

Complete Places Visioning - Collaborative and Problem-Based Learning in Urban Planning: Example of the Faculty of Architecture Poznan University of Technology in Poland

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Abstract

Complete place visioning is an idea of designing active places in the city space. It is important part of urban design so as to act in accordance with inhabitants' needs and provide vivid and socially desired places. In the paper there is presented an idea of complete places visioning introduced into academic learning system within the urban planning course at the Faculty of Architecture of Poznan University of Technology. The presented example of collaborative and problem oriented learning seems to be a useful tool in solving real urban problems and aiming at improving a quality of a city space. In the paper, collaboration is considered also in terms of participatory planning. There is shown the case study of polish commune Tarnowo Podgórne in which the project of civic activity centre together with neighboring public space is designed and realized as the final result of long-term collaboration between academic institutes and municipality.

Keywords: complete places visioning, problem-based learning, urban planning

Introduction

The following paper¹ discusses issues related to the use of intellectual and creative resources of academic and research centres within a collaboration with external environment. In general, it is about the cooperation between universities and cities or communes authorities aiming at solving urban problems and directing the desirable and sustainable development in accordance with participatory planning paradigm.

There are number of advantages both for communes and for students and academicians as well. The main advantage for a commune is the opportunity to obtain a graphically legible material that can be an important and helpful in the discussion about its future development and development opportunities. The posters prepared by students under supervision of academic teacher are very often presented at exhibitions or evaluated in public plebiscites, which helps to define a coherent development vision both for authorities and residents. Thanks to the open discussion, the postulate of participatory planning is also implemented, which allows to develop a consensus and ensure the proper direction of spatial development.

From the point of view of the academic centre, cooperation with local communities interested in solving a specific spatial problem and those who knows the conditions of a given space very well is of a great value. A big advantage is the

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opportunity to orientate academic teaching to the practical needs of the place and the search for specific solutions for the real spatial problem. It is especially important in terms of urban planning education because helps students to understand thoroughly how complicated and multilayered can be existing spatial conditions.

There is presented in the paper, an example of a few years cooperation between the Faculty of Architecture at Poznan University of Technology with the authorities of rural commune named Tarnowo Podgórne which is located in the Greater Poland Voivodeship (north-west part of Poznan agglomeration). In the case of cooperation between the Faculty of Architecture and the authorities of Tarnowo Podgórne commune, the main assumption of collaborative and problem-based learning was to search for a way to improve the quality of spatial and functional offer as well as to change the image and visual standard of public spaces in the central part of Tarnów Podgórne. These spaces play an important compositional, functional and social role, but their development and aesthetic quality have not been satisfactory.

An important issue was the need for social and civic activation of local community and providing inhabitants with a formally and functionally attractive place to carry out activities, interactions and social contacts. The initiator of the cooperation was a non-governmental organization named Haverford Institute of Public Sociology¹, which became the main catalyst for all activities and animator of long-term cooperation.

A multi-stage and several-year cooperation has resulted in identification of development opportunities and possible directions. The analyses and design work was prepared in various scales of problem – starting from the level of the entire commune, through the village scale to architectural projects and proposals of urban design solutions. The main purpose was to define and point out existing values and spatial deficiencies and to adapt them to the modern needs of users in order to ensure social activity and visual attractiveness of the center of the village and commune.

Complete and active places visioning - chosen aspects

The starting point of the considerations undertaken in the area of raising the socio-spatial quality and attractiveness of the central part of Tarnowo Podgórne village was to understand architecture and urban planning issues as the ability to shape the human environment. It is crucial to take into account the multi-aspect of existing determinants, not only in spatial meaning but also humanistic, cultural and social and economic ones. Complete place visioning is understood as creating an attractive and socially active space of high aesthetic and compositional quality, which affects the provision of positive emotional experiences, psycho-physical comfort and the possibility of establishing social contacts.

From the point of view of spatial issues, it is composition which is considered to be an important tool that helps to achieve these goals. The composition plays an important role in assessing the quality of the urban space by the user, and decides to help achieve the desired order and spatial harmony. The composition emphasizes the existing values: the specificity of the place, its cultural and physiognomic identity as well as social and cultural prestige. In the art of composing space, many factors should be taken into account, among others: scale, proportions, references, rhythm, relations, connections, contrasts, compensations, light, color or texture, as well as the implementation of the principle of unity in diversity. Which is significantly important in terms of providing social attractiveness of public space.

The issues of the activation of inner-city areas raised through work by introducing spatial solutions based on the use of creative, artistic and cultural potential, to a large extent concern the change in the image of public spaces in the middle parts of commune. These spaces play not only an important compositional, functional and social role, but above all express the level of culture of local communities. In these terms cultural activities support the spatial development and social attractiveness of city space based on factors such as: generating social involvement, developing a sense of pride, creating the image and identity of the city, creating attractive places to live, visit and invest, implementing cultural projects that activate development.

Within the work on identification and adaptation of existing spatial potential of the analyzed commune so as to identify the best development possibilities we have found very inspiring the idea of creativity by Landry [2013]. These researchers enumerated and accentuated a very important element of the creative city concept which is vitality. It seems to be crucial aspect of providing vivid and livable public space. Term vitality is defined as a specific, internal resource of the city/space, which is in constant process of dynamic changes. This potential lies in three layers: cultural resources, which include the

¹ Directed by well-known sociologist - prof. Suava Salameh from Sociology Department at Berkeley University of California, who is founder and director of the Haverford Institute of Public Sociology.

inhabitants' abilities and creativity, products of material culture in the form of buildings, manufactured products or artefacts, as well as intangible assets, such as the social environment, collective memory, reputation or the identity of the place, creativity, thanks to which the potential can be identified and creatively used, as well as the vitality and vitality of the city. In general, vitality is understood as the ability to adapt to changes occurring within development.

Implementation of creative urban design is considered to be an important factor of creating vivid and inspiring public space. Space which is well equipped with small architectural forms and pieces of urban furniture with artistic value can be found very useful in terms of providing desirable spatial affordances [Kopljär, 2016]. In the context of space quality, it is necessary to ensure the proper form and visual quality of these elements, which in addition to their obvious functional aspects should also present an appropriate aesthetic level, because they have an impact on spatial harmony and attractiveness. The pieces of small architecture should be adapted to the existing landscape consistent with its dramaturgy and spatial character. The specificity of the elements of small architecture lies in the fact that they affect constitution of space image and quality, both in terms of aesthetics and functionality.

Participatory planning and design intervention

Participatory planning is an urban planning instrument worth emphasizing, in which the real participation and involvement of residents plays a key role. There is a wide range of possibilities how this paradigm of participation can be realized. The case study presented in the paper of collaboration among university, non governmental organization and commune authorities is considered to be a good example of participatory planning. In this case not only representatives of local management but also local communities were involved. The given example of spatial arrangement of a central part of the commune touches the issues of placemaking. The general idea of placemaking is to provide socially desirable, functionally completed and though active places. The idea of creating attractive places is also a kind of socialized planning, in which the emphasis is put on creation of meanings. The concept of a place is defined in terms of the perception of physical space, which users attribute to symbolic and emotionally characteristic features, and in which the relationships between man and space are strongly emphasized [Dovey, 1985]. It is not about providing well-equipped public space but to satisfy users' needs answering them within functional and semantic layer. In this context it is also worth accentuating the term *place*. It is defined as a space of specific meaning which refers closely to the emotional relationship between space and its user. That is why it is so important to provide a real participation in planning or designing process of public space which are especially significant for inhabitants. Referring to the metaphor of Canter's place [Canter, 1977], one can point to three features characterizing the places: • economic, cultural and social activity; • form - proper relationship between buildings and public spaces; • sense of place - historical and cultural significance [Montgomery, 2003].

Nowadays, the role of design has changed and it is perceived in a very broad context: as interdisciplinary (cross-disciplinary), collaborative, speculative, discursive, and transitional [Clarke, 2016]. With regard to the considerations presented in this work, temporary and engaging design is a tool for creating creative and flexible space, responding to changing needs and conditions, and at the same time attractive and inspiring, which is particularly important in the context of providing high-quality public space in the city center.

This idea is close to the concept of design intervention, which is a method of creative design, allowing the discovery and application of new ways of experiencing space in terms of complexity of development processes. It is a tool helping to start a dialogue and social interactions aiming at raising consciousness. Design intervention is part of experimental design, in which the main focus is on adoption of a specific perspective and analysis of potential effects of its implementation. In the assumption this type of design process balances on the border between reality and fiction, and also stimulates the creativity and imagination of participants. It is a kind of research tool from the borderline of ethnography and design arts, allowing the use of ephemeral, non-obvious solutions, enabling the exchange of thoughts, views and opinions, increasing the awareness and level of social coexistence [Halse, Boffi, 2016].

This idea of design intervention can be treated as an instrument allowing for the staging of commune development process according to the five-phase division:

1. generating ideas and projects,
2. putting ideas into practice,
3. networking - dissemination and promotion,

4. providing adequate facilities and presentation mechanisms - such as cheap premises for rent, business incubators or exhibition space,
5. popularizing the results of creative projects, creating markets and target groups as well as discussion groups to generate further innovations [Landry, 2013, p. 231].

At this point it is worth emphasizing the importance of complementarity and cooperation between citizens and public institutions within development process. Design intervention can be treated as a tool to realize a participatory planning paradigm and to balance bottom-up and top-down activities in order to satisfy needs and answer preferences of local community. At certain stage of development process independent activity of citizens must be supported by public authorities. This means that the authorities must demonstrate activity in maintaining and stimulating social processes as well as initiating and tightening intersectoral cooperation, thus creating appropriate conditions for citizens to develop their own initiatives, make efforts and achieve desired results to improve the quality of the city's functioning and meet the needs users [Kieliszewski, 2010].

Collaborative and problem-based learning in urban planning at the Faculty of Architecture Poznan University of Technology in Poland

At the end of 2017 there was organized in commune of Tarnowo Podgórne a meeting summarizing the several-year cooperation for spatial and social activation of the central part of the village. The meeting was organized by Haverford Institute of Public Sociology which is the initiator of this long-term and multi-stage project. There were also invited all the representatives of the local community and commune officials, academicians and students who were engaged in the collaboration.

Cooperation with the Faculty of Architecture has been going on for several years - including two contracts signed with the Institute of Architecture and Spatial Planning of Poznan Faculty of Architecture. Within few years of this cooperation, many students from various years (of first and second cycle) were involved working on concepts of spatial development and transformation of the commune, villages and selected places of Tarnowo Podgórne village. These projects were prepared in different urban scales under the supervision of educators – urban planners and architects from Poznan Faculty of Architecture. The first stage was dedicated to the questions of the innovative directions of the commune's development. Students' task was to identify the existing spatial potential and define proper strategy of development. The main idea was to find right solutions which may contribute to the increase of spatial attractiveness and competitive tendering of individual settlement units of the commune, at the same time cooperating and strengthening on the basis of synergistic links.

Detailed studies and conceptual design works concerned selected strategic areas chosen out of the entire commune. Urban and architectural projects were aiming at identification of very specific spatial character and uniqueness taking into account existing social conditions. All the design decisions that have been made were done in accordance with the assumption of the improvement of public space standard, both in terms of functional offer and aesthetic level aiming at stimulation of social contacts between residents.

That was also the year of the student competition for the concept of the spatial arrangement of a central part of the village of Tarnowo Podgórne. It was organized by Haverford Institute of Public Sociology in cooperation with commune authorities. The main task was to design an architectural vision of the Center for Civic Activation together with the neighbouring area. The idea of implementation of such a function was to bring together and integrate all the residents. It is also very important to promote the idea of responsibility for the common space and to strengthen the sense of identity. The task was to take into account the needs and expectations of the residents and to identify the historical and urban contexts of the given space. The cooperation has resulted in the creation of innovative concepts for the commune development which were found very attractive and interesting both for authorities and inhabitants of the commune.

Students' competition for the architectural project of Center for Civic Activation and neighbouring area in the central part of Tarnowo Podgórne village

There were seven team projects taking part in the design competition in 2017. There were finally three concepts chosen, which, in the jury's opinion, fulfilled the assumptions in the best possible way. Presented urban ideas and architectural solutions were fitting into the spatial context and social importance of the place. The winning work of the third year students of the first cycle of higher education met with appreciation of the President of the Tarnowo Podgórne Commune and other representatives of the authorities and local community. The main prize was not only first place but the realization of the

project. On the basis of the concept selected in the competition there was prepared an architectural and construction project prepared by architectural office. The first actions of the erection process of Center for Civic Activation have already been taken and the implementation of the first stage of the investment is planned for 2019.

There are presented the brief descriptions of the three awarded works expressing the main project assumptions described by the authors:

I prize – work of students: Zuzanna Wysoczyńska and Karolina Wnuk (pic.1)

The main design goal was to create a place where equally important are: good architecture, greenery and human. As a result of accepting these assumptions, a concept was created in which architecture meets nature, nature interacts with users and users with each other. The name of the "ZŁĄKA" (in Polish) project was created by combining the first letters of the most important elements referring to civic integration: to join, to educate and to activate. There was made an observation of Wielkopolska countryside which was a basis for modelling the shape of building of Center for Civic Activation. The landscape is characterized by compact housing closed in a quadrilateral form, thanks to which not only the building but the space around will act as a magnet attracting residents to come and stay and interact. An important element of the project was the introduction of naturalistic greenery and natural materials. The final effect of the design work is the visible integration of inside and outside space providing a wide range of leisure activities and attractive and friendly space.



Pic.1. First prize in the competition – work of students: Zuzanna Wysoczyńska and Karolina Wnuk (visualization prepared by authors of the concept).

II prize – work of students: Natalia Złotkowska and Barbara Urbańska (pic.2)

Nature and unity are the slogans in accordance with which the design idea was contained. The aim was to emphasize the natural beauty of nature which is a characteristic feature of Tarnowo Podgórne commune and village. In order to realize this assumption, natural materials were used, thanks to which the effect of the homogeneity of the object and the surroundings was obtained. The main idea was the recognition of the needs and aspirations residents recognizing that the human being is the most important within architectural design process.

The proposed spatial arrangement of the given area is to unite and integrate the residents providing livable place offering a wide range of spending spare time together - meetings with friends and neighbours, daily shopping at stands offering local products, business talks, trainings. The concept takes into account all-year use - in the summer, it offers rest in the bosom of nature in a quiet place, visiting an outdoor art gallery for adults and children, as well as a playground for children, which are located within a comfortable distance from the café gardens. In the evening it is possible to organize various

types of events and concerts. In winter, there is possible to organize events for the whole commune e.g. dressing the Christmas tree or learning skating.



Pic.2. Second prize in the competition – work of students: Natalia Złotkowska and Barbara Urbańska (visualization prepared by authors of the concept).

III prize – work of students: Katarzyna Wróbel and Mikołaj Zydorowicz (pic.3.)

The diversity of users who will visit the newly designed object was a main assumption of design work. It was projected to be a space offering a variety of functional possibilities and of a high visual value. In terms of function, the building and a neighbouring area will provide entertainment, relaxation, room to work and, above all, will be a place of social integration and activation. The small architecture and pattern of the pavement are arranged according to the designated urban direction, so as to invite residents to a friendly public space, where it is possible to stay sitting on specially designed hammocks and to spend time talking and resting. The idea was to provide a place for a pro-social, intuitively felt meeting place - meetings not only with other residents - also with art. Hence the name of the place "public art zone".



Pic.3. Third prize in the competition – work of students: Katarzyna Wróbel and Mikołaj Zydorowicz (visualization prepared by authors of the concept).

Conclusion

The idea of complete and active places creation is possible to be implemented only in the process of participatory planning. The voice of local communities expressing their needs and preferences is the only way to design desirable and socially accepted places. The participatory planning paradigm can be implemented within a collaboration between academic centres, non governmental organizations and city or commune authorities. The results of this kind of cooperation can be presented publicly and evaluated in plebiscite welcoming all residents. The exhibitions of students work prepared under

supervision of academicians and practicians can be found as a very useful and attractive tool to start a discussion about possible development direction of a given settlement unit.

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