The Effect of Privatization and Commodification into the Functions of Pedestrian Public Space: Case Study of the Central Plaza at ‘Manufaktura’ Shopping Centre in Lodz (Poland)

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The Effect of Privatization and Commodification into the Functions of Pedestrian Public Space: Case Study of the Central Plaza at 'Manufaktura' Shopping Centre in Lodz (Poland)

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Abstract. In XX century the new model of social relation based mainly on consumption was introduced. This change in social life inflict also the urban space – the City become a field of investment game. Even the pedestrian open space become the commodity, which been used for investing and accumulating of capital. This change leads to creation of the new type of pedestrian city spaces, called by some authors hybrid spaces. These urban spaces have become a place for meetings and strolls for the new generation of urban flaneur. It can be observed that the consequence of the commodification of public spaces is the creation of the specific amusement parks for adults. Access to such hybrid city areas is restricted, and activities are limited by private owners. Some authors claims that commodification and privatization of urban space is a threat to the functioning of the public space by limiting the activity of users, especially some important social functions - from unstimulated and uncontrolled meetings with the "other" and "foreign", up to public gatherings, social protests and conflicts. Limitations and access reduced to selected social groups are the essential origin of conflicts and tensions, as exemplified by the 2011 events at Zuccotti Park. The article analyze the privatized pedestrian space the "Manufaktura" shopping center in Lodz (Central Poland). It is one of the largest private city plaza in Europe. This text should allow to better understanding of the functions of the hybrid spaces in the contemporary city. Author focused on evaluation from the users' point of view, as well as in a broader social and urban context and buildings (this includes: the large shopping gallery, amusement park, hotel, cinema, theatre, two museums, numerous clubs, cafes and restaurants) located around the privately owned plaza. According to some sources it is the largest private city plaza in Europe. The purpose of this text is to allow a better understanding of the specificity of the hybrid space in the city (its functions, advantages and disadvantages evaluated from the users' point of view, as well as in a broader social and urban context). It also should contribute to the search for a proper balance between private and public open spaces in the city.

1. Introduction

The last 20 years have changed the appearance of the city centre – both aesthetically and functionally. Trade in city centres has become a secondary function – specialized shopping malls now become the place of purchase (Castells already wrote about decline in the role of trade in the city centre in 1977 [1])

The city centre slowly turns into an “amusement park” for adults, where the most important human activity of the 21st century – consumption – is carried out. As Baudrillard [2] wrote:

*We are at a point where 'consumption' takes over and consumes a lifetime, where all activities are combined in a united mode* 

Today our cities are witnessing an increase in very good quality open spaces for pedestrians as a result of research by Jan Gehl [3,4,5,6] and the activities of non-governmental organizations such as the
Project for Public Space. We already know how to design attractive and attracting urban flaneur parks and squares. However, we rarely pay attention to traps hidden in these aesthetic transformations and we let ourselves to be deceived by private investors implementing strategies far from the common good.

2. Case Study – “Manufaktura” Shopping Centre in Łódź

The "Manufaktura" in Łódź is one of the largest shopping malls in Europe. Along with accompanying facilities, it occupies about 27 hectares of land.

The history of this unique group begins in 1871, when Izrael Poznański begins to buy land for future weaving plants. Soon, this unusual entrepreneur becomes one of the largest and wealthiest in the country. After the Second World War, the plant was nationalized and on its basis the state-owned cotton industry plants were established. In the 1980s, during political transformation, the plant did not meet requirements of the free market, nor did it manage to introduce a restructuring program on time. This led to complete closure of the company, which had been split into smaller companies, between 1990 and 1997. In 1998, Apsys Company began the process of transforming historical buildings of its former factory into a huge shopping and entertainment complex. It was the largest post-industrial revitalization project carried out in Poland. Architects from the French studio SUD Architectes in Lyon were selected for design works. In 2002, extensive construction work started. One of the most important design decisions was to create a pedestrian space between historical buildings – so-called Manufaktura “Market”, figure 1. It should be noticed the lack of natural connections with urban traffic and pedestrian paths.

![Figure 1. Plan of Manufaktura Shopping Centre in Łódź, own elaboration based on Earth Google and press materials](image)

After reconstruction and adaptation, the historical buildings of Poznański factory created a unique background for the new square, which took the form of elongated rectangle. The square is closed from the east by a glass facade of new shopping mall. In the very space of the square there are several smaller factory buildings, which visually break this huge space, making it more “urban” on a scale.

Looking at the plan of “Manufaktura” shopping complex in relation to the urban fabric of Łódź, it is easy to see that, unlike historical markets and urban squares, the new space of Manufaktura is not a

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1 As a part of the project, nearly 45,000 m² of historic brick facades were restored.
2 The owner has introduced many additional functions to the Manufaktura’s historical buildings – there are among others local museums, climbing wall or an entertainment centre. In the historic spinning mill handed over by Apsys, a new seat of the modern art gallery “ms2” was created.
keystone in which urban transport routes connect organically. The space of former factory is even separated from the rest of the city by open car parks and greenways. Only the central square of Manufaktura serves as a keystone connecting public transport stops with the most important building of this complex, i.e. the shopping mall.

In the space of new square we can find interestingly designed elements of landscape architecture (benches, bicycle racks), as well as sculptural elements emphasizing the character of this place. An important element of the square’s composition is fountain – one of the longest in Europe. It is the barrier separating an open area of the multifunctional square from the space assigned for gastronomy. Catering is an important part of the Manufaktura complex – there are dozens of different cafes, bars and restaurants that complement the commercial and entertainment offer, figure 2. At first glance, there are no major functional differences compared to other public city squares.

Figure 2. Manufaktura Plaza in 2017

Figure 3 a), b) Hybrid urban space is characterized by high quality of elements of landscape architecture, but also by security forces and CCTV everywhere. Photo: M. Gałkowski.
Figure 4. Layout of Manufaktura “Market”.

Legend: 1 – access to the public transport; 2 – main shopping mall building; 3 – gastronomy (and retail, including household appliances store from the south); 4 – retail (Inc. cinema and local museum); 5 – music club; 6 – bowling alley and gastronomy; 7 – gastronomy. Blue colour indicates linear fountain.

Own elaboration based on Earth Google and press materials.

“Manufaktura” is very popular, and especially in summer we can see crowds of walkers on the square. Very often, various “events” are also organized there, such as music concerts, sports events or fashion shows, which attract additional consumers. In a communication sent in May 2015, the Manufaktura office describes the types of events taking place in the open market as follows:

During the 9 years of Manufaktura existence thousands of various types of events have been organized here: entertainment, sports, and culture. The biggest ones in recent years include annual birthdays, during which we organized outdoor concerts, as well as spectacles and great street theatre shows (among others Plasticiens Volants, The Dream Engine, Doll Clinic). For several years now, summer concerts with the largest radio stations have been held, during which top Polish stars perform. We have hosted such artists as Kayah, Edyta Górniak, Wilki, Kult, Afromental, Ewa Farna or Mezo. Regular events are summer jazz concerts as a part of the “Manu Summer Jazz Sundays” festival. In addition, with regard to beach – there are held the beach volleyball tournaments of national importance, and with regard to ice rink – figure rides and skating lessons. During Euro 2012 we had a huge fan zone on the market, where thousands of Łódź players watched the struggle of Polish national team footballers, and not only. Every year we also organize the finals of WOSP/Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity in Łódź. [...] Other activities are also taking place in Manufaktura, such as information campaigns (European Funds Picnic – how to raise money from the EU), health campaigns (blood collection, mammobus, a day with nurse and midwife, Guinness pressure measurement record) and photo exhibitions – in the rotunda and on the market.

The quotation confirms a uniqueness of this place – there are few open urban spaces in Poland where a similarly large number of cultural, sporting and pro-social events are held.

At first glance it seems to be a successful, well-designed and functioning “public space” of the city. This is what it is called in the narrative of numerous press articles devoted to it. Referring to the concept of *common good* as described by David Harvey [7], it can be concluded that this urban space fits in with this definition.
While understanding and appreciating all its advantages, it is worth taking a closer look at its true function, etiology and phenomena occurring in it. The Manufaktura market is a private space, and as you can learn from the operator’s materials, the square space can be leased for commercial purposes – just like the interior of a shopping centre.

The space of Manufaktura square is reminiscent of urban areas referred to as the Business Improvement Districts (BID). A characteristic feature of the BID is that it takes full control of a given area from the State owner (e.g. a city or commune). This is done on the basis of an agreement defining the relations between private manager and the owner (this is a specific type of private-public partnership – PPP) or simply a purchase. However, it should be remembered that each BID first of all implements the manager’s strategy – aimed (in a longer or shorter period of time) to multiply the capital. And it is not the users, but the private management company that decides about the direction of urban space transformation. Some of the best known and described examples of BIDs are Bryant Park in New York (managed by Bryant Park Corporation [8]) and Thames Boulevards (owned by a private company More London). The number of such spaces is growing dynamically, and while walking around London’s Oxford Street we usually do not realize that it is a part of the BID called the New West End Company.

As in typical BID spaces, the Manufaktura area is also subject to the phenomena of aestheticisation, cleaning and limitation of user activities. All the events organized here have several levels of meaning. They serve the residents, but they are also carried out for marketing purposes, building a positive image of the shopping centre as a place full of interesting events and experiences. This even applies to museums where there are as many as three in the Manufaktura area (the largest is mentioned gallery “ms2”). Officially the cultural and commemorative institutions are supported and promoted by the shopping centre operator. However, as M. Saryusz-Wolska [9] writes, these activities are in fact of a different nature:

[...] relying on the neighborhood with other museums [this is the State’s “ms2” – M.G.] and at its own cultural institutions, the Manufaktura uses them to a much greater extent for promotion through culture than for promotion of culture.

Private owners are the only directors of situation here and have full control over the performance taking place in this space. The role of consumers of goods and services is foreseen for the visitors of Manufaktura and those staying in open spaces. There is no room for measures that could disrupt the consumption ritual. Any spontaneity or controversy in the participant’s behavior was excluded, and – as we can assume – they are aware of that3.

However most importantly, there is no room for political or philosophical discourse in this space. This is stated in the following excerpt from the Textbook of the Tenant of Manufaktura Shopping Centre4:

It is also forbidden to conduct any activity contrary to public order or to organize or permit any demonstrations or gatherings of a political, religious or trade union nature on the premises of the Centre, outside the premises provided for this purpose. Each user is required to obtain the necessary licenses to conduct his business.

The entire open space of Manufaktura is also free of any political or civic activities – which is also confirmed by the press office5:

Manufaktura is an areligious and apolitical place and it has been from the beginning of its activity. No political or religious activity can be carried out here.

Many authors, who write about public spaces today, focus on their spatial composition, socialization and urban entertainment, completely ignoring the issues related to the restriction of civil liberties. However, this is a key aspect of the social function of this area (and similar areas) in the city. The space belonging to commercial owners is flawed by its exclusion from social and political life. These areas

3 M. Saryusz-Wolska conducted an interesting experiment: she asked the Manufaktura visitors to sing several songs with her, accompanied by a guitar. However, she did not find any volunteers – passers-by were afraid of security intervention.

4 This textbook is not available to the public. The authors have a copy of it, but it has not been possible to confirm whether this version of the document is still valid.

5 Quotation from an e-mail sent to the Author by the Manufaktura Press Office on 7 May 2015, signed by Ms Agnieszka Danowska (in the Author’s collections).
have a completely different status from urban areas in which State and constitution law are in force (and where the role of owners is performed by elected authorities). Makowski [10] accurately summed up the shopping centre’s strategy in this respect: consumption as much as possible and public life as much as needed. Behavioural control in private pedestrian areas is carried out by means of a monitoring system and enforced by private security forces. As Ritzer writes, in new consumer products the ability to control customers is inseparably related with their tracking [11].

Sylke Nissen [12] has created a very helpful graph illustrating progress in the privatization of open public spaces of cities. In accordance with the above division, the Manufaktura market belongs to the fifth stage, i.e. to a very high degree of privatization.

### Table 1. Level of privatizations

| Level of privatizations | Pedestrian areas, the Business Improvement Districts (BID) | Pedestrian areas, the Business Improvement Districts (BID) |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 Transforming public space through private management, installing private signs, symbolic exclusion through private labels | Pedestrian areas, the Business Improvement Districts (BID) | Reconstruction of parks and public green areas |
| 2 Semiprivatization of public space through reconstruction of parks and transfer of usage and management rights to private entities, temporary exclusion through introduction of designated opening hours | Pedestrian areas, the Business Improvement Districts (BID) | Reconstruction of parks and public green areas |
| 3 Construction of private spaces with limited public function, exclusion through labelling and private security forces | Pedestrian areas, the Business Improvement Districts (BID) | Reconstruction of parks and public green areas |
| 4 Full privatization through the sale of quasi-public assets; exclusion through signs and private security forces | Pedestrian areas, the Business Improvement Districts (BID) | Reconstruction of parks and public green areas |
| 5 Full privatization through the sale of public real estate; access restricted to customers/consumers; control by private security forces | Pedestrian areas, the Business Improvement Districts (BID) | Reconstruction of parks and public green areas |
| 6 Full privatization through the sales of public real estate, as well as political and administrative spin-off of urban communities; full access control | Pedestrian areas, the Business Improvement Districts (BID) | Reconstruction of parks and public green areas |

### 3. Conclusions - An Attempt to Evaluate Spaces Managed by Private Entities

The ownership status of an area does not determine its function in the city and its classification as a public space. Although all private owner’s activities are motivated by the desire to multiply profits and, referring to Harvey’s texts [7], the appropriation of a monopoly annuity resulting from the possession of a unique property, i.e. a historic factory in Łódź, their actions also have positive effects, expanding the availability of cultural goods for the local community. Revitalization of the historic buildings of Poznański factory is also a value worth noting, which preserves at least part of the spirit of this place and creates in its centre a high quality open, pedestrian urban space of great aesthetic value, which soon became a meeting place for the inhabitants of Łódź.

Although we can speak here mainly about the users of this space from the group of well-paid middle and upper class (consciously chosen by the owner), but bearing in mind the fact that this area was completely devastated before the entry of private capital, its transformation should be considered as a definitely positive effect. Analysing the Manufaktura market space, it should be stated that access restrictions enforced by private guards, targeted elimination of political activities and control of all activities in the area of square are significant functional restrictions, which do not allow for including this area in the category of public spaces. On the other hand, the square is frequently used and positively

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6 Adopting the most accurate according to the Author of this article, the Polish definition of public space derived from the work of dr. hab. arch. Piotr Lorens: “Therefore, the public space will be called the fragment of urban space which – through the way it is designed and its location in the urban structure – is intended for the purpose of implementing direct contacts between participants of social life and other social needs of the communities using it, while remaining physically accessible for all interested persons [M. G]. The physical availability of space can be limited in time due to security issues or the way in which its using is organized” [14]
perceived by the inhabitants of Łódź. It can be considered as an example of the hybrid space, which becomes more popular in cities of our cultural circle [13].

The example of “Manufaktura” in Łódź clearly proves that hybrid areas of the city cannot be treated as public areas, despite the fact that they are well-designed and organized spaces for socialization and entertainment. Such areas are only destructive in the symbolic aspect simulating the real public space. It is also important that the hybridization of urban space is accompanied by increased control and limited physical access for certain user groups – what is contrary to the basic definitions of public space.

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