Taming the urban space

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Abstract. The idea of sustained development can’t be effectively implemented without due
inclusion of social needs and designing that is “closer to the people”. This approach allows the
holistic design, the design of urban spaces, and the spaces that were dehumanized to date, have
the chance to regain their social and town building potential. The aim of the article is to present
the possibilities for accomplishment of idea of reclaiming urban space through its taming, on
the example of the competition designs of town greenery in different scales in two Polish
cities: Szczecin and Złotów. The idea of taming the urban space was interpreted as integrated
action of three components:
- urban gardening – through appropriately chosen plant species, including edible plants and use
of traditional and elevated plant beds the space created is “homely”, “safe”, creating
connotations with a home garden, stimulating interaction of neighbours and the feeling of
being the “host” of the space;
- games in the space – the use of some amusement elements and adaptation of the urban
elements of small architecture and the surfaces to the needs of games and recreation, but
without being too literal in that aspect, to be used by all inhabitants, independently from their
age, introduces the feeling of freedom, creativity and even surprise that accompany
entertainment, to the space and in effect enhances the integrative quality of the space and the
feeling of comfort of staying “in our own”, that is neighbourly space;
- system of easily adaptable furniture – thanks to furniture elements that give the inhabitants
the possibility to transform the space we enhance their awareness of their real influence on the
functioning of the space and its perception as an attractive one, because it can be used
according to one’s individual needs.
In the effect of the adopted project assumptions we achieved a pro-social space, that has the
potential to become the area for integration of local community, thus filling in the idea of
sustained development.

1. Introduction
The idea of regaining city space through its taming enjoys, coincidentally, ever growing attention both
as research objective and practical design task. Frequently the indicator for modern cities is the
misinterpreted modernity, connected with the occurrence of numerous spatial and social issues in
public spaces. The vanishing social bonds and neighbourhood communities, the presence of non-
places and quasi-places are just some of the characteristics of modern urban spaces. What becomes
apparent is “the need to create spaces that will adopt new functions, at the same time preserving the
memory and identity of the place” [1, p. 79].
In this context “taming” of space, understood as shaping a human-friendly space that aims at creating bonds with space, seems not just an alternative approach to design, but absolute necessity, which forms the basis for fighting with issues of modern city, and part of the idea of sustained development. The idea of sustained development can’t be accomplished efficiently without inclusion of social needs and design that is “close to human beings”. This approach allows holistic planning and design of city space, and the spaces that were previously dehumanized now have the chance to regain their social and city-creating potential.

The aim of the present paper is to present the possibility of realizing the idea of regaining city space through its taming on the example of two development projects: town green area in Złotów and public space in Szczecin, that led to definition of tamed space components.

2. The term of revitalization and taming of space

Revitalization is a process of developing downgraded areas from their crisis state, led in a thorough fashion through integrated actions for the benefit of local community, space and economy, which are territorially concentrated, and performed by stakeholders of the revitalization on the basis of municipal revitalization plan [2]. The term revitalization introduced in 1960s in the USA at the very beginning denoted administrative actions. It is now understood more broadly, and includes actions on different levels, leading to improvement of the inhabitants’ quality of life. Revitalization actions are initiated in relation to: downgraded midtowns and the pre-war multifunctional urban development areas, post-industrial areas, former railway and military areas, residential settlements – with special emphasis on those built up with large, prefabricated concrete apartment buildings, and cityscapes with special emphasis on the silhouette of the city and the system of public spaces, including town greenery. It is a multidimensional social process characterized in that its success largely depends on interest and inclusion of people.

Unfortunately, the notion of revitalization is frequently misused to denote repairs, adaptations and modernizations, and wrongly identified with modernization, revalorization, adaptation, conservation or land reclamation. Revitalization is a process reaching far beyond aesthetization or regenerative actions, that aim at physical improvement of space and not at its reanimation.

Taking the image of modern city into account the understanding of space revitalization seems to require special emphasis being put on the need of global change in approach to shaping city space, which now should stress the crucial position of individuals and their links with space. Jan Gehl stresses the role of people in public space, stating “people come, where people are” and the very presence of other people provides opportunity for initiation of some interactions and events. [3, p. 25]

On the background of the notion of revitalization the concept of “taming” of space is linked with exposing the role of human being in its shaping, through reference to local heritage and social activation. The concept of “taming” of space is not precisely defined and is linked with its rather intuitive understanding.

The need for renewing city space through its taming thus requires the search for new solutions and actions in space that could form part of tamed spaces. Among many concepts, the now particularly visible ones include the ideas of: city agriculture, agrarian urbanism, edible landscaping and placemaking (creation of places). What is essential in case of city agriculture and horticulture, which are based on joint work of local communities is not just the production of food, but also building the feeling of ownership, belonging, and identity in the cityscape that was previously anonymous [4; 5]. Similarly the placemaking is also an action aimed at cooperation and participation of people in space, enhancing their feeling of responsibility for its shape. Transformed places are to provoke interactions between people and strengthen local communities [6]. Edible landscaping – the new trend in landscape architecture – is in turn connected with introduction of edible plants to urban areas, with their aesthetic qualities that were previously undervalued. What is also significant is the “homely” characteristic of edible plants and the possibility to use them to “tame” spaces by giving them the appearance of backyard garden [7].
3. Result and discussion. Taming space on selected examples of space development

3.1. Development concept for fragment of Aleja Papieża Jana Pawła II in Szczecin – designed as a
dweller-friendly public space

The main aim of the 2016 contest of the City Office in Szczecin for urban development of the
fragment of Aleja Papieża Jana Pawła II [Pope John Paul II Alley] located in strict center of the city
was to gather designs for dweller-friendly public space [8]. The project submitted by the team of M.
Czałczyńska-Podolska, M. Rzeszotarska-Pałka, A. Szymski, M. Mincel, M. Pietrusewicz interpreted
the idea of dweller-friendly space as an action leading to creation of attractive green urban public
space, with dominant recreational function. In order to attain a dweller and tourist-friendly space in the
center of a large city the design incorporated three components:

• play in space – the use of selected play elements and adaptation of urban elements of small
architecture and paving for play and relaxation, without being too direct, of all groups of
inhabitants, regardless of their age (also taking the needs of handicapped persons into account)
the area of the square is enriched with the feeling of freedom, creativity or even surprise –
connected with play, that enhance the integrative nature of development and the feeling of
comfort of “our” space;
• urban gardening – the carefully selected plant species, including edible plants, and the use of
elevated beds create a “homely”, “safe” space that evokes the associations with home garden
and stimulates the integration of local community and the feeling of being the “host” of the
space;
• cube-shaped furniture – a cube inspired by Rubik’s cube – mobile and easy to adopt to
different activities – by using furniture that allows the inhabitants to transform the space it
enhances their awareness of their real influence on functioning and perception of space, due to
the possibility of using it according to one’s individual needs.

What is essential is the fact that the adopted solutions, based on the three aforesaid components, do
form part of the assumptions of the design for all idea, including handicapped people, and utilizing
the possibility of activation of different senses for that end (play through stimulation of not just vision, but
also hearing – e.g. audio systems that allow users to listen to music, sounds of nature, etc.; touch and
even taste – e.g. plants chosen for their taste and texture). In the end the proposed design for the space
exceeds the borders of actions that are aimed at making the space more available (understood as
creation of space without urban barriers), becoming a space that is friendly for all users, to the fullest
extent of its meaning.

As the design concerns an urban recreational space located in the heart of the city, and thus
threatened with detrimental factors connected with road traffic (noise, pollution), isolation of its users
by rows of maple-leaf plants and counteracting their impact by distracting users, e.g. by the hum of
water in the designed fountain or the sounds of music and birdsongs emitted from the speakers of the
audio system became essential aspects of the design (figure 1).

The functional-spatial program of the designed city recreational space assumes its multifunction
use and easy adaptation to organization of events: fairs, kermises and other open air events.

The concept proposes a model of urban furniture that was designed for this particular space in form
of characteristic cubes (of different size) inspired by Rubik’s cube and allowing for their different use
in recreation: starting from its most obvious functions as seats, through game tables, picnic table,
bookshelf (bookcrossing), audio device, drawing board and ending with a stage for informal
performance (musical, oratorical, etc.) or a pot for edible plants (blueberry, currant, etc.).
The idea of book-crossing, accomplished with use of the individually designed bookshelf locked with transparent plastic door is an interesting solution that enhances the taming of space. The mobility of the designed urban furniture – cubes is accomplished with steel rails that allow the users to slide the elements.

Other designed development elements included: openwork umbrellas forming sun protections and supports for climbing plants, a place that allows the users of mobile devices can use them for work or entertainment. It gives the users chance to charge those devices in eco-friendly fashion, with small photovoltaic panels installed in roofing elements. Both ends of the square are provided with sort of...
vista windows in form of steel frames. One of these windows also functions as a fountain, providing entertainment and joy on hot days – enabling the users to pass through a wall of atomized water.

The choice of plant species was directed both by practical and aesthetic, or even social considerations. The proposed species are easy to cultivate and resistant to urban conditions. The species were selected according to their colours, in order to refer to the colours of Szczecin’s Floating Garden brand (green and blue) and also according to their fulfilment of social and ludic functions, forming examples of plants that are well liked, and used to play by children, e.g.: *Viburnum opulus* ‘Compactum’ – ‘Compactum’ guilder rose, *Ribes alpinum* ‘Schmidt’ – ‘Schmidt’ mountain currant, *Allium ursinum* – wild garlic, *Vaccinium vitis-idaea* – cowberry.

3.2. Concept of green area development at ul. Słowackiego in Złotów, for the “Oswoić miejskie nieużytki” [Tame town wastelands] competition

In 2015 the Town Office in Złotów organized the “Tame town wastelands” competition, aiming at acquiring designs for development of four greenery areas located in town centre [9]. The areas subject to the competition differed both in their total area and current function. All of them are currently run down and unused by inhabitants, planted with unattractive plants without visible function. The team in the panel of: M. Czałczyńska-Podolska, M. Rzeszotarska-Pałka, M. Mincel, M. Pietruszewicz developed a project for a small area at ul. Słowackiego, which was partially designated to be developed as a parking lot. The remaining area is used by inhabitants of the neighboring apartment buildings.

The main design assumption was to compositionally and functionally integrate the area that was disintegrated by introduction of the planned parking lot in its centre, hence the use of geometrical module network. The space is characterized by its visual integrity and ordering, further enhanced by repetition of the module of squares used in the design in form of the characteristic structure of open cubes and use of the leading gold color motive, referring to the name of the town. The coupled system of small interiors was linked by an integrating zig-zag patterned path, making the daily walk a joy, or even play.

The idea of taming spaces was interpreted, similar to the design for Aleja Jana Pawła II in Szczecin, as the interaction of three components, (table 1):

- urban gardening;
- play in space;
- a system of furniture that is easy to adapt – wooden cubes and mobile stages

Small, square-base interiors were created by covering with plants that isolated them from the parking and the neighbouring building, creating cozy garden spaces. The interiors were defined by using spatial elements in form of characteristic structures of open cubes with stage, enabling different forms of recreation. The enhancement of identification of interiors is also stressed by use of different paving: concrete slabs in three shades of grey, wooden decks, sand, safe paving made of plastic material, and black & white concrete slabs used to create a chessboard. Additionally, the walls of the created spaces are stressed by elevated flowerbeds.

The choice of the small architecture elements that were specially designed for this end enables the freedom of use, or even adaptation of space to individual recreational needs. These elements enable the play to both adults and children, integrating local community. Among the proposed solutions we find: cubes – open cubes, mobile stages, multifunctional devices for movement and construction play, benches and bookshelf.

The designed wooden cubes do give the possibility to suspend a hammock or form of a swing, cover them with light roofing, use as mini-stage in games or even use it as typical carpet hanger. Use of energetic colour for these structures introduces animating contrast to the grey paving and green plants. An interesting solution that enhances the taming of space is the use of book-crossing, accomplished by individually designed bookshelf, enclosed with transparent plastic door. The wooden
mobile stages on wheels, in two different sizes, enable the adjustment of space to individual needs of its users.

The area of parking was infiltrated with greenery in form of a raised flowerbed with pergola for climbing plants. This provides a green vertical element that softens the unpleasant characteristic of the paved square.

Both practical and aesthetic, and even social considerations were included in the selection of plant species. The proposed species are easy to cultivate and resistant to urban conditions. The species were selected according to their colours, so as to refer to the name of town, e.g. the yellow-flowering “Goldsturm” orange coneflower, the “Bonanza Gold” Japanese barberry, and “Vicaryi” privet with yellow leaves. The project also includes plants that are particularly liked by children that are able to utilize them in play, such as: giant onion, strawberries and wild strawberries or *Echinacea* (figure 2).

**Table 1.** Realization of the idea of inhabitant-friendly city based on three integrated components on the selected examples of design concepts (own elaboration)

| Components of the inhabitant-friendly space | Public space (Development concept for fragment of Aleja Papieża Jana Pawła II in Szczecin) | Neighbourhood space (Concept of green area development at ul. Słowackiego in Złotów) |
|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| urban gardening                            | - edible plants;                                                                      | - edible plants;                                                                     |
|                                            | - species easy to cultivate and resistant to urban conditions;                        | - species easy to cultivate and resistant to urban conditions;                       |
|                                            | - species selected according to their colours, in order to refer to the colours of Szczecin’s Floating Garden brand (green and blue) | - species selected according to their colours, in order to refer to the colours of the name of town, (yellow, orange and gold colours); |
|                                            | - plants particularly liked by children (that can be utilized in play);               | - plants particularly liked by children (that can be utilized in play);              |
|                                            | - species stimulating different senses;                                              |                                                                                    |
| play in space                              | - water play (special fountain);                                                      | - multifunctional devices for movement and construction play (creative plays);      |
|                                            | - multifunctional space to organize fairs, kermises and other open air events;       |                                                                                    |
| system of easy-to-adopt furniture          | - cubes (of different size) inspired by Rubik’s cube, allowing for their different use in recreation (e.g. seats, game tables, picnic table, bookshelf (book-crossing), audio device, drawing board); | - cubes – open cubes, (possibility to suspend a hammock or form of a swing, cover them with light roofing, use as ministage in game); |
|                                            | - places that allow the users of mobile devices can use them for work or entertainment; | - mobile stages on wheels;                                                         |
|                                            | - mobile furniture (can be moved on steel rails);                                    | - individually designed bookshelf (book-crossing idea);                            |
Figure 2. Concept of green area development at ul. Słowackiego in Złotów (M. Czalczyńska-Podolska, M. Rzeszotarska-Pałka, M. Mincel, M. Pietrusewicz, 2016)

4. Conclusions

The idea of inhabitant-friendly city was accomplished in the discussed competition designs as taming of space with use of three integrated components:

- **urban gardening** – with use of appropriately selected plant species, including edible species, and utilization of traditional and elevated beds a “homely”, “safe” space is achieved, resembling home garden and stimulating neighbour integration and the feeling of being “host” of space;

- **play in space** – with use of selected play elements and adaptation of urban elements of small architecture and surface paving for the needs of play and relaxation, but without excessive literality and for use by all inhabitants, regardless of their age, thus introducing the feeling of freedom, creativity or even surprise accompanying the play, and in the effect enhancing the integrative quality of space and the feeling of staying in “own”, that is neighbour space;

- **system of easy-to-adopt furniture** – use of furniture that allows the inhabitant to transform space enhances their awareness of real influence on functioning of space and its perception as an attractive one that is such, that gives them the possibility to use it according to their individual needs.

In the result of the adopted design assumptions we achieve a pro-social space that may become a place for integration of local community, thus inscribing in the current ideas of sustained development. The presented competition designs differ most of all in the size of the developed area and the target group of users (Szczecin – public space for inhabitants of the whole city and tourists; Złotów – square used by local inhabitants). But they are connected by the common idea set by the Bylaws of the competition – creation of an inhabitant-friendly space. As the comparison of both projects reveals, the presented idea for taming space is easy to adopt and repeat in different urban public spaces. The
presented designs show a new way of thinking about urban space, opening paths to its wider use in transforming the urban landscape.

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