URBAN SPATIALITY – TRADITION AND CONTEMPORANEITY

Abstract

The contemporary image of the city is built on the basis of mental ideas, in which the synthesis of knowledge about the place and space orientation in a given urban area are particularly important. A reflection on contemporary urban space leads to the question of how to present the richness of its cultural contents. That is why the spatiality of the proposed solutions is particularly important from the point of view of the state of public spaces and their quality. The considerations are illustrated with examples of the transformation of two public spaces in Krakow.

Keywords: spatiality, urban, Krakow, urban space

Sustainable development is considered in terms of a balance between the needs of the present and future generations. The lives and heritage of past generations have no specific place in the definition. Therefore, the contemporaneity of the city should also be viewed through cultural memory and respect for history, including its traces in the cityscape and daily life.

The term image of the city is associated with the achievements of the environmental approach, which takes into account not only the structure of the city, but also, primarily, its perception. Perceptual capacities become the basis for thinking about its structure.

The article argues that the contemporary city makes possible better and more attractive perceptions of its space via the multiplication of perception sites and sequences. The spatiality of the contemporary city (built in this way) allows a better and many-sided presentation of the elements of its history and tradition.

The creation of new sites and sequences of urban space perception is an element inseparable from the development, extension, and revitalization of city space. The cities— which respect their cultural heritage—develop strategies to harmonize particular aspects of their duration and development.

1. The Vision of a City – Summary

The views presented here are based on the author’s vision of a city, which is a result of many years of work in the field of architecture and urban space; this experience has generated some original thoughts and conclusions.¹

1.1.

A city is a four-dimensional capacity understood as follows:

“A vision of the form of a city as a physical, three-dimensional extension is the basis for understanding numerous theories. It is supported by a realistic attitude which assumes the existence of real, recognizable entities independent of consciousness². In the most general sense, we can imagine a uniform, three-dimensional universe with a permanent location of points in relation to selected directions. These directions, defined naturally, mean the horizontal (X-Y plane) and the vertical (Z). In such a rationalized space, its initial (only imagined) uniformity practically includes various kinds of reality. It can be a man—a person whose reality is more than physical; there are other forms of matter, too, including visible elements—topography, greenery, and architecture. The air is treated involuntarily as a “lack” although it makes a space of the same type as visible matter. The diversity and richness of spatial forms, as well as time and the transformations of matter in time, overlap on such a basic model. Such an imaginary four-space “stage” is the environment of life in its broadest meaning; first and foremost is the life of an individual and a community. This approach makes it possible to see the city in a geometrized scheme of inventory and morphological character. Four-dimensional capacity can also establish and assume an unlimited number of other, immaterial dimensions which differ from each other (e.g. in the sphere of meanings, emotions, applications, descriptions, histories etc.). In such a universe, it is also possible to continue defining certain wholes, always with the guarantee of geometrical precision as far as location, distance, and size are concerned.

Four-dimensional capacity (as an initial vision of the city of complete and holistic character) is the basis for many well-known theories. This basis is realistic, not phenomenological.³

1.2.

We may find specific criteria of urbanity.

They take into account the urban community and define significant values in the city space, such as:⁴

² Realism, [after:] [PWN Lexicon, 2000], p. 282.
³ [Kantarek, 2013], p. 31.
⁴ Cf., ibid., p. 19, 20.
The environment of life
A city is an environment of life and cannot exist without permanent residents.

The anthropogenic environment
Man-made environment prevails in the city. Natural environment in the city is also arranged by man.

Social and spatial diversity
A city is a complexity of various environments based on both spatial and non-spatial relations. Its size makes possible a diversity of relations.

Spatial nearness
Over centuries, cities have developed ways of binding and bringing closer many functions and structures which serve one another; they either connect or become isolated despite their close proximity.

1.3. The City as a Net of Nets
The city is a space-time reality of multiple systems and networks. Its basis is a synthesized space-time composition with some areas of stable form that are reference points of this composition. The foundation of its existence are diversified residential environments that provide housing for its community, and allow the housing standard to develop.

From a philosophical point of view, it is worth noting that cities in their time-space version dwell on (or should dwell on) the elements that are important in ontological terms. Substantiality understood as protection of essential values of the city is considered fundamental.

The city, so seen, becomes local in the first place. Locality creates substantiality, and it is the narratives of places that constitute a city.

The city can become a spatial continuum provided it develops connections which, from the social dimension – as well as interpersonal and community relations – will create a system of networks of spatial links based on pedestrian relations and encounters.

2. What Does Spatiality Mean – a Preliminary Definition

"Perhaps there will be (...) majority of defined types of situations in which man finds himself in a space being more frequently able to look down or up at an urban landscape having various levels, platforms above him – "the spatial city"."

K. Wejchert

Since time and space, as accidents of substances (or essential things), serve the purpose of getting to know and explore them, the city can be regarded as layering up and protecting meanings and creating substantialities.

A good introduction, in this respect, is the opinion of Robert T. Tally Jr., expressed in the prologue to his book entitled, Spatiality. It presents the role of space in the contemporary approach to literary studies:

“Whereas the nineteenth century appeared to have been dominated by discourses of time, history, and teleological development, and a modernist aesthetic seemed to enshrine temporality as the most important dimension … slowly, and picking up pace especially after the Second World War, space began to reassert itself in critical theory, rivalling if not overtaking time in the significance it was accorded by critics and theorists, who were then more likely to address spatiotemporality or allow space to have a more equal footing with the time in their analyses.”

The adjective spatial refers obviously to space and is often associated directly with three dimensions.

In the Polish language etymology, przestrzeń (space) is associated with the Old Slavic prostor, “area” (our przéstwór/exppanse), the noun stroma/side from “stronić”/stand aside, “stroniczcy”/taking sides, but also “obok”/beside, as well as another word used in Slavic languages: strzeć – used in combinations such as “rozpostrzeć”/spread, and “prześcieśierdło”/sheet.

Spatial may connotes spacious as it often refers to a situation where we relate to a free, loose fragment of a three-dimensional reality, a composition of a site, or an arrangement of a system of things; hence, it is subsequently associated with unlimitedness, comfort, freedom, and movement.

Below, we are going to use the concept of spatiality to refer to real-time three dimensional space, and characterize such an arrangement of the space as to make possible a many-sided and dynamic perception of the reality that will enable a search for substantial relations.

The simplest typology of spatiality will be to define perception capacities in flat arrangements, or in topography with diversified heights. Historical cities, which usually looked for localities with topography offering defense conditions, created beautiful urban complexes with unlimited opportunities to have close and distant views of their own structures and the surrounding landscapes.

Another condition could be the kind of traffic (pedestrian, vehicular), its speed (aim, time), immediate visibility of the road and the scale of spatial sequences (backstage), the kind of detail (number, scale) and the possible aggressiveness of stimuli (engaging attention).

As is always the case with perception, a great role is played by individual and social factors connected with sensitivity to stimuli and meanings, personality and individual features, the nature of social relations, as well as time and events conditions.

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5. Cf. [Kantarek, 2012]
6. These usually are historical areas, whose forms are developed and protected, as well as systems or their fragments – e.g. communication, greenery.
7. We are moving within the concept of substance developed by Aristotle. It is only in relation to substance that accidental elements such as space and time are justified. cf. [Kantarek, 2014]
8. Ibid. and [de Portzamparc, Sollers, 2008]
9. [Kantarek, 2014]
11. [Tally, 2013], p. 3.
3. Spatiality at the Confluence of Two Rivers – “Circuit Wenzel”\textsuperscript{14}, Luxembourg

The location of the city of Luxembourg (on plateaus formed by the ravines of the rivers Alzette and Petrusse) determines its spatial form; it is not only the city’s basic spatial characteristic, but also its main attraction. The edges of the plateaus form clear boundaries of the city’s quarters and create areas from which there open dynamic views on the insights and panoramas of the city. This was used to create walkways and educational routes. Their skillful delineation reveals the natural and cultural values of the city’s spaces.

“Circuit Wenzel”\textsuperscript{14}, beside – “Chemin de la Corniche”, “Circuit Mansfeld”, “Circuit Vauban” or “Circuit Schuman” tells about historical figures important to Luxembourg, and leads to the places connected with them. Wenzel (Wenceslas II) was the Duke of Luxembourg in the years 1383-1419. He is credited with building the city of Luxembourg, and leads to the places connected with them.

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From the city centre, we descend steep slopes to the lower city with green areas, rocky slopes, and fragments of historical fortifications. The tourist walk leads through the historical centre (Old Town, the Rock du Bock – the seat of the oldest ducal castle and abbey dating back to the 10\textsuperscript{th} century). The views on the opposite banks reveal Plateau Rahm, Quartier de la Gare; Neumünster, Grund, Clausen, and Pfaffenthal in the Alzette valley; and tall buildings of Plateau de Kirchberg. The route then takes us downwards through Neumünster and the Grund to Plateau Rahm. From here, we can see the panorama of Old Town, the Petrusse, and Plateau du Saint Esprit.

The dynamically changing views, which move at different levels, are great assets of this walk. The space explored in movement – whereas the views, their directions, and scales keep changing – facilitates the creation of an individual image of the city and its physical and cultural space (historical information, themes of the walk.) Identification of one’s position and the location of the objects happens in relation to the spatial whole of the city and is based on the perception of the real space.

In 2001, Casino Luxembourg, Forum d’art contemporain\textsuperscript{15}, organized an open air exhibition for 18 artists whose works found their place in the city’s space. One of the artists was Daniel Buren, whose installations have become an additional attraction on the walks in the valley of the Alzette and the Petrusse. The artist put square, orange-and-white striped panels with a round opening in the middle throughout several places in the city. Their precise setting in the landscape frames views of some fragments of the city panorama.

4. Kraków

Kraków is a city situated on marshy ground in the Vistula at the foot of Wawel Hill, in a valley bordering the diverse landscape of the hilly Wyżyna Krakowsko-Częstochowska and Pogórze Zachodniobeskidzkie. Its central part was built on a basically flat ground.

Spatiality is formed here in a different way.

New investments and modernization of the space of the Old Town in Krakow have resulted in the emergence of many new public spaces which are accessible (although some of them are partly private.) They make it possible to view the city from different levels (mainly from rooftop terraces or basements), which offers a new, different perspective. The historical fabric of the city gains new framing while residents and tourists get attractive new functions and sites. The image of the city changes owing to the perception of the new sites. The city structure can be explored more fully thanks to various vantage points which are, above all, friendly places where one wants to spend time.

Here are two examples of public space transformations in the city centre.

4.1. Rynek Krakowski (Main Square) between St.Mary’s church and Cloth Hall

The Main Square is a four-hectare urban interior which was the centre of the parcelling out of Cracovia (New City) in the 13th century. The area (except for Gródek) is rather flat.\textsuperscript{16}

Previous places from which the Main Square could be perceived here:

- The tower of St. Mary’s (Belltower) opened as a vantage point\textsuperscript{17},
- The Czynciels’ house, Rynek 4\textsuperscript{18} from the 1st floor level.

Other places open to the public other than the Main Square floor include:

- Biderman’s house, Rynek 5, which housed the Em-pik shop in the years 2002-2013, and provided views of the Main Square from all levels,
- 1st floor of the restaurants on the A-B line.

Modernization of the branch of the National Museum in the Cloth Hall (and making accessible the underground of the Main Square) provided new levels of perception of the Main Square. The underground museum officially opened on Sept. 24, 2010, and is an extensive space showing the history of the Square on the site where priceless relics of

\textsuperscript{14} The path construction started in 1989.
\textsuperscript{15} The exhibition is called Sous les ponts, le long de la rivière... [Buren, 2014].
\textsuperscript{16} The impression of flattening is obvious for those who know the place. This results from the fact that the Square as we see it today is one plane divided into two parts by the volume of Cloth Hall. In fact, the difference between the levels is nearly 2 meters.
\textsuperscript{17} Currently closed due to refurbishment.
\textsuperscript{18} Built in the years 1907-1908 and designed by L. Wojtyszka, it’s one of the first modern department stores in Krakow. The first floor level was commercial space.

Stanisław Wyspiański lived in the building which had been here before. At the turn of 1900 and 1901, he wrote Wesele (the Wedding) here. Since 2008, it has housed the Hard Rock café restaurant.
its pre-foundation history were found. The museum and the exhibits owe their present form to professor A. Kadłuczka and his team.19

Modernization of the branch of the National Museum in Cloth Hall occurred at the same time. The result was the adaptation of the first floor rooms and terrace to be used as a café called Café Szał/Frenzy/ (opened in September 2010).

4.2. Panorama of the Vistula bank from Wawel hill to “Jubilat” department store

Views can be enjoyed from the Vistula boulevards (Czerwieński Boulevard), popular walking grounds on various levels, and the terraces of Wawel Castle.

In 1969, the “Jubilat”20 department store was opened. The views of Wawel Castle and the Vistula bend could be seen from its floors. The top floor restaurant, one with a viewing terrace, has always been a special place. It is still open.

Currently, in the area to the west of the Wawel hill, many new levels have been built, making possible a multi-dimensional viewing of the space. Wawel hill and the Vistula bend have become an urban showroom of the city. Looking from the rooftops, one gets unique panoramic views of Wawel hill and the Vistula, as well as more distant perspectives (the southern part of Krakow including Łagiewniki and the panorama of the Tatra mountains).21

Accessible rooftop observation terraces include:
• in 2004 – Viewing Terrace & Lounge Bar of Sheraton Krakow Hotel (7, Pawiśle Street)22,
• in 2009 – Café Oranżeria of Kossak Hotel,
• the Pod Wawelem restaurant 22, Na Groblach Square.23

In 2009, the Tourist Information Centre was opened at the foot of Wawel hill24. It occupies two levels of space next to the boulevard and gently leads to a walking route on two equal levels.

Fig. 2. Panorama of the Vistula bank from Wawel hill to “Jubilat” department store. Graphic by the author

Also in 2009, an underground parking garage was opened in Na Groblach Square,25 which goes two levels under the square.

The above are two examples of the spaces in the centre of Krakow which do not seem to have changed over the last few years. And yet they are different, also because of the new levels of space made public, which offer a new view

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20 Designed by architect. H.J. Marconi. 
21 It is worth mentioning the other bank of the Vistula with the view of Wawel Castle. The view of Wawel Castle can also be enjoyed from the Manga museum and Poleski Hotel.
22 A. Kadłuczka and ARCHECON.
23 Designed in 2000 by Biuro Projektów Lewicki Latak.
24 C.O.R.T. Pawiśle Kraków designed by the studio Imbasymetria.
25 Designed and built by ASCAN Empresa Constructora y de Gestión SA.
of the historic city fabric. Wejchert's spatial, multilevel city is a new opportunity, a new perspective for Krakow.

5. Summary

Urban spatiality as presented here is based on the geometry of three dimensional urban space, which, enriched by time and social life, is becoming a four-dimensional capacity; it's capable of containing an infinite number of immaterial spaces and worlds which make her shape and uniqueness.

That's why the locality gives form to the cultural and semantic richness of a living community.

References


An arrangement of three dimensional urban space (in time) – which makes possible a many-sided and dynamic perception of the reality – enables a search for its substantial relations, and leads to urban spatiality.

Typology of such a spatiality could be found in differences of topographical layout (or idea of levels in built environment), regarding means of movement, and in individual and social factors.

As seen in examples of Krakow public space, even small changes in use could change the spatiality of a built structure.