Public Spaces as the Reflection of Society and its Culture

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Abstract. Spatial structure of places has gone through significant changes in the last 70 years, caused by modernistic approach towards urban design. This approach has brought retraction from traditional spatial form and has started introducing free form design of urban spaces since the 1960’s. Tighter urban structure has started to be applied since the 1980’s, but in a less significant way than in other developed European countries, as a result of starting mass-housing period. However modernistic approach legacy is quite heavily maintained and present in our cities. Single-use commercial areas and family-house "landscapes" located mostly on the outside of city border represent the mentioned system. In those structures, a man usually identifies himself with his own house or apartment rather than with space that commonly surrounds him. Therefore, the role of spaces, their image perceived by men and their character is more and more important. Supporting the distinctive individual character of a city and its places and the identification with districts is fundamental. Urban resident and occupant identify himself with the city and urban environment via arrangement of spaces. Social sustainability is an integral part of the effective urban development. Quality of public spaces, which support the city of neighborhoods, vibrant city and short distance city are the important pillars of sustainability. Cultural environment and the sense of place is another important dimension of sustainability. The paper is focused on mapping and evaluation of the public spaces in Bratislava with the emphasis of their social development and cultural value, as factors of their identity.

1. Introduction

There is a correlation between urban space and society. Different types of urban spaces are associated with the specific activities of different social groups. Public space unexploited and unused by people and space without social destination often reflects its physical form. Unorganized transportation, parking and other physical barriers reduce its usability and attractiveness. Human activities need quality and clearly defined public space. The relationship between people and space can be defined by the phrase: People creates and co-creates space while at the same time the quality of the space influences the character of people.

Architects and urban designers, as creators of the public space, must consider different needs for human activities and different ways of their social life. Many authors explore this relationship between people and space in their research. Manadipour, A., - Cars, G., Allen, J. & Regional Studies, A. 1998, Gehl, J. - Gemzøe, L., 2004, Gehl, J, 2010, Madanipour, A., 2003, Spacek, R. - Legenyi, J., 2015. Several authors are focusing more on the socio-cultural dimension, Melková, P., 2014, Carmona, M. - Tiesdell, S. - Heath, T. - Oc, T., 2010, or cultural level Krier, Rob, 1975, Citte, C., 1995, Lynch K., 2004, Norberg-Schulz, Ch., 2010 of public spaces.
We will focus on those characteristics of public spaces, whit the socio-cultural dimension viewed in parallel. This characterizes the public spaces Melková. "Public spaces are kind of a mirror to the city culture, to the city life... undoubtedly it is a medium influencing and completing the cultural profile of a man and society."[1]. From the viewpoint of the social aspect William White characterized squares as “places of sharing, of living and belonging citizenship”. From the social point of view the streets are “...about moving from place to place” and about “involving experiences, anticipation...” [2].

2. Between different urban spaces and their potential of socio-cultural uses

The City is characterized by the breakdown and reinvention of public spaces. For the city is historically typical natural growing and self-organization development. Major role played the existing road network, which reflected strong development of the skeleton, around which was organised by the urban structure. Conceptual and streamlined development with its impact on the shaping of the public space is carried out mainly in the first half of the last century. [3] He was, however, focuses only on the selected development site. In terms of regulation of public spaces at the city level the fundamental concept has brought the only competition to the Regulatory plan of Bratislava in 1929. He, however, did not have an impact on the future overall development of the city. The planned development of the city (in the second half of the 20. century) was focused primarily on the mass development of residential structures and industry in the spirit of functionalism that the traditional public spaces cast aside.

Even after the velvet revolution, the issues of the conceptual shaping of public spaces at the city level, whether its parts, does not pay necessary attention from the level of municipality. It was revitalised the network of streets and squares of the historic core, the selected areas of the internal compact city, whether central, separate knot spaces in some urban areas. Conceptual material is currently being prepared by the main architect of the city, in cooperation with the Faculty of architecture STU in Bratislava, part of which is this paper. Perhaps due to the absence of the strategy of public spaces in Bratislava is growing stronger for her so a typical self-organization flow – whether the ad hoc activities of the private sector, or activists. The contribution focuses in particular on the informal activities in the public spaces of Bratislava.

2.1. Transformation of urban spaces and their active and creative use

Spontaneous transformation of urban spaces and their active and creative use is influence on factors that are close to the terms of the creative city. From this point of view, for spontaneous transformation and use of public spaces as a determining we perceive the following factors: Social: open social climate, informal social groupings, active lifestyle, cultural and social life, informal social activities

- Economic: labour market, with the offer of a rich range of employment opportunities and with the possibility of the placement of talented employees, high schools, art high and medium education, tourism.
- Political factors: spontaneous transformation helps enlightened urban policy and the way of the city management, their creative form and its cooperation with local authorities (stakeholders and residents). On the contrary, the absence of such city management can be generator of civic activities.
- Urban environment factors:
  - The image of the city, characterized by distinctive urban structure and architecture, preserved cultural heritage, the characteristic genius loci.
  - The quality of the urban environment characterized by rich forms of urban structure, diversity and proximity of the function, the quality of public spaces. Variety of amenities: schools, art schools, libraries, shops, cafes, restaurants, parks, sports and other facilities
  - Affordable spaces, old industrial buildings, authenticity, spaces.

2.2. Tradition and present day
Bratislava, a city at the crossroads of historical trade routes, at the "crossroads of cultures", for many centuries a multi-ethnic city, the city of coronation of Hungarian kings, the city of trade, crafts, the city of university, the city of music... Bratislava was the city on the border, on the periphery. This periphery character mainly in the second half of the century overcomes the dynamic development. In 2013 Bratislava region was the sixth richest region of Europe.

Table 1. Bratislava – the characteristics of the underlying factors

| Factors          | Potential                                                                 | Barriers                                                  |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Economic factors | Concentration of higher schools (art of focus, IT technologies...) creative employees | Less support of creative incubators                        |
| Social factors   | Rich social and cultural life, the rise of the influence of civic associations and activism | Lower rates of civic engagement                           |
| Political factors| In some urban areas support creative and civic initiatives                | A bureaucratic form of administration, the absence of participation in planning process |

(Source: Authors)

Table 2. Bratislava – character of city environment

| Factors                        | Potential                                                                 | Barriers                                                                                                     |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| City image, genius loci        | Historical city centre, enclaves of culture heritage, quality of architecture of the thirties, sixties, seventies, nature elements – Danube, Carpathian | Loss of complexes and objects of industrial heritage, the construction of global character of architecture       |
| Quality of city environment    | The diversity, richness and density of urban fabric in the inner city    | The lack of good quality public spaces, suburban development                                                 |
| Amenities and cultural facilities | cultural facilities, outdoor sports facilities, parks, schools, libraries, shops, cafes, restaurants, cultural festivals | The uneven distribution of facilities of culture and recreation in the structure of the city.                   |

(Source: Authors)

2.3. Social and cultural background

The identity of the public space of Bratislava influenced in particular the historical-cultural context. Social and cultural context is generated by: multicultural, multi-ethnic character of the city during long centuries. Historical meaning of public space is not sensible just superficially, but acts like an important factor affecting the atmosphere. It is especially historical forming of a square, development process along the events, important personalities, groups. Social and cultural background in Bratislava is extremely important for the quality and intensity of public spaces uses. From this point of view is Bratislava rich for facilities and events. Many of the cultural and social activities are carried out under the open sky: Cultural Summer, Summer Reading, Welcoming of the New Year, May Day Festival, International Children’s Day, The National Ceremony at Devin, many food festivals and other markets.

Table 3. Bratislava – cultural background

| Facilities     |                                                                 |
|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Cultural facilities | 41 gallery, 25 museums, 9 theatres, 4 concert halls, 6 cinemas, 4 cultural centres, 10 foreign cultural centres, 100 open scenes... |
Events

| Theatre events                        | The New Drama, Summer Shakespeare Festival, The Istropolitana International Festival of Theatre Universities, The Astorka Festival, The Festival of Czech Theatre, GUnaGU Festival... |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Film                                 | The Mountains and the City, The International Festival of Francophone Film, the Biennial of animation Bratislava, Ecofilm, The International Film Festival, Young Slovak film... |
| Music                                | Bratislava Music Festival, Bratislava Jazz Days, The International Festival of Choirs, International Guitar Festival, Convergence, International Festival of Christmas Music... |
| Literature                           | Anasoft Litera Fest, BRAK Festival...                                                                                                                                                             |
| Architecture                         | Days of Architecture and Design, Design week Bratislava, Bratislava Fashion Days, Urban Market...                                                                                                                                                           |
| Dance                                | International Festival of Contemporary Dance, BLAF Festival ...                                                                                                                                                                                            |

(Source: Authors)

An important role in the initiation of interest in public spaces their activities played by the architects Vallo and Sadovsky. Those in 2008, then in 2015 organized competition for architects, students of architecture, and in the year 2015 also for the non-professional public, aimed at generating ideas for improving public spaces in Bratislava. "Urban interventions 2008" started real and spontaneous activities in public spaces in Bratislava. Many of the civic associations aimed at improvement of quality of public spaces and public life in them started to work from this period. [4]

3. Between different urban spaces and their potential of socio-cultural uses

We focused our research of Bratislava’s public spaces on an investigation and exploring of citizen initiatives in a public space. We concentrate our research on those initiatives which influenced the public space the most, were discussed and confronted their views on the use of public spaces with community and representatives of local governments. For our research, we defined the activities into two categories - “stimulating” and “remediating” a public space. The projects that remediate a public space point to the faults of a public space and seek mainly for a material improvement of this public space. The second category of the projects that “stimulate” a public space includes long-term and conceptual efforts to revitalize a public space by its revival. Under the revival, we understand new responsibilities in a public space, an effort to restore a relationship to a public space, mostly of its inhabitants. An inhabitant can find the way to restore his relation to the space and to the city where he lives through an experience and co-participation on events in the public space.

3.1. The activities that remediate a public space

Nowadays, the quality of public spaces is the topic that is highly debated. Bratislava has a large number of public spaces that are not maintained and so are degraded physically and morally. Except for the problematic issue of property relations, the quality maintenance of public spaces in Bratislava is problematic itself. The city is not able to maintain and manage public spaces in a quality and professional manner. Several associations and civic initiatives try to substitute this absence in Bratislava. The most influential ones are “Bratislava’s beautification association” and the initiative “Green patrol” that make an effort to beautify Bratislava’s streets and squares very actively. “Bratislava’s beautification association” is a civil association of residents and friends of Bratislava that has an intention to preserve historical values of the city, to support an aesthetic feeling of society and to improve the environment of Bratislava. The civil association that follows on the historical beautification association originated in 1868 gets benefits for its activities mainly from financing by a large investment group. Therefore, we may regard it as the typical representative of the organization whose mission is especially to improve the name of given financial group, despite of some positive intervention in a public space.

The second organization is “Green patrol” that is financed exclusively through crowdfunding, the supporters contribute to its activities with voluntary financial donations. “Green patrol” organizes
regular cleaning of public spaces, streets and parks, and liquidation of illegal landfills. In the last year, they focus on the activities „Spot Fix“. They try to fix the paving in a specific area, clean up the space from graffiti, embed the trash bins and treat the public foliage. Their activities do not include just one activity, but they come back to the places they have cleaned up or have revitalized and they maintain them. With these activities, they point to the fact that maintaining of a public space is much cheaper than its formal reconstruction. They point to the bad systemic view of our society and government officials on public spaces.

3.2. Activities “stimulating” a public space
The growth of initiatives that except for the physical change of a public space have mainly the intention to change the perception and the program content of a public space is very significant in Bratislava in the last few years.

The most discussed example of stimulating activity in a public space is the project „Šafko“ in the last few years. It originated in 2014 as a life accelerator on one of the squares in Bratislava - Šafárikovo square. The group of ship containers tried to revive this public space through the playground for children, coffee shop, bicycle repair or design shop. On one hand, the project has received a positive response from experts, it has become popular among artists, architects or aquarists. The problem has arose in the relation with residents of neighboring houses who haven’t accepted the project, and also in various political and economic irregularities. Although one-year function of containers on the square ended, it aroused an interest of entire society in addressing this public area and this caused a call for architectural and urban design tender through the participatory planning.

The project that has also been ended after one year function is the initiative “Under the pyramid” which has been actively working with the spaces in one of the icons of Slovak architecture – the building of Slovak radio. The original concept of building design by the architect Štefan Svetko that was built in 1985 counted on the active use of terraces that were created on the horizontal base of iconic inverted pyramid. After thirty years, the initiative “Under the pyramid” organized concerts, creative workshops, Christmas markets or they run community gardens for people from the neighborhood for a year. The terraces of Slovak radio building finally served the purpose after thirty years as the author of the building dreamed up. However, the radio management terminated the contract on cooperation with the initiative at the end of 2015, and so the project was cancelled.

Similarly, the older installation BA_LIK of cultural platform on the historical Franciscan square in the center of city ended unsuccessfully. Vallo Sadovsky Architects dedicated the flexible pavilion to the city. The pavilion was supposed to serve to presentation and cultural activities in the public space. The platform worked under guidance of organizers for a year and various events were held there. After a year, it was given to the city which was not able to utilize it. Graffiti began to appear on the pavilion, its gradual degradation began and it culminated in its helpless removal from the public space by the city. This case points to the incompetence of the self-governments and public organizations in Slovakia to bring residents and visitors the alternative art forms directly in a public space.

3.3. “Obchodná” Street and surroundings
An interesting example is the initiative on “Obchodná” Street in the center of Bratislava. While in previous examples, we mostly talked about stimulations and initiatives from “below”, “Obchodná” street and surroundings is the first example in Slovakia where we can talk about an active and natural interest in a public space from the street stakeholders, the mselves. The organizers are the building owners, the owners of establishments or inhabitants of this extremely busy and lively street in the center of city.

Based on the coordinated and professional setting of their activities, these activities do not tend to make quick changes on the street, such as cleaning and so on. The strategy of street revival is clearly set, it is planned for a long time before, and different analysis and research are done previously. Renowned Marko&Placemakers have been authorized to process it, and thanks to them, the main problems of the street have been defined, moreover they have managed to determine the potential and
strengths of the street. It is clear from the research that the street is not only physically determined public space, but it is also living substance which includes a public space itself and also live parterre, diversity of functional filling of the buildings, greenery, or inhabitants who are moving, acting and living in the street.

The strategy of street revival counts on the variety of proposed functions. Due to the fact that the owners of buildings themselves are the initiators of this revival, it is possible to achieve this variety by a partial form of regulation of the functions. The initiators consider the uniform graphic visual of “Obchodná” Street as an important aspect, because the street is the mixture of various functions as whichever shopping center. The rebranding design of each business in the street should be based on this visual, so that the street will look attractive and uniform, because most of the research respondents indicated a large number of advertisements as the main problem.

Such a form of civic initiative has a long-term vision; therefore, it has a chance of success in the cooperation with the self-government itself. There is an interest in improving of the street from its users and the building owners, therefore they can define clearly their requirements, and moreover they guarantee a justness of possible interest in this locality from the city itself.

4. Conclusions

The object of the paper was focused to the relationship between different urban or architectural spaces and their potential of the socio-cultural use, as well as connection of society to the quality and cultural public spaces dimensions. In the text we presented the methods of these relationships evaluation and functioning models definitions of surveyed relation. The goal was simultaneously aimed to the evaluation of space exploitation adaptability by different social group of inhabitants. Paper present results of a research focused on evaluation of current activities in public spaces in Bratislava. Geographical, historical, cultural and social conditions play essential role of resident identification with public spaces in Bratislava. Analyzed features of social activities play important role of spontaneous public places transformation.

Based on the research, the following can be stated: The hypothesis – “Spontaneous transformation of urban spaces and their active and creative use is influence on factors that are close to the terms of the creative city”, was presented and confirmed. There are good examples of the mentioned phenomenon. The life in several places of the city centers were activated by the activities of voluntaries and interest groups.

References

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