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Axiology of space as a base of reflection on attitudes in the architect's profession

Preparation for the architect's profession is a process in which particular attention is paid to this stage of education ('period of creating') during which sensitivity to the beauty of space is developed in the first place. This is a basic stage which leads to the next stages: knowledge, understanding, responsibility and gaining experience. Therefore, 'learning' architecture is based on the development of responsibility which facilitates acquiring knowledge, deepening understanding, taking responsibility and taking advantage of experience. Sensitivity is of special significance in the process of creative work; therefore, it is really important to ask the following questions: what are the crucial elements which influence the level of sensitivity? Is sensitivity to the beauty of space along with its usefulness the only thing that matters? According to the classical philosophy, beauty, goodness and truth constitute a triad of the highest values. Thus, sensitivity to beauty when related to other values such as goodness and truth implies moral sensitivity. The architect's attitudes – in relation to people who take part in

the process of designing the space and in relation to the space itself – have a moral context. Ethical education of students of architecture is aimed at protecting the sensitivity with which they start their studies, then at developing the awareness of its existence and finally it is aimed at 'correcting' this sensitivity in relation to space and man. These two relations of the architect's attitudes – towards people and space – are very important also in the next period of the architectural practice ('creative period'). Both relations are concentrated on the feelings of beauty and usefulness which – as the basic ones – present the offer of values perceived in the effects of the architect's work as well as in the architect's attitudes. Axiology of space provides an indispensable basis of references in order to educate students in responsible and positive attitudes in an unceasing process of 'learning' architecture as a domain of culture. The axiological approach towards the performance of the architect's profession means responsibility for the offered values in many categories, including the moral one.

Architect – profession of public trust

Many situations can cause disturbances in the architect's right attitudes in relation to people and space. However, do external circumstances sufficiently justify 'lapses' while designing and realizing various spatial forms? Isn't the information about the investor's violations, economic considerations, complicated requirements of land development plans just an easy excuse for these 'imperfections'? An axiological understanding which – unceasingly broadened – constitutes support in choices of values may be a clue of key significance for the attitudes accepted by the architect.

In Poland the position of the architect's profession is constitutionally legitimated as a profession of public trust, which means that the architect is obliged to respect many requirements, including the moral ones. Documents prepared by local government institutions (Chamber of Architects) and community institutions (Association of Polish Architects) help architects to comply with different requirements. The above mentioned documents are commonly known. However, in the social awareness, the knowledge of legal provisions and code principles is not so widespread; therefore, the architect's actions must be based on trust. Among various participants of the designing and realisation process, a bond of a peculiar character is created. An individual client entrusts the architect with his own some-

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times even very personal needs and wants them to be put into beautiful shapes. Major communities, for instance a city community, also have expectations of healthy, safe and at the same time aesthetically satisfactory conditions of life which to a large extent depend on spatial conditions created by the architect's talent. Apart from sensitivity to beauty, the architect needs moral sensitivity as well in order to meet these requirements and deserve respect. Duration of works of architecture in space – sometimes decades, hundreds or even thousands of years – means that they are subjected to criticism for a very long period. Forming and expressing opinions about designs and their realisations, in particular nowadays, constitutes a significant manifestation of the social life and these opinions cannot be ignored.

What is the real position of the architect's profession in the society? Is it perceived as trustworthy? The surveys, which were carried out by Research International Pentor in February 2008 and published in form of the report prepared for the Polish Chamber of Civil Engineers [8], showed a diversity in the positions of particular professions of public trust in the social awareness. One of the survey questions referred to determining which professions are associated with public trust. The architect's profession appeared in this spontaneously made list, but only 2% of the respondents took it into consideration in their associations. Comparison

with other results should make us consider this problem because the architect's profession looks unfavourably when compared to such professions as doctors (50%), judges (24%) or solicitors (19%). Is an architect a profession of public trust at all? Answers to this question were particularly interesting. There were 48% of positive answers to the question posed in this way. Almost half of the surveyed persons admitted that this status should be granted to architects. Respondents also had a possibility to give their opinions on the prestige of public trust professions. Considering social respect, the following professional groups were situated higher in the hierarchy: doctors, pharmacists, nurses and midwives, judges, solicitors, psychologists, notaries, attorneys, veterinarians, construction engineers. Lower in the hierarchy there were such professions as laboratory diagnosticians, probation officers, tax advisors, urban planners, chartered auditors, patent spokespersons and debt collectors. In the hierarchy of public trust professions the position of the architect seems to be intriguing – rather distant from professions which were assessed in the best way. We could ask whether it is exclusively works of architecture that contribute to the social position of creators of architecture. Or perhaps it is the case that 'something more' matters? Which values of the architect's work are assessed as the highest? Which architects' attitudes in personal relations are considered as the positive ones?

Not only aesthetic values

Valuation of space refers not only to the problems of the aesthetic nature because space constitutes an offer of many different values [5]. The basic value groups are as follows: vital values (e.g. usefulness), cultural (e.g. beauty) and moral ones (e.g. humility, respect, truth, courage, justice, responsibility). The process of creative work means the unceasing choice of values which the architect follows and which will be represented by his work. It is impossible to predict all situations using law regulations or codes which are still being improved. Following only the legal provisions does not give any guarantee that the work of the architect – as a person of public trust – will be evaluated in a positive way.

The choice which is made [3] is a particular kind of certificate of the aesthetic attitude first of all; however, the attitude that matters – ethical or not – is also the attitude towards people and space. Answers to the questions about what is ethical and what is not are created in the system of values. Architects need the awareness of professional responsibility which is based on axiology of space which in turn directs the way of thinking of the valuating person. In particular, ethics refers to the relations with all participants of the process of designing and realisation of different spatial structures. The attitude towards people is reflected in contacts with co-authors, clients, users, investors, employers, etc. In the context of responsibility for various 'goods', it is necessary to specify a clear standpoint of an ethical character towards the existing elements

of space development – the space which constitutes records of history, customs, memory, traditions and other things – these are the values that matter for man as an individual as well as for various communities (nation, local community, etc.).

The choice of values, which a designed space structure is supposed to offer, is not deprived of dilemmas. A decision is made by the designer who follows the accepted system of values and is aware of individual responsibility. Each value must have a specified level on which it is realised and it must be defined whether it is understood as something positive or negative. The purpose of the educational process is not only to offer the criteria of the value assessment and to sensitise students to the necessity of their protection, but also to teach a proper recognition as to which values can be liquidated in order to introduce new ones. One of the basic principles of axiology is that everything can be changed as long as the removed values are replaced by others which go beyond the liquidated values. Reflection upon this principle ought to accompany the designing work – it is then that the problems of relations with the surrounding reality, difficulties with the definition of a design concept, choice of stylistic forms, arranging material and ecological standards etc. take on an explicit moral dimension. Axiology of space provides us with a number of arguments which are useful when choosing these values that guarantee an ethical attitude towards people and space [4].

Learning architecture – lessons in humility, respect, etc.

Being knowledgeable in the world of values can help us choose the attitudes appropriate for given situations in reference to a particular place in space as well as in the necessary relations with the persons involved in designing, realization and utilization of the space which is shaped by the architect's imagination. All the persons who participate in the process of land development create a type of a community which carries out very responsible tasks, the effects of which are critically assessed. Many a time we can hear words of justified criticism with regard to a controversial – for various reasons – design or realization? An architect – as a person who is responsible for the shape of space – is the first one to be mentioned in this regard. In the process of constant learning of what architecture is, it is worth coming back to the situations which can be treated as peculiar lessons in humility, respect, justice, courage, etc.

We can still hear accusations of bleak housing estates which are inhumane in their scale and standards. Do they belong only to the past? Even now in the social space we deal with various effects of the phenomenon of this peculiar 'revolution in architecture'. We need the attitude of humility in order to swallow this bitter pill in the form of a social grief which burdens architects like 'bad genes'. Humility in architecture? Is it possible to evaluate the architect's works in categories of good and evil as well as to accept humbly that something more than the author's vision of the space shape or innovative style of the époque matters? Experiences of grief and repentance of wrong decisions as well as attempts of correcting them are quite common.

A very meaningful example was the decision about modernist demolitions – in its utopian version – of housing estates of a 'blocks of flats' type. The decision – which was described in literature [7] – about demolishing buildings, whose design was once honoured with a prestigious prize, seemed inevitable due to negative social

assessments of the quality of life in blocks of flats. The day of 15th July 1972 – when the explosives were planted at 3.32 p.m. and some blocks of flats of this type were pulled down in Saint Louis in Missouri – became a symbolic date of the modernism utopia decline. Critical opinions of residents, existing criminal activities and destruction of social bonds turned out to be more important than the approval of the professional community. The pulled down buildings were awarded the American Institute of Architects prize in 1951. The above mentioned case can be interpreted as a specific lesson in humility for architects. The conclusion that can be drawn from this lesson in humility is as follows: social and individual effects of land development should be taken into consideration in designing practice. Responsibility for these effects grows along with the scale of the design undertaking.

Another value also belongs to moral categories, i.e. respect. If we interpret this value in the category of space, we can understand it as respect for the history of space formation, respect for authors of various designs of the same subject or place as well as respect for natural and architectural values of the place and surroundings and traditions of usage. Difficult dilemmas concerning space transformations in old town areas are particular lessons in respect. Changes, which took place in the territories of old towns of many cities, constitute material evidence of various forms of results of numerous factor impingements, including the designers' ethical attitude and their axiological understanding.

On the example of the territory of the Old Town in Wrocław in an exceptionally clear way we can observe numerous traces of attitudes towards space and people. A comparison of the old town space depicted in a 1562 print (Fig. 1) with the picture of the contemporary state which can be seen from the St. Elisabeth Church tower (Fig. 2)

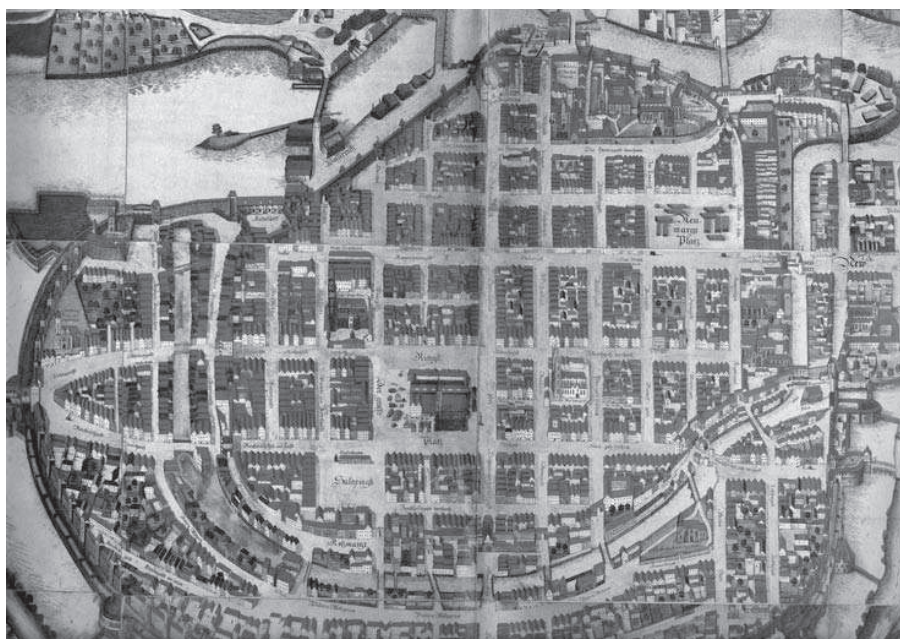


Fig. 1. A fragment of the City of Wrocław's plan by Weihner brothers, 1562 (source: [11])

Il. 1. Fragment planu miasta Wrocławia braci Weihnerów, z 1562 r. (źródło: [11])



Fig. 2. Wrocław – a view on the south side of Old Town
(source: the autor's collection)

Il. 2. Wrocław – widok na południową część Starego Miasta
(źródło: kolekcja autorki)

makes us reflect upon the legal and ethical attitudes towards land development [1]. An attempt to answer the question of why throughout the centuries there have appeared so many spatial deformations in transforming the area that is so exceptional – often referred to as a phenomenon of urban planning and architecture – must lead to another reflection. If we assume that these actions were legal, perhaps what they lacked was axiological thinking. Among the values which were lost we could mention urban planning and architecture consistency, style, historical truth and respect for authorship. Are new values better than the old ones? This question has an ethical dimension and it addresses the assessment of relations of the values which are lost, protected and introduced. In the Study of conditions and directions of land development of the town of Wrocław dated 1996 [9], as part of a compositional analysis of the town, the state of 'spatial order' of the Old Town was registered. This area was analysed as one of the 235 compositional complexes which were diagnosed across the city. There was a clear indication of the fragments that were characterized by explicit distortions of the spatial order consisting in mutual inconsistencies of the character of spatial forms. The highlighted places cover entire quarters or their parts which in the drawing were marked as 'distortions or lacks of material' (Fig. 3). During the presentation of the analysis results of the town compositional condition, the architects as well as the interested mass media reacted strongly to the revealed scale of distortions, which can be treated as an important educational part of the lesson in respect. The following conclusion can be drawn from this lesson: in the designing practice, broadly understood effects of land development are revealed all the time and thus they cannot be ignored.

Many other values of moral category leave peculiar traces in the architects' attitudes towards space and peo-

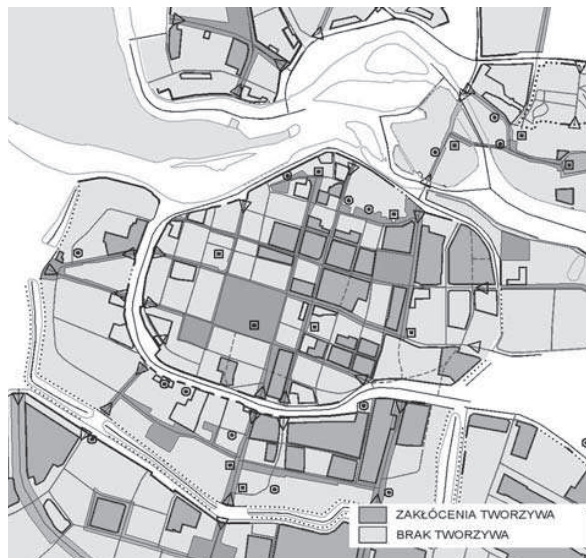


Fig. 3. An analysis compositional of city – a fragment
(source: an author's study based on [9])

Il. 3. Analiza kompozycyjna miasta – fragment
(źródło: opracowanie autorskie na podstawie [9])

ple. In the designing practice, we often encounter problems referring to such values as justice or truth. How should we manage the process of land development in its planning, urban and architectural scale so that important human needs such as a desire for truth and justice can be legible in space? Special emphasis must be placed on the issues concerning residential areas. As early as during the stage of elaborating local plans, we must devote some time to determine important indexes, such as i.e. the share of biologically active areas, within the framework of the designed territory so that not only economical values are recognised. Environment protection with all its values requires an attitude in the spirit of truth as to real effects for natural and cultural environment, which effects are reminded by sustainable development concepts. A legal, and also moral, requirement is to respect – obvious for users – demands with regard to insulation, ventilation, equipping out-of-town areas and quality of materials. Fulfilling these obligations means taking care of just administration of the space. Human memory as well as material traces of the architect's work in the form of works of architecture constitute a proof of introducing such values as courage (reflected in innovative formal and technical solutions), honour (necessary to overcome temptations to make far-reaching compromises) as well as patriotism (determination to propagate regional forms and national heritage in the domain of land development).

Summary

Ethical dimension of the architect's profession results from the cultural character of attitudes towards various issues and it is, to a certain extent, regulated by legal provisions and the professional code. Moral assessment of

the assumed attitudes comprises all fields of architect's activity, starting from planning aspects which require respecting reliability of initial analyses up to technical issues concerning development as a whole as well as

architectural detail. An ethical attitude is legible at the time of choosing values from the three basic domains: vital, cultural and moral values.

A moral attitude in the architectural practice does not contradict 'creative freedom'. A real understanding of the notion of freedom ought to lead us to assume attitudes which are free from ignoring a historical context, imposing the will of incompetent persons or technological coercion etc. [6]. A designer, while acting towards creating spatial order, is driven by the force of his own creative personality; however, he is also subject to the impact of other 'forces' coming from the broadly understood natural and social surroundings. The architect's creation is subjected to the influence of many forces of this type, as a consequence of which the notion of responsibility is blurred – a moral one as well. B. Szmidt, referring to the manifestations of spatial order [10], emphasised its pragmatic nature. He wrote about the architect's work in the following way: *On the one hand, its real basis and generator is the entirety of experiences and affinities that is brought by the cultural background of the epoch in which the artist happens to act, while on the other hand – the artist's own individuality*

combined with an ability to develop the tradition or, as opposed to it, to create new esthetic values. The former can be named as the style of the epoch, while the latter – a gift of creative personality [10, p. 87]. The fact that the final effect of the architect's work is influenced by so many factors assuages voices of criticism and constitutes a justification for imperfections in the attitudes towards people and space.

Learning professional ethics can help in the process of arousing and fostering sensitivity to beauty and usability as these two are the most important values in architecture. However, practical application of the knowledge of ethics and aesthetics is possible only when during the design elaboration we promote attitudes which take into account an axiological aspect of forming the space, i.e. land development. In the professional practice, moral sensitivity is manifested at the time of making decisions about a choice of values in spaces which are the subject of elaborations, but it also refers to the subject of the designed forms – man – and it is expressed as an ethical attitude in interpersonal relations.

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Aksjologia przestrzeni bazą dla refleksji o postawach w zawodzie architekta

Od architekta, jako wykonującego zawód zaufania społecznego, wymagana jest świadomość istnienia etycznego wymiaru aktywności zawodowej. Każda relacja, w której uczestniczy architekt, zobowiązuje do określenia własnej postawy zarówno w odniesieniu do przestrzeni, jak i do człowieka – w osobach współautora, inwestora, klienta, użytkownika. Przemyślenia z dziedziny aksjologii przestrzeni stanowią istotne wsparcie w pracy zawodowej. System wartości formowany jest w okresie przygotowującym do pracy zawodowej („okres tworzący”), a podtrzymywany i rozwijany w trakcie wykonywania zawodu

(„okres twórczy”). Wartości przestrzeni tworzą obszerny katalog w trzech podstawowych dziedzinach: witalnych, kulturowych i moralnych. Rozeznanie aksjologiczne w odniesieniu do wartości moralnych stanowi szczególnego rodzaju drogowskaz zachowań w pracy zawodowej. Historia kształtowania przestrzeni wyobraźnią i talentem architekta pozostawiła ślady rozmaitych lekcji z zakresu etyki zawodowej, np. lekcji pokory, szacunku, prawdy, sprawiedliwości. Przedmiotowa i podmiotowa odpowiedzialność za przestrzeń – jej piękno i użyteczność – nie bierze się znikąd, odzwierciedla dylematy wyboru wartości.

Key words: ethical living, humanistic education, architects' ethic

Słowa kluczowe: życie etyczne, etyka architekta, edukacja humanistyczna



Architecture and Engineering – the frontispiece of Pierre le Muet's treatise of 1647 (from Przemyslaw Nowakowski's collection)

Architektura i inżynieria budowlana – frontyspis traktatu Pierre'a Le Mueta, 1647 (z kolekcji Przemysława Nowakowskiego)