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MULTIDIMENSIONALITY OF PUBLIC SPACES

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ABSTRACT

By interpreting the landscape, we try to feel the places, to become aware of the space, to feel its openness and infinity. Each new perspective shot opens up a new view. The senses play an important role in defining the spatial situation. As one gets to know a given space, the landscape becomes more 'familiar'. Each pause of the gaze gives time to create one's own image of the place. A well known area becomes a place. Public spaces are places of social contact. They give the opportunity to actively experience space and to meet other people. There is an ethic in the very way we participate in social life. Mutual respect and understanding result from the ability to "read values". Ethical thinking is sensitive to the affairs of others, it is the thinking of man about man. Public spaces inscribed in the structure of the city engage the viewer to make him aware of his own role in experiencing the surrounding reality. The aim of this article is to show the multidimensionality of space, which carries a range of sensations and experiences. A space that is comfortable and looks inviting changes the meaning of city architecture. The abyss of the sea evokes feelings of anxiety and alienation.

The airspace is an immensity of height and an unreachable shell. Places supported by patriotic feelings are an element of identification with a given space. Public spaces provide an appropriate setting for the monotonous fabric of the city.

KEYWORDS

space ; place ; senses ; encounter ; value

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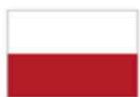
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Multidimensionality of public spaces

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By giving the surroundings a new quality, it is impossible not to interact with the space. We are in dialogue with our surroundings. Man changes the world, believing that the more he changes it, the better he will know it. Enriching the landscape with new spatial compositions attracts people, brings them together, diversifies and enlivens the surroundings. It provides an opportunity for experimentation for the creative activities of designers and supports various social phenomena related to getting to know, experiencing and valuing new space. What experiences are attributed to spatiality? If space is associated with openness, how is it affected by the presence of other people? What makes a public space a friendly place to strengthen social ties?

Sensation of space

Fundamental to human cognition is the fact that man synthesizes experience. The development of his spatial receptors - sight and hearing - explains his ability to adapt and make use of past experiences. The term 'experience' is important in view of the various ways of knowing reality and the sense of orientation in a given space. It is an important part of our everyday life. When interpreting a landscape, we try to feel the places, to become aware of the space, to feel its openness and infinity. The senses play an important role in this process, creating a spatially organised world. The sensory organs create spatial qualities specific to each viewer. Different experiences of space thus result in different interpretations of space.

The organisation of human space depends primarily on sight, but the other senses enrich and expand visual space. Sound, for example, dramatises the experience of space, extends the visual perspective to include what cannot be seen, but exists at the back of our minds. Sounds enrich the experience of space, although very imprecisely located, they can give a strong sense of size and distance.

Human spaces are a reflection of the quality of human senses.

Space is constructed according to the mind's ability to go far beyond the sensory data. Human beings react emotionally to the features of his environment - he finds or does not find liking in it.

A definitional distinction between the concepts: place and space was proposed by Yi-Fu Tuan in his book *Przestrzeń i miejsce* [Space and Place]. We read in Tuan:

In experience, the meaning of space often overlaps with the meaning of place. Space is more abstract than place. What is at first a space becomes a place as it is learned and given value. [...] The concepts of 'space' and 'place' need each other. The security and stability of place draws our attention to the openness, size and horror of space - and vice versa. Moreover, by associating space with movement, we experience place as a pause: each pause in movement enables the transformation of a situation (position) into place.

Constancy is the essential element of place. Space is transformed into place as it acquires meaning. By experiencing a place and reaching deep into memory, one can find remembered images, landscapes, phenomena. Each recall of these places evokes an intense feeling of satisfaction. Stopping in motion is a necessary condition for getting to know a place.

The quality and intensity of the reception of stimuli by the senses influence a person's spatial abilities and the way they experience space. The field of experience is much larger than the stimuli we perceive. Motor and observational experiences are necessary to identify space. Integrating a vast space into well recognisable places requires spatial skills. Spatial fitness related to our body's capabilities precedes our knowledge. "Man's sense of space is closely related to his sense of self, which is the result of his personal relationship with his surroundings. Man by his presence gives meanings, constructs and subordinates space to a scheme. It is a determinant of directions and positions. Space opens up to the vertical position of man's body, it becomes differentiated according to the structure of his body. As one moves around and gets to know the space, the landscape becomes more "familiar". Each pause of the gaze gives time to create one's own image of the place. A well-known area becomes a place.

A meeting place

Enclosing a space and giving it fixed values therefore creates a place. Both space and place are important in human life, in their daily movement between safe haven and adventure, attachment and freedom. Each new place requires familiarity with the landscape by remembering certain landmarks, getting to know the character of the city. During the process of familiarisation and settling in, images of the surroundings are memorised, which later become habitual and a daily humanised interlude of the day. With time they become commonplace and do not provoke any special reflections, they only come to light when something changes. The unexpected disruption is particularly noticeable when we return to familiar places years later. Changes and constantly flowing time create new places.

Public spaces support different social phenomena and mark places of social contact. They provide opportunities for active experience of space and for meeting other people. The experience of the encounter has an extraordinary persuasive power and is much more than a simple "encounter" with another person. An encounter is an event. Human beings are social creatures; we value company and contact with other people. Each person requires us to acknowledge and behave appropriately. Mutual respect and understanding reveals the full meaning of being with another. To behave appropriately, we must be able to "read values". The meeting of people should include the presence of truth. "All paths of human *ethos* pass through the gates of truth". Ethical thinking is sensitive to the affairs of the other, it is the thinking of man about man. To find oneself in the space of meaning is to find the other person:

[...] I am in a particular place in the space of meaning, in which besides my own there are also other people's places. Just as the individual word has "its place" in the whole of the sentence, so I "have a place" among other people's places. By knowing what these places are, people can get to know each other before they have even met. We are to each other what our places in the space of meaning make us.

There is an ethic, a social *ethos*, hidden in the very way we participate in society. Ethics is the knowledge of the ways of being of people among people. Each community lives according to its own internal *ethos*, which is a carrier of values, ideas and influences social processes.

Public spaces should be inspiring and attractive to people, so that they find such places at the heart of every community together. This is an extremely important goal when a place becomes our favourite place, an area for meeting friends, where people feel comfortable interacting with strangers. Friendly places where people want to gather and return to again and again. Places that cater to everyone, regardless of profession, education or age, and become an ethical living space.

Many of our streets are not aesthetically distinctive. We often walk through a grey, monotonous space and wish to escape from it. Dull surroundings create a sense of indifference and alienation. The lack of emotional contact with such surroundings creates anxiety. Often public spaces: boulevards, squares, quays change the expression of city architecture by co-creating appropriate surroundings. Spatial enclaves introduce divisions, disturb the uniformity of architectural forms and create fascinating views.

An inspiring spatial solution is Yorkville Park in Toronto (Photos. 1-4), which has been inscribed into a dense structure of modern architecture. The park is divided into 11 sections, referring to different representations of the Ontario landscape. The plant compositions form a harmonious whole through careful spatial arrangement and the use of overlapping textures and colours. The park's main landmark and most distinctive feature is a huge massif of granite rock, excavated from the geological areas of eastern and central Canada. The granite rock invites tactile sensations, kinesthetic experiences, climbing on it and helps users create a stronger connection with the landscape. In another area, a metal structure creates a water curtain that borders a courtyard full of benches and chairs on one side. Prefabricated rings surround the trees and create places to rest. A space that is comfortable and looks inviting satisfies human needs. A sense of comfort is bound up with a sense of security, the availability of seating provides the opportunity to choose a place in different light.

The introduction of simple spatial solutions is to ensure that the surroundings do not distract users, but are a neutral space, a background for events. The application of the "third place" idea fulfils one of the main assumptions of Ray Oldenburg, the creator of the "see and be seen" idea in modern spatial-architectural solutions. Public spaces can encourage different activities and attract many people. It is important to observe the needs of users and create places to concentrate or create a pleasant atmosphere to activate young children to play during the day, places to attract young people after school, places for concerts, cultural initiatives to come in the evening.

Madrid's Pasarela de Arganzuela park (Photo. 5) is a key element of the programme to revitalise the banks of the Manzanares River. The most recognisable element of the park is the bridge designed by Dominique Perrault. The bridge takes the form of two conical tubes spirally wrapped with metal mesh, which meet at the top of the park hill. Shields stretched over the steel structure protect users from the sun, wind and rain. Shaded during the day, the promenade is illuminated at night, becoming a beacon for its surroundings. The metal mesh gives the structure a variable appearance. Depending on the observation point and the light, it can appear transparent or completely opaque. The sophisticated form of the gate-passage is located just a few metres from the historic Toledo Bridge. Both sides of this symmetrical confrontation form a spectacular whole exclusively for pedestrians and cyclists.

Liquid space

Water is a fluid matter of changeable form. While remaining in a bodily relationship, it can be touched, experienced with the senses. By immersing ourselves in it, we are part of a different environment, we accept its rules. I mean the temperature, the force, the movement, the resistance of the water. Movement is slower in water because of its density. The dark, unsettling water evokes an ambivalent feeling of fear of being immersed in it. It is often treated as an analogy of time. The fluid image of water refers to something impermanent, elusive and constantly changing. Water enlivens public space. Cascades, fountains, water curtains increase the quality and attractiveness of urban spaces.

The phenomenal properties of water, the ability of water surfaces to reflect light, are shown in the works of the Danish artist Olafur Eliasson. The artist focuses on the problem of perception - especially the perception of colour. He often uses water as the medium of his expression. He is particularly interested in the relationship between light and colour. His projects inscribed in the

urban space engage the viewer to make them aware of their own role in experiencing the surrounding reality. We can find fascination with the power of the elements of nature in his works, especially earth, air and fire, interpreted as light, as well as the world of the senses: touch, smell, sight, taste and hearing. The artist experiments with and captures the phenomena in question. The project *Green river series* (photo. 6) from 1998 consisted in dissolving a bright, fluorescent green dye in the Fjakkabaksleid nedri river in southern Iceland, which completely changed the appearance of the water without, however, adversely affecting the natural biosystem. The experiment was later repeated in Bremen, Stockholm, Los Angeles and Tokyo. The dissolved dye looked frightening, but from a different perspective it also looked very interesting against the grey boulders emerging from the fluorescent green. The dyed water provided a strong contrast to the surrounding city. The artist draws attention to the multidimensional space. The flowing river is an analogy of time, it suggests a specific time. The water makes the tissue of the city realistic, tangible. Being there, we are present in the given space.

The essential feature of water is its definite time of falling. *The New York City Waterfalls* (photo. 7) is an experiment in public space on the properties of perception. Eliasson built four huge water cascades on both banks of the East River, at the famous bridge connecting Manhattan and Brooklyn. Three of them rose several metres above the water surface in the middle of the river, while the fourth emerged from under one span of the famous New York bridge. The main ideas of the project are space, distance, colour and light. When viewed from a distance, a waterfall gives the impression that the water is falling slowly. The closer you get to the waterfall, the stronger the impression that the water is flowing faster. The falling water marks the distance in the city. Eliasson did not want to bring nature into the city.

The waterfalls were seen by thousands of people every day. The viewer was to be part of the space, not just receive the image *en face*. Sensual effects, like salt fog spread by the wind, could evoke the feeling one gets when observing atmospheric phenomena. However, when we realise that the waterfalls are the result of a set, openwork steel structure housing powerful pumps that transport river water into a high bowl, with the water cascading down, we realise that it is impossible to experience the natural. The contact with nature is seemingly created, directed, as a simulated experience, through an installation that uses 'materials' unusual for sculpture, such as water, light, colour, space. The installation became a means of measuring distance.

Another example of space, this time in painting, is still water showing the relationship between surface and depth. The most fascinating property of the surface of standing water is its ability to reflect, to double. The effect of duplicating the same thing, but also the inverted image in the water maintains the tension between the two sides. The reflection in the water reduces the distance and brings you closer. The reflections, meeting, penetrate and attack each other. The emerging images carry a new meaning, which sometimes surprises with an unexpected solution, with colours.

Gerhard Richter's painting *Eis* (Ice) (photo. 8) shows an unobstructed sea space with stalls floating on the water surface. The frozen landscape shows no signs of life. It evokes feelings of anxiety and alienation. Most of the artist's works give the impression of a fluid reality in which everything is blurred, out of focus and fuzzy, like reflections on water. The artist expresses himself as follows:

I blur things to make everything singularly important and unimportant. I blur things to make them look not artistic or craftsmanlike, but technological, smooth, perfect. I will blur to make all parts more customised. I may also erase excess unimportant information.

Between heaven and earth - airspace

Respect for the traditions of a place awakens in the population an awareness of regional national distinctiveness. Places supported by patriotic feelings constitute an element of identification with a given space.

An interesting example of respect for national values, bearing witness to the past, is the ensemble of outdoor sculptures in Târgu Jiu, Romania, created by Constantin Brâncuși commissioned by the city authorities in 1936 (photos. 9–11). A spatial composition made to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the great battle of Târgu Jiu during World War I, in which many Romanian soldiers died. *The path of the heroes* still continues to amaze art critics today. The main entrance to the park leads through the *Gate of Kisses*, which is a modern interpretation of the triumphal arch with the motif of a kiss, referring to the rite of passage, or entering another dimension of reality. Behind the gate, there is the *Avenue of Chairs*, which leads to the riverside to the *Table of Silence*, surrounded by 12 hourglass-shaped stools, which may symbolise the absence, or rather the invisible presence, of the guests. The famous *Infinity Column*, which Brâncuși himself called "the stairway to heaven" is outside the park, but on its axis. In this way, the artist creates the cultural value of the place and the need to be connected to the place of his birth, to the history of his ancestors and to the many

generations growing up in a common culture and tradition. The sculptures are a message, a symbol, a sign, in a complex space they enrich the identity of a place.

The Romanian religious scholar Mircea Eliade - in an essay dedicated to his compatriot Brâncuși - recognises in the *Endless Column* an element already known in prehistory and widespread throughout the world. The column of heaven is also a Romanian folk motif - the central column supports the celestial vault and serves to communicate with heaven. In other words, it is the *axis mundi* (axis of the world) appearing in various representations as the Irminsul column of the ancient Germans, as pillars of the peoples' world. The point of contact between heaven and earth was considered the centre of the world, a place imbued with the sacrum, the holiest of the holy. In many cultures it represented the basic concept of cosmogony.

Brâncuși, by erecting the support of the sky, by reproducing it in an infinite number of variants, brought to light the symbolism of ascent, contained the essence of flight in it. The vertical dimension of the column ascending into space gives such an impression that, climbing with the gaze, no boundaries are perceived. This ascent, flight into infinite space, "the symbolism of flight expresses the abolition of the human condition, transcendence and freedom". Flight is equivalent to the cancellation of a burden and is an ontological transformation of the human being. It is a sign of control over the element. Flight in the air forces a change of consciousness. Breaking away from the ground, we enter a different airspace. When the force of gravity is overcome, the perspective of vision, points of reference, and above all, feelings change. The celestial vault, airspace - how different it is from a small patch of earth. The higher spheres of the sky are an inaccessible dimension.

[...] the sky reveals its transcendence before there is even an attribution of religious values to it. Heaven "symbolizes" transcendence, power, immutability simply because it exists. Heaven exists because it is lofty, infinite, unchanging, powerful.

The space that connects heaven and earth creates a place where heaven can be the backdrop for events. When we look up to the sky, however, it ceases to be secondary. The perspective of looking up opens up the immensity of height, the unattainable shell, the structure of the openness of the sky. A space without borders, eternal and distant. A number of atmospheric phenomena reveal a connection to the supreme beings of primitive peoples and to the gods of the first civilisations. The sky is perceived as an area, an immensity of space.

Summary

Public spaces inscribed in the structure of the city engage the viewer to make them aware of their own role in experiencing the surrounding reality. The multidimensionality of space brings a range of sensations and experiences.

The modern age has developed many psychosocial needs in society, for which the city as a whole should provide the right spaces, the right setting and the necessary elements to meet them. The needs of people are diverse and alternate between individuals and communities.

We feel the need for variability and constancy, for silence and bustle, for calm and movement, for solitude and participation in the community, for anonymity and public performance, for individual expression and participation in collective undertakings.

An important need of urban communities is to have common unique values. These are works of architecture, urban planning, sculpture, gardening and landscape art. They give the city an individual face and are a factor of integration of the inhabitants into the city. The social space consists of many elements which create zones of different social character in the city structure, introduce gradation of social attractiveness of individual areas, create landmarks of the city in this space.

The city structure is of great importance in regulating the life processes of the urban community. The evolution of our culture and new phenomena in our surroundings require the development of appropriate new spaces and a suitable setting for city architecture.

The feeling of a given space by its inhabitants and the possibility of finding in it a place for the expression of small human affairs strengthens in us the feeling of belonging to the surroundings and bonds with other - known or potentially close - people.

Meeting places, where new ideas are born and where we gain distance to things. We create such places together by perpetuating and maximising the values that are important in a given environment.



1, 2, 3, 4. Park Yorkville w Toronto
5. Green river series, Olafur Eliasson
6. The New York City Waterfalls, Olafur Eliasson



7. Eis, Gerhard Richter

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