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Responsibility of the architect to the local community

Influence of a design on health and life of residents

A design improves or worsens people's lives and its effects may last for decades [1, p. 5]. Depending on its scale, these effects may be seen in the area of a district, city or province [14] and in the light of the EU structural policy – of the region as well [10 p.15]. A design transforms numerous biotechnical and mental factors in the residential environment. We can measure many of them and assess their influence on man as positive or negative. Since the mid-19th century, various systems of valuation of the transformed environment have been created and developed. On the basis of international programmes such as Agenda 21 [6], Health 21, UCLA Health System [9], URBACT and others, assessment tools of the influence of designed investments on man and nature are elaborated. The knowledge about the influence of architecture on people's health and life is systematically broadened and along with this knowledge, the number of assessment systems is still growing. What we ought to bear in mind is the fact the architect's work exerts an enormous influence – positive or negative – on man's psycho-physical health and the development or deterioration of his social and spatial relations [4] – only then shall we see the greatness of responsibility that is placed on him.

Unawareness of this influence does not discharge from responsibility. This responsibility is shared with other participants of the design process; however, taking into consideration the architect's role in this process, it appears to be special. Practicing a public trust profession, such as an architect, imposes on him a necessity to use knowledge for the good of people. A mission to beautify the world – which is part of the profession – as well as to put in order and shape the environment that is conducive to the healthy development of man determines specificity of the architect's creative activity, although it cannot confine



Fig. 1. a) Residents uninformed in the process of making houses or housing settlements. Lack of spatial connections. Lack of social structure. Monotony of mass production, Mexico City, Mexico, b) Inhabitants directly involved in the process of making houses or housing settlements. Maintaining housing tradition. Variety of structure elements, Mexico City, Mexico (photo: Marek Lamber)

Il. 1. a) Mieszkańcy niez zaangażowani w powstawanie domów i osiedla. Brak związków przestrzennych. Brak struktury społecznej. Monotonia masowej produkcji, Mexico City, Meksyk. Autor: Marek Lamber, b) Mieszkańcy bezpośrednio zaangażowani w powstawanie swoich siedzib i osiedla. Zachowanie ciągłości tradycji zamieszkania. Bogaty zbiór elementów tworzących strukturę, Mexico City, Meksyk (fot. Marek Lamber)

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him to esthetical issues only. Therefore, when managing or participating in the design process, an architect must make decisions taking into account the future life and health of residents. Whether these choices will result from the sense of moral responsibility or from selfishness and conformism depends not only on the sensitivity of his conscience and his internal power, but also on the professional community support¹.

What is also indispensable for 'shaping' responsibility is a point of reference, i.e. an assessment environment, namely,

¹ Mieczysław Twarowski, an architect and member of Prymasowska Rada Budowy Kościołów Warszawy (Primate Council of Warsaw Churches Construction), emphatically claims: *There exist architecture and art created out of love – out of friendship for man – and architecture created out of architects' selfishness* [18, p. 297].

Influence of a design on life and development of local community

Effects of the architect's work refer not only to particular residents but also to local communities². Spatial culture constitutes an imitation of social culture (Fig. 2). Since the very beginning man adapted the environment to his needs. On the basis of historical structures, arrangements and appearance of human settlements we can see not only patterns of spatial behaviours and traditions of living, but also a social and state structure existing at that time or a set of common rules for a community that lived in a given place³. The spatial chaos, which can be observed today, results from numerous negative tendencies that are mutually connected with one another. Lack of a contemporary canon of beauty, relativism, indifference to values and, last but not least, the destruction of social bonds are significant factors for the appearance of our

² The Congress of Polish Architecture in Poznan, in May 2008, in its Poznan Declaration accepted preliminary assumptions of Polish Architectural Policy: *Understanding the architect's work as an obligation arising from cultural heritage, contemporary needs of man and the future of next generations, the participants of the Congress of Polish Architecture in Poznan wish to ask all similarly thinking people, who understand the architect's mission in the public life, for cooperation in the development of architecture and design of the spatial order, which determine the quality of life of all citizens* [5].

³ Wallis points out the imitation of social culture in the city structure: *Among many definitions, which we associate with the notion of a city, there is one which also means a social space with its own specific structure. [...] This structure is of great importance in regulating life processes of the urban community. It also has its cultural values. Experiencing by inhabitants rationality of their surroundings, ingenuity of particular solutions, having the ability to find great urban concepts in them and the place for expressing simple human matters, finding pleasure in appropriate proportions between the shape and function of various parts of the city as well as in understanding the society structure through its own structure – all these things 'shape' the image of values which are achieved and accepted by this society. Each of the aforementioned values has its autonomous significance. All of them constitute an entirety which can be called a city cultural value* [19, p. 196].

it is important whether in the discussion about architecture the issue of its effective usability for residents shall be brought up and the level of its acceptance shall be assessed retrospectively on the basis of its usage. It is also significant to include in this assessment not only professional, scientific or journalistic environments, but residents as well [3].

If a design is supposed to serve a community in a proper manner, it should be created within this community. When responsibility for designing and the development of the residential environment is shifted beyond the community, this is bound to bring direct negative results – starting from breaking the continuity of the residential tradition, then impoverishing means of expression of the spatial structure (Fig. 1), lack of responsible bonds with the place, unacceptability or even aggression towards the imposed rules and finally degradation of the environment [2].



Fig. 2. Spatial connections mapping a social structure, a) Mexico City, Meksyk, b) Mexico City, Meksyk (photo: Marek Lamber)

II. Związki przestrzenne odwzorowujące strukturę społeczną,
a) Mexico City, Meksyk, b) Mexico City, Meksyk
(fot. Marek Lamber)

landscape. The existence of a common canon (of beauty at least), of models of behaviour and of principles of coexistence is possible only when there is a local community. At the same time, lack of social culture makes it impossible to establish and develop a community and it also leads to the destruction of interpersonal bonds.

Unfortunately, the social condition of the Polish people is bad and it shows tendencies to deteriorate⁴. There are many reasons for this situation. The totalitarian system, which lasted 50 years and destroyed any manifestations of social initiatives, left a void which is not easy to be filled. Growing popularity of these philosophical trends which promote individualism (freedom from any addictions, including social relations) and relativism (no objective truth shared with others) makes an individual stand in opposition to the community. Institutions of the state, which take over more and more functions that so far have been fulfilled in form of community work done by families, relatives, neighbour communities and local structures – also lead to the destruction of interpersonal bonds. Even in the case of a serious danger we can meet people who wait passively for help from the outside⁵ (from

politicians, administration, insurance institutions) and are not able to live in solidarity with their neighbours.

Social relations and conditions of interpersonal relations constitute an inseparable element of the environment which is indispensable for health and the appropriate development of man [16, p.160]. Participating designing, which aims at this aspect of ‘shaping’ the environment, has become a standard in the countries of Western Europe. Social participation in the process of designing is part of all documents concerning sustainable development. Avoiding social issues in the designing practice in Poland has a particularly negative effect, since it results in anti-civic attitudes and aversion to social engagement as well as lack of care about the common good.

The local community needs some encouragement, support and education in the scope of increasing its participation in making decisions concerning the formation of the residential environment [8, pp. 431–41]. Architects, who cooperate with the local government and social organisations, have a variety of possibilities of motivating residents to take part in the process of designing and further management of the environment. Gaining the society’s acceptance in difficult conditions of the fledgling Polish democracy may require a substantial effort; however, it is indispensable if we treat our work as a mission of designing the environment of man for his current needs and future generations and as a responsible service for people.

⁴ A definitely negative opinion on the level of social development of the Polish people was voiced by Professor Janusz Czapiński who has been managing the project ‘Diagnoza Społeczna’ (Social Diagnosis) since 2000 – a cyclical survey on the conditions and quality of life of the Poles: *We do not have a society. I cannot see the slightest signs of starting to build a citizen society. We do not have a society and we will not be able to discuss citizenship until we start to build foundations of a society* [12].

⁵ It has its origins in lack of trust and the fact that people distance themselves from others; it has nothing to do with trusting public institutions as this is alarmingly low. According to Report of Association Klon-Jawor *Index of Citizen Society in Poland 2007* that examines the level of social trust: *We can still observe a negative attitude and lack of trust to the institutions that are of key importance as regards the formation of the public sphere image. It affects an attitude to the state as such and also refers to trusting institutions in general* [7, p. 69].

Design as record of social culture

This difficult situation makes the architects responsible towards the society the members of which we all are. We, as architects, have a lot of catching up to do and there are not short cuts to it. However, we must consequently hold this significant dialogue, create the environment, establish and support communities.

The issues concerning the order, principles or common values cannot be addressed in a discussion between a

clerk and an architect without taking into account the people who live or shall live in a given place.

The criteria, which participants of the design process follow, concerning the quality and style of architecture are different and sometimes even contradictory. They will be different for a clerk and different for a developer or an architect and still different for a resident. The appearance of houses and housing estates is no longer a clear sign for



Fig. 3: Architecture as a mass product , a) A view of Street, Mexico City, Meksyk, (photo: Marek Lamber), b) A view of Śliwkowa Street, Smolec, Poland (photo: J. Wiszniewski)

Il. 3: Architektura, jako produkt masowy, a) Widok ulicy. Mexico City, Meksyk (fot. Marek Lamber), b) Widok ulicy Śliwkowej. Smolec, Polska (fot. J. Wiszniewski)

anybody because there is no communication, debate or consensus that could be reached collectively. It does not hold any values, it does not generate a community of message, and it does not develop bonds with a place. Quite often, there is nobody behind the concept expressed in the space – nobody we could enter into a dialogue with or interact or exchange ideas. Architecture has become a massive and ideologically indifferent product directed to a fictional and anonymous group of consumers (Fig. 3) that is only sometimes probed by public opinion surveys on demand carried out among people of unknown origin. Such architecture can no longer arouse a sense of responsibility because it is addressed to the user that is indifferent to an architect. Thus, a developer, replacement investor or clerk – they all become closer to an architect. However, the responsibility towards them is governed by other criteria and it is different from the responsibility towards actual users.

It is crucial whether an architect represents a clearly specified system of values. It is also of great significance whether the principles, social values, culture of living which are represented by him and used in the designing process are common for anybody apart from him. An architect must be known to others, he must establish relations with a community in order to enter into a dialogue with it about important things: values, ideas and attitudes. Residents should have an opportunity to learn about these principles, to assess them and accept them according to their demands.

In fact, everybody who relieves himself of his responsibility to cooperate and respect a local community opinion, takes on a much greater responsibility – by making decisions concerning the way of life of residents, at the same time he represents their ideas although he has neither any authorisation nor competences or moral law to do so.

Design as a social act

Research on the influence of participation in the process of designing proved that esthetical criteria – so important for architects – are of minor significance for residents. Therefore, the fact of increasing the importance and role of the society in making decisions concerning the living environment design does not constitute any danger for the architects' creative activity [20, p.118] because in the socialized process of designing each of the parties has its share of participation resulting from competences and vocation.

This is proved by the civic creative activity of Stanislaw Niemczyk who was a laureate of many prizes. This architect, who was famous for his social attitude and represented a personal trend [11, p A-018], is personally engaged in cooperation concerning designing and realization of sacral buildings by treating his work as a civic service. With such an attitude, it is not surprising that Niemczyk had meetings with the users of the area and personally showed them concepts, designs and details. During these meetings, he explained functionality, symbolism and significance of the proposed solutions. During the cooperation with builders he chose the brick and stone and encouraged residents to touch the cross which was soon to be fixed on the high tower. His engagement and respect for the users of his work results in an authentic sense of community of a given place and extraordinary social and creative values of the work itself and the whole creation process. This full responsibility attitude for the work gathers almost all the local community around him – the community which is engaged and becomes identified with a created place [17, p. 6]. The residents become authentic cooperators and hosts. This example should have its followers.

Social involvement of residents can be won by someone who himself is involved in the community. We cannot expect from an architect to treat any residents subjectively if he himself is not socially involved in the

whole process. If an architect does not have a sense of responsibility towards the community in which he lives, we cannot expect from him to feel responsible towards another community with which he is connected merely by the topic and area of his design. If there is no involvement on his part with his own community, then there is no place where he could grow in his civic maturity. It is not the question of his professional preparation, but rather the question of the attitude and social culture that he represents. It is the question of labour culture and a professional style so that an architect, by his own example, could shape attitudes of involvement in local communities. Is it possible for a person (immature as regards social relations) who does not know the needs of his own community to respect the needs of another local community? If such a person does not function in space, in any particular social culture, in any specific community, what are the principles according to which he participates in the process of land development?

Deficiencies in civic formation and social education cannot be remedied by introducing provisions in the professional codes or additional precepts of law. Maturity, social culture and moral sensitivity cannot be approached by multiplying bans and orders. In reality, they remain dead letter and can only bring a misleading impression that their mere existence shall result in the growth of responsibility for the conducted work. As a matter of fact, letter without spirit is dead. The community is a foundation on which the values such as a set of common principles, canon of behaviours, style of life and service are based. Vitality of the attitudes determining the community is conditioned by the existing state of the community.

The Polish people are divided; they are disposed towards individual development rather than cooperation for the common good [7]. Architects are no different than the rest of the society in our country. Therefore, we

must put emphasis on the professional autonomy of architects as a natural place of the architect's formation and development, not only professional but also internal – this environment ought to initiate, promote and support the proper civic attitudes and social involvement.

The heart of an architect is extremely significant as well as his moral sensitivity and a sense of mission and service towards the society. In architecture, thanks to these features, we can foster the values which are much greater than only one's own satisfaction.

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Odpowiedzialność architekta wobec lokalnej społeczności

Projekt poprawia lub pogarsza życie ludzi, a jego efekty mogą trwać dziesiątki lat [1, s. 5]. W zależności od skali, efekty te mogą obejmować obszar dzielnicy, miasta, województwa [14], a w świetle polityki strukturalnej UE – także regionu [10 s.15]. Projekt przekształca bardzo dużo czynników biotechnicznych i psychicznych w środowisku zamieszkania. Wiele z nich potrafimy zmierzyć, a ich wpływ ocenić jako pozytywny lub negatywny dla człowieka. Od połowy XIX wieku powstają i rozwijają się systemy wartościowania środowiska przetworzonego. W oparciu o międzynarodowe programy, takie jak

Agenda 21 [6], Health 21, UCLA Health System [9], URBACT i inne, opracowywane są narzędzia oceny wpływu projektowanych inwestycji na człowieka i przyrodę. Wiedza na temat wpływu architektury na zdrowie i życie ludzi jest systematycznie poszerzana, a wraz z nią rośnie liczba systemów jej oceny. Wystarczy zrozumieć, jaki wpływ – dodatni czy ujemny – na zdrowie psycho-fizyczne człowieka oraz na rozwój lub degenerację jego relacji społecznych i przestrzennych [4] ma praca architekta, aby dostrzec, jak wielka odpowiedzialność na nim ciąży.

Key words: joined responsibility in design process, housing environment

Słowa kluczowe: współodpowiedzialność w procesie projektowym, środowisko zamieszkania