all constituents of the layout both in the urban scale as well as in the details caused a formation of the uniform structure where open and limited spaces intermingle. With reference to the surrounding development, the layout constitutes an abstract landscape formed on the basis of transportation connections. The example depicts a possibility to construct a landscape as an autonomic structure which does not refer to the spatial context in a traditional way. A complex connection of architectural and infrastructural elements gives a new urban quality of the place. At the same time, thanks to the land form and scale, the layout constitutes an artificial continuation of the area topography.

The project for the Mullerpiers district in Rotterdam presents the employment of the area as an urban binder in a different way (Fig. 3) (Kees Christiaanse Architecture



Fig. 2. Project of the public transport terminal in Strasbourg, Zaha Hadid Architects

& Planning). Blocks of flats of diverse forms were evenly planned in the area of the former sports terrains. An individual architectonic expression of each of the buildings contributes to the spatial richness of the layout. The objects were integrated by means of the floor which surrounds them. A “carpet” of open public space was formed where architectonic sculptures designed by local architects were put as if they were toys. Thanks to the employment of the landscape through the standardization of the floor character, the effect of uniformity of the open area was achieved despite the fact that the architecture of objects is different.

An artificial landscape generated by the designer may constitute the basis or binder for the existing or future development. Thanks to such solutions, there is a possibility of an efficient organization of open areas and a way to determine the area of a given urban group.

The building of the new post office in Scherpenheuvel, Zichem (Fig. 4) (Neutelings Riedijk Architekten) fits in the immediate surroundings in a similar way. In respect of the fact that there is a historical object on the plot, the new development was entirely subordinated to this object. Architects offered the formation of the new cubature as the basis on which the already existing post office was “put”. The object in the shape of a tray was formed on which a historical building was “served”. The formation of the most immediate artificial surrounding of the historical building in this tricky way gives it a new value – raises it to the rank of a symbol – the most extraordinary piece of art. The whole cubature of the new object was put back and covered with a floor which curls up on it.

The above example shows that a careful and resourceful formation of an artificial landscape in the surroundings of a particular significant value may contribute to rising of the rank of the place as well as to underline unique architectonic values of the existing objects.

The project of revitalization of a historical quarter in Salerno presents a complex intervention in the existing urban structure of a particular historical value in order to raise its utilitarian values. A new layer was introduced into the existing tissue whose aim is to determine directions in the mediaeval labyrinth of streets and to enrich the offer of open areas with multifunctional squares and gardens. Thanks to the employment of the system of signs which determine functions, distances, directions



Fig. 3. Project for district of Mullerpiers in Rotterdam, Kees Christiaanse Architecture & Planning



Fig. 4. The New postoffice building in Scherpenheuvel Zichem, Neutelings Riedijk Architekten

and levels, the space was given a new quality without spoiling its original character. A subtle designation of the place constitutes a graphic activity rather than the spatial one; however, it influences the existing space so that it is united in the form of a legible group. The new layer resembles a map which was used in the real scale, which in turn gives it almost an abstract expression. Japanese architects joined together two realities – mediæval buildings with a multi-media floor. This concept assumes their parallel existence – an ephemeral information membrane does not disturb a possibility to experience the space; moreover, it improves its working. An artificial landscape in an unusually synthetic form was designed – by means of projecting a map – universal information – onto the area of the project.

We present our own attempt at the employment of the land formation technique in order to revitalize and develop the existing urban structure in form of the above considerations and examples. The project concerns Tumska Street in Płock (Fig. 5). This street is the main shopping centre in this city. The local authorities plan to sell a part of the plot to private investors and they look for the method of arranging the space as well as raising its quality. Tumska Street is divided into three sections by means of crossing streets. Our aim is to give this street the quality of a representative salon of the city and to uniform the character of the urban space on its whole length. The main assumption is to construct a uniform background which is made of elevations of newly-designed buildings and the floor. This effect was



Fig. 5. Project of Tumska Street in Płock, Studio Fold

achieved through the material and color uniformity of facades and the pavement for pedestrians. The basic material of the floor constitutes stone slabs in sober colors which are put evenly as well as in a uniform rhythm along the whole street. These slabs form a neutral background for the remaining elements of its design. Newly-designed elevations of buildings suit the service quality of the floor and form a discreet background for the existing historical buildings. Façades are uniform with reduced details and resemble stone blocks perforated with windows. Flexibility is planned while forming new facades. Each of the objects, in spite of the uniformity of basic materials, can be perforated with windows of a specified height in a free way without any influence on the expression of the street. We have a general impression of the ordered arrangement of Tumska Street frontage; exhibited historical buildings dominate over new spare facades which, in spite of employing very simple means, have a unique character. In order to avoid spatial disarray which was caused by chaotically placed advertisement boards and signboards, a special informa-

tion system was designed. In the part of upper floors of buildings we plan semitransparent plates which will be fixed perpendicularly to the elevation. Transparency of signboards provides a minimal intervention into the order of facades and their rhythmical arrangement results from fitting the character divisions along the whole street. Thanks to such an organization, we are able to preserve a unique character of the place and to avoid a chaotic influence of commercialization on its image.

The above projects present an outline of possibilities how to employ a landscape which is constructed in architecture and urban planning. By means of this general principle, we can solve a wide range of problems both on the architectural scale and the urban scale. We can distinctly see a conceptual connection of the spatial interventions presented in this article and in the broad perspective it is possible to single out a legible trend in architecture and urban planning which is based on the formation of an artificial landscape.

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