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## *Public space in contemporary housing estates – attention to the common good versus maximisation of investor’s income*

In the recent years we can observe a dynamic development of the housing market in Poland. Intensive activities of developers have been concentrated mainly on the outskirts of towns where the price of land is much lower than in the centre [1]. Very often, these areas do not have an official local land development plan and the structures that are built there are designed in accordance with the guidelines included in administrative decisions about conditions of building and land development, which are issued independently of one another. A really serious problem is the lack of a comprehensive concept of newly built districts. Structures are frequently created in a chaotic and inconsistent way. Moreover, these districts also lack the basic infrastructure such as roads. Another typical defect is negligence in relation to the public space which constitutes one of the characteristic elements of the city tissue that determines the residents’ quality of life.

Developers’ activities are focused only on achieving profits on the sale of flats. Investors usually expect usable areas of flats to be maximised locally; at the same time, the building law strictly defines conditions of locating car parks, rubbish heaps or recreation areas without specifying their minimum sizes. Due to these conditions, many housing estates have a very limited area of common spaces or in fact there are no such spaces.

The architect’s role in designing housing estates comprises attention to aesthetics, environmental ethics as well as public good combined with cooperation with the investor aimed at indicating advantages resulting from appropriate solutions of the land development. Below, there are some examples of the synergic cooperation of participants of the design process as well as pro-public activities of authorities and investors of housing estates in Poland.

An interesting example of cooperation of housing estate designers with local church authorities is the hous-

ing estate in Naramowice in Poznan designed by ARÉ – Stiasny & Waclawek Studio [2]. On the remote outskirts on the territory of the old agricultural farm of the area of 50 hectares a new district is being built. In 2004 a new local plan was passed. It comprised quarters of a cosy development based on view axes on a late Modernistic church with its yard. Detailed regulations imposed exposing facades which formed the yard walls by means of the following elements: pinnacles, frontals, arcades, arches, gables, portals, risalites, dormers, bay windows, etc.

The architects fully applied decisions of the local plan and they interpreted it in a particular way by designing a housing estate with a unique climate created by using modern means of architectural expression and at the same time referring to the development of Poznan market square. Moreover, they extended the urban concept of planners. According to the local plan, there were only dead end side streets reaching the church square, where they ended in a scarp. Thanks to the efforts of ARÉ designers, the parish priest of the church neighbouring the yard agreed to remove the fence and the investor financed the construction of stairs and a ramp on the scarp. This solution enabled a better connection of the new



Fig. 1. Estate in Naramowice, Poznań (photo: M. Kowaluk)

Il. 1. Osiedle na Naramowicach w Poznaniu (fot. M. Kowaluk)

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Fig. 2. Apartment and office building Thespian in Wrocław  
(photo: M. Kowaluk)

Il. 2. Budynek apartamentowo-biurowy Thespian we Wrocławiu  
(fot. M. Kowaluk)

development with its surroundings and provided the residents with easy access to the city transportation system and services located at the square. The housing estate in Poznań Naramowice (Fig. 1) constitutes an example of creating public spaces in housing estates and contribution to commercial success of the entire realisation thanks to these spaces.

Another example of successful cooperation between the developer and the architect that bore fruit in the form of improvement of public space in a city is the apartment and office building erected in Wrocław at Powstańców Śląskich square – Thespian (Fig. 2). In the investor's intention, the area around the building was to be redesigned only in the scope of land ownership. However, thanks to the actions of the designers from Maćków Design Studio, the developer agreed to finance refurbishment works of the part of the square adjacent to the building as well as the remaining pedestrian streets. As a result, not only the pavement was redecorated, but also many new benches appeared with greenery pots as well as other elements of small architecture. Such actions bring profits to the investor as in this way he raises the

prestige of his own realization, but first of all, it is the city that benefits by being enriched with another attractive public space.

A controversial subject with regard to housing estates is connected with closed estates – enclaves separated from the city space [3]. These estates are characterized by a high standard: being shut off from the surroundings, they are supervised by security companies with hundreds of surveillance cameras guaranteeing safety and constant control. They do have common spaces, but they are common only for their isolated residents, who get a feeling of safety at all costs, even at the price of isolation and separation. A good example of such realisation is Marina Mokotów in Warsaw, designed by Architectural Studio Kuryłowicz & Associates. How many estates of this type will be constructed in the future? Is it right to design such estates at all? And perhaps architects themselves ought to firmly say 'no' to such creations? However, as it seems now, until people do not feel safe in normal estates and their public space quality is not satisfactory, there will still be a demand for residential 'ghettoes of luxury'.

The quality of public space depends largely upon the architects' level of awareness, observing the basic ethical norms and their involvement in the profession they practice. Application of requirements concerning the public space quality in the process of building residential districts, by changing the appropriate legal regulations, would improve the situation of architects designing housing estates.

An important step on the way to achieve spatial order would be the introduction of regulations strictly determining the minimum of the common space area as per one single flat in the territories of family housing estates. This would ensure appropriate proportions between the residential tissue and recreational areas. The requirement to design residential complexes exclusively on the basis of local land development plans, especially in the suburbs, could prevent the uncontrolled process of sub-urbanisation, particularly with the assumption that these plans ought to comprise the whole impingement areas of such investments.

*Translated by B. Setkowicz*

### References

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### *Przestrzeń publiczna we współczesnych realizacjach deweloperskich – dbałość o dobro wspólne a maksymalizacja dochodu inwestora*

Jakość przestrzeni publicznej zależy w dużej mierze od poziomu świadomości architektów, zachowania podstawowych norm etycznych i zaangażowania w wykonywaną pracę. W ostatnich latach można zauważyć dynamiczny rozwój rynku mieszkaniowego w Polsce. Wzmoczona działalność deweloperska koncentruje się przede wszystkim na obrzeżach miast. Rzucającym się w oczy problemem jest brak całościowego spojrzenia na nowo powstające dzielnice, w których zabudowa tworzona jest w sposób chaotyczny, niespójny. Powielanym defektem jest również

niedbałość o przestrzeń publiczną, decydującą o jakości życia mieszkańców. Rolą architekta w projektowaniu osiedli jest dbałość zarówno o estetykę, etykę środowiskową, jak i dobro publiczne, przy jednoczesnej próbie porozumienia z inwestorem, zmierzającego do wskazania korzyści, które wynikają z poprawnych rozwiązań zagospodarowania terenu. W niniejszym artykule chciałbym wskazać przykłady synergicznego współdziałania uczestników procesu projektowego i propublicznych działań władz oraz inwestorów osiedli mieszkaniowych w Polsce.

**Key words:** quality of public space, collaboration between architect and the commune

**Słowa kluczowe:** jakość przestrzeni publicznej, współpraca architekta i samorządu lokalnego