Square Between Two Synagogues in Rzeszow (Poland) – a Place with Potential?

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Abstract The aim of the article is to examine selected aspects of the potential of the square between two synagogues in Rzeszów. The study covers historical, spatial, functional and location features. Rzeszów is a large city in south-eastern Poland. It is the capital of the Podkarpackie Voivodship. The city has a historic centre, that in part is refurbished and pedestrianised, and, in part, its potential still waits to be unleashed. Between the historic market squares of the Old Town and the New Town, there is a sequence of smaller squares. One of the squares in that sequence is the subject of the study, described in the following paper. Characteristic feature of that square is its location between the former synagogues. It is located within an area entered into the Polish Register of Historic Monuments. The square is well-defined, to a large extent. It is located between two synagogues, tenement development, and a park. Compared to the areas of the historic market squares of the Old Town and the New Town, that square is smaller. The study seems interesting, as Rzeszów is a developing city and a metro area under construction. Interesting and attractive city centre may contribute to further development of the city. The present paper may be helpful in assessing the potential of the square between two synagogues in Rzeszów as an attractive place in the urban network of public spaces. The square seems to be an interesting place, worth using for expanding the boundaries of the attractive city centre.

1. Introduction
There is a square between two old synagogues in Rzeszów. This paper attempts to find its potential as an attractive public place.

The present study seems to be up-to-date and interesting from the perspective of a large developing city, that Rzeszow certainly is. Due to metropolitan aspirations of the city, it may be necessary to extend the area of attractive public space in the heart of the city in the future. In Rzeszów, the city centre involves the old town. It is partially refurbished and pedestrianised. However, in part, from the perspective of the attractiveness of public spaces, it is neglected. The paper discusses selected features of that place. Selected elements concerning its location, and also historical, spatial and functional aspects are also presented.

2. Location
The analysed square is located in the centre of Rzeszów, in its historic part. And the city itself is located in the centre of Podkarpackie Voivodship. It is the capital of the region and the voivodship. The city is currently developing and is a metro area under construction [1]. As far as Polish conditions are
concerned, the city is relatively large - 190,000 registered inhabitants [2], with a significant number of students – 42,000 [3].

The square between two synagogues in Rzeszów is situated between two historic market squares. Old Town Square is used as main, attractive city square. Market square of the former New Town [4], on the other hand, is mainly used for transport purposes, and its historic spatial shape is disturbed, or, in fact, extensively deteriorated.

Between the historic market squares, there is a sequence of smaller squares. Their arrangement makes it possible for pedestrians to move between the market squares of the Old Town and the former New Town. Some of them are located very close to each other. One of those squares is the square discussed in the present paper (figure 1). The analysed square is located at approximately one third of distance between those market squares, closer to the market square of the former New Town.

**Figure 1.** Bird’s eye view of the square between two synagogues in Rzeszów, the New Town synagogue on the left, the Old Town synagogue on the right, and the adjacent square at the top [5]

In the case of public space of the old town in Rzeszów, there is a discrepancy between the area located east of the Old Town market square, and west of it, along with that marketplace. The reference point for historical past is the Wiedemann’s plan of 1762, and the built-up area from that time, within the former town limits of the Old Town and the New Town. Currently, the areas located to the west of the described above division line are, to a relatively large extent, pedestrianised. While in the area to the east from that line, there are not many such areas. The square between two synagogues, is located on the eastern side of the dividing line and is intended mainly for road transport purposes.
3. Historical elements

The discussed square is located within the area of the historic old town. It is a fragment of the old town urban arrangement, entered into the Polish Register of Historic Monuments [6]. Based on the Wiedemann’s plan of 1762, on the territory of the city several main points may be distinguished, including the Old Town market square and the former New Town market square. Between them two synagogues were located: The Old Town Synagogue and the New Town Synagogue.

The square concerned in the present paper is located in place of the former border between the medieval Old Town and the Renaissance New Town. Through this area “the Mikośka [7] used to flow, being a part of the defence system of the New Town” [8, pp. 484].

Characteristic feature of the square is its location between the above mentioned two synagogues. "The “Old Town Synagogue” (also called the “Small One or Former School”) was built around 1610 — probably in the place of the earlier, wooden one.” Over the centuries, it has been destroyed several times, including once during the Second World War. It was rebuilt according to a project of 1953, however “that project was not preceded by any historical or architectural research, therefore the present form of the building is a completely free creation of the author” [8, pp. 478-479, 482-483]. The New Town Synagogue was erected in the period 1705-1712. Nowadays, also that synagogue has a different shape than it used to have. It was rebuilt after the war in 1963. That reconstruction, “not preceded by proper historical and architectural research, led to a fundamental transformation of both the body and interior of the building” [8, pp. 484, 486]. Historical document, presenting forms of the synagogues described here, from around the mid-18th century, is the Wiedemann’s plan of 1762 (figure 2). Both the synagogues are entered into the Polish Register of Historic Monuments [9].

![Figure 2](image.jpg)

**Figure 2.** Fragment of the Wiedemann’s plan of 1762 (photo of mural copy), A – the New Town Synagogue, B – the Old Town Synagogue; the figure also presents the Mikośka watercourse between the synagogues

On the area of the present square located between the synagogues, a Jewish cemetery used to be located. Similarly, on the area located to the west of it. Today, there is a park. The history of this place, next to one of the entrances to the park, is commemorated by a stone with a commemorative plaque — “This is where a 16th-century Jewish cemetery is located — it was destroyed during World War II by the Nazi invader. It was here that in the summer 1942 the Jews were gathered, before they were taken to death camps.”
To supplement the information above, it is worth mentioning the local Jewish community. Their history in the town dates back, at least, to the 16th century. Over time, they became a significant part of the population of Rzeszów. For example, in 1869 it was 54%, and before the Second World War 1938—34% [8, pp. 477] [10]. Currently, there is no separate Jewish Religious Community in Rzeszów [11]. However, there are still elements in the city that refer to the fact that their community used to be present in Rzeszów, some of which are discussed above.

4. The space of the square
The square between the Rzeszów synagogues is well-defined, to a large extent. It is limited by a wall of tenement development, the Old Town synagogue and New Town synagogue and a park (figure 3). The limit of that space is well-defined on the side of the building. On the other hand, arrangement of the adjacent park allows for its partial visual penetration (varying, depending on the season), and insight into the areas a bit more distant, from the analysed square. The square opens out in its north-eastern corner into another small square. A spatially defined street starts in its south-eastern corner. Western part of the square is a fragment of car roadway. That street, compared to the one described earlier, is more difficult to see.

The examined square is relatively small. Its shape is similar to that of a rectangle, with a small offset. It is approximately 50 m per 45 m in the wider place, or 35 m in the narrower place [12]. The visual width of the space — due to proximity of the park, allowing for an insight into that area — is larger, in a certain sense. The distances in the area of the square itself reach a maximum of 60 m approximately. This means that they fall within the range of the social field of vision (the distances do not exceed 100 m). In addition, it is about the distance allowing to recognise gender, age, hair colour or body language characteristics, and to hear scream. However, this distance is greater than the distance allowing to
recognize facial expression or main emotions [13, pp. 34-35]. According to Christopher Alexander the square is too wide (width greater than the maximum, 21 m) [14, pp. 310-314]. According to Jan Gehl, taking into account human senses and human communication, in urban planning, there are the boundary distances of 100 m, and then 25 m. "Between seven to zero meters (7.5 to 0 yards), all of the senses can be used, all details experienced and the most intense feelings exchanged." [13, pp. 34-35]

As far as the height of the building is concerned, the tenement development, adjacent to the square, varies from two to three storeys. According to Christopher Alexander it is correct height, and it is within the “four-story limit” pattern. Also the uppermost windows of the synagogues are within that range. Alexander claims that “there is abundant evidence to show that high buildings make people crazy.” They negatively influence elements such as social life, availability of light, and people’s minds and feelings [14, pp. 114-119]. The height of the buildings in the square in question, allows contact of people between the building and the square [13, pp. 40-41].

There is a tree in the square, with the remaining area completely empty (figure 4). That open space constitutes foreground scene for both the synagogues. The presence of the above mentioned tree enriches the examined space. In terms of composition, it may be considered an accent. It may also be an element softening the contrast between the built-up area and the green area. In addition, thanks to that tree, the offset in square shape is less visible.

Figure 4. View of the New Town synagogue and the tree, being an accent

Standing in the central part of the analysed square, it is possible to see — apart from the park and the buildings adjacent to the square, and its immediate vicinity — the adjacent square, further buildings and further greenery. The above mentioned adjacent square is surrounded by compact high-density urban development, a free-standing New Town synagogue and market kiosks (figure 5). A large part of its area is a square with low- and medium-height greenery. Those market kiosks, although they are of low-height, are located in such a way that they are also visible from the area of the square between two synagogues. Above them, it is possible to see buildings and high greenery that are located further away. Looking south-west from the analysed square, the view of the development come into view, and its form conveys an impression of a mismatch (figure 6). In the north-western corner, the back of the tenement house is visible, which is currently not very attractively maintained.
5. Functions and arrangement
The following buildings are adjacent to the square: two former synagogues and tenement development. In terms of the service function located in the immediate vicinity of the square in question, worth mentioning is the adjacent square described above, and the passage through premises of one of the tenement developments. That passage is in the form of a narrow street, connecting the square and the Mickiewicza street.
Tenement development adjacent to the analysed square may also be considered one having a housing and service function. The above mentioned tenement development consists of four buildings (figure 7). Entrances of three of them are also on the side of the square in question. The fourth building is however the only one with a storefront on the ground floor, while its entrance is on the other side. "Walking in the city is enhanced for pedestrians if they can see goods on display and what is going on inside buildings." [13, pp. 78]. While analysing that fragment of development, it is worth mentioning the frequency of entrances to the buildings. As shown in figure 8, part of the frontage of the tenement houses is more active in this respect. There are entrances to the buildings and only one, above mentioned, storefront. Moreover, they are accompanied by an entrance to the above mentioned passage through premises of one of the tenement developments and the buildings with ground floors with service function, adjacent to the neighbouring square. And the southern part of the tenement development is limited in this respect. Considering the entire square, only the above discussed fragment of the frontage is more varied in terms of ground floor activity.

The other buildings adjacent to the square in question are the two former synagogues. In relation to the square, entrance to the Old Town synagogue is located on the exact opposite of the building. On the side of the square, the building has four large windows, the bottom of which is approximately at the level of the second storey. Recently, until 2016, it housed the Polish State Archives (with main entrance in the neighbouring building, connected with the synagogue with a skybridge at the height of the second storey). The building is owned by the Jewish Religious Community in Krakow and it does not currently house any institution. In the building of the New Town synagogue is seated the BWA Contemporary Art Gallery. It includes: art gallery, commercial art gallery, studios and local offices of ZPAP and ZPAMiG [15]. One of the two entrances to the building — leading directly to the commercial art gallery, also available from the inside of the building — is located by the square. Main entrance of the synagogue is located on the exact opposite of the building. Most of the windows on this side of the synagogue are located above the ground floor level. The synagogues are facing each other with their back. Main entrances to the buildings are located on the exact opposite side from one another. Yet the New Town synagogue has another entrance, on the side of the analysed square.
The surface of the square is mainly used as a parking area. Directly in front of the Old Town synagogue there is a fragment of low greenery, in the form of a lawn. In front of the New Town synagogue, on the other hand, there is a separated part of the paved surface. It is divided using flower pots, technical facilities and elevation differences. The surface of the square varies in elevation and there are some minor stepped parts. The area of the square in question is also crossed by roads, one of which ends with a dead end, in place where tenement development is present. There are no benches within the area of the square.

Figure 8. Analysis of entrances and storefronts within the area of the square

Figure 9. View towards the park adjacent to the square
It is also a park that is adjacent to the square between synagogues (figure 9). It is the area of a former Jewish cemetery. Its history, associated with Jews, is commemorated by the above mentioned stone monument. Part of the park—located in the closest vicinity of the square in question—is characterized by tall trees, with grass growing at their foot. Towards the square, in its north-western corner, runs one, relatively perpendicular, park alley. In addition, another park alley runs parallel to the square, in its close proximity.

6. Results

The square described in the present paper is located in significant part of the city. This is due both to the fact that it is the very centre of the city, and a historic area under legal protection. Moreover, its location is all the more important as Rzeszów is an important point on the map of the region. In terms of urban planning, it is worth noting that there are sequences of smaller squares between the historic market squares. This gives an opportunity to create interesting public spaces, in the heart of the city.

Looking at historical aspects of the square in question, it seems to be an interesting place in the urban fabric. Firstly, it is located in the area entered in the Polish Register of Historic Monuments, and secondly, it is accompanied by the buildings of former synagogues. These buildings are unique in the city. What is more, an important aspect is the fact that the square combines many elements related to the Jewish population, which once constituted a significant part of the city’s community. It seems that, among others, this very place may be a good reason to highlight this element of the city’s history.

The area of the square, on the one hand, is too large to be able to recognize other people well enough, from any place in the square. On the other hand, however, the distances fall within the range of the social field of vision. Jan Gehl, in his book “Cities for People”, mentions the example of market square in Siena. That square is much larger than the one described in the present paper. Yet, as Gehl notes “The Campo in Siena demonstrates that large spaces can also have a human dimension, provided they are carefully designed.” [13, pp. 38]. It can be concluded from this that the analysed square in Rzeszów could be designed in such a way that it would work better than it does currently. As already mentioned, the height of the buildings in the square in question, allows contact of people between the building and the square. This has a positive impact on social life in there. In terms of the appearance of the square, it is diversified, thanks to the presence of various buildings (tenement houses and two different synagogues) and greenery in various forms (a wall of tall greenery, a tree being an accent within the area of the square and a lawn - foreground scene of the synagogue). Moreover, immediate vicinity of another relatively small square and the arrangement in the sequence of squares are also interesting. This enriches the spatial diversity of that part of the city. What is more, it is worth emphasising that this is an already existing space which needs only to be improved and used.

In functional respect, the area is currently boring. This applies both to the ground floors and to the area of the square itself. The only exception is the building of the New Town synagogue, which on the side of the square offers the function of a commercial art gallery. Yet, the main entrance to the building is on its other side. Moreover, at the ground level, most of the building, on the side of the square, do not have any glazing that could attract the passers-by. The remaining buildings, by the square, on the side of the space in question, are not attractive at the ground floor level. From analysis of the entrances and storefronts results that, in this respect, only half of the eastern frontage is attractive. This is also supported by the fact that it is very close to the areas, the ground floors of which, in the vicinity of the analysed square, are rich in service functions. It is important to note that the adjacent Old Town synagogue does not have any entrance on the side of the square, or even on the side of the streets running to the square. This means that in its present form, the building will functionally remain dead for the square. Only large windows located quite high above the ground level constitute an opportunity. However, this does not mean that the building is useless. It has great historical and aesthetic value, and can thus be useful as a “support” for the potential new functions of the square. It should be stressed that the synagogues are facing each other with their back, which makes moving between them difficult. Especially due to the lack of any doors in the Old Town synagogue on the side of the square or the
adjacent streets. For the square itself, this means that it is very difficult to create a direct functional connection between those buildings.

7. Conclusions

It seems that the square between the two synagogues in Rzeszów, due to advantages of the place, has the potential to become an attractive public place. It is currently not sufficiently used and neglected. However, the existence of two synagogues, and the fact that the square is located in the very centre of the city, between the two historical market squares, make it possible to believe that it is a place worth paying attention to when shaping the urban network of public spaces. The need to create more urban lounges in the form of city squares or to extend the attractive city centre in general, may prove to be valuable in developing the city’s metropolitan features. The square between the synagogues in Rzeszów seems to be a place worth taking care of.

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