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ARCHITECTURAL ASPECTS OF SPATIAL PLANNING

Building climate-resilient cities and public consultations are among the most important elements of today's spatial planning.

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In today's world, the quality of the spaces around us is becoming more and more important. We pay attention not only to the way streets and squares are designed, but also to the nature of architectural solutions. We want to know if these solutions are modern and support our aspirations. It is likewise important to what extent these solutions capture the spirit of the place, and to what extent they are consistent with the identity of our cities and districts. Urban activists form groups that pay special attention to these aspects and propose alternatives to existing solutions and to investor suggestions. For this reason, spatial planning is not only an area of interest to the city authorities and to the construction industry, but also a topic for broad public discussions. Obviously, the expectations we have with respect to a particular site will be different if it is located centrally in the structure of the city or situated further out in the suburbs.

It is often the case that growing interest in the quality of urban spaces does not translate into an increased level of knowledge of the mechanisms that govern urban development. In this context, we should list at least three groups of issues: legal matters, ownership,

and finance. Of course, they are based on strictly-understood architectural and urban planning matters, which allow the introduction of new solutions in a place that already exists. In particular, this refers to the structure and nature of development, the design and functions of the existing public spaces, and the actual possibility of their transformation. As far as legal issues are concerned, we should keep in mind the regulations governing the possibility of spatial planning. A very important role is played by urban planning conditions resulting from the local zoning plan or decisions on land development conditions (issued for areas not covered by the local zoning plan). Other factors include transformation conditions provided for in what is called the revitalization program. These documents, drafted by the city authorities, define the conditions for making investments and for related legal options.

Ownership and finance

As for ownership-related issues, we should bear in mind that as a rule, every piece of land has its owner. In some situations, this owner may be difficult to identify. In most cases, however, we can check the status of land ownership in spatial information systems (such as Geoportal). If it turns out that the piece of land we are interested in is privately owned, we must consult the owner about any ideas we may have regarding the development of this area. But if this area (a plot of land that can be developed, a piece of a public space, or the area of a street or a square) is controlled by the local authorities or the State Treasury, we may attempt



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to influence their decisions. This is usually done by filing applications for the development of these areas in a specific way, for example, through the use of participatory budgeting or other programs run by the municipal authorities.

Land development is expensive for reasons related to the high prices of building materials, plant materials, and construction and renovation works. Therefore, a single person or a group of people are usually unable to finance concepts related to the transformation of urban space. Consequently, the investment

must be made by a private investor or by the local authorities, often supported by EU funds or other external resources.

Sustainable cities

In the context of current concepts and theories, a special role is played by the groups of issues concerning the creation of sustainable cities, or ones whose structure is consistent with the principles of sustainable development. Such cities offer a chance to meet the needs

The Stockholm Room – an information center showing the planned directions of Stockholm's urban development

ACADEMIA INSIGHT Architecture

Development of the policy of revitalizing degraded urban areas – the quarter of HafenCity in Hamburg



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Workshop discussions on the directions of transformations in the Young City area in Gdańsk



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of both environmental protection and social and economic development. In the area of urban planning and architecture, this quite general definition translates into the concept of a “compact city,” one in which we strive to use, to the smallest extent possible, those areas that not been urbanized yet for development purposes, and we move from one place to another using public transportation, personal transportation devices such as bicycles and scooters, and on foot (as most destinations are within a short distance).

The concept of a compact city is linked to numerous issues concerning the revitalization of degraded areas, including residential and downtown areas,

as well as the transformation (re-use) of brownfield sites, among other areas. Urban planning activities also include studies of the possibility of urban densification, including through the use of unused areas (called urban voids) for development purposes. These activities are linked to growth in the number of new residential or service areas. We should bear in mind, though, that there is a considerable housing shortage in Poland, and the housing gap is estimated at up to 1.5 million residential units. This means that despite demographic stagnation, the demand for new residential spaces remains high. Importantly, topics related to sustainable cities are also raised in the European and global arenas, which is expressed in practice in numerous declarations and manifestos, including the Leipzig Charter and the UN’s New Urban Agenda. Simultaneously, these ideas are reflected in recently discussed concepts such as the “15-minute city” idea.

Recent years have also witnessed the emergence of another group of issues of great importance for the spaces in our cities, namely one related to the need to adapt to climate change. In the context of urbanized space, we must respond to multiple risks involved in such adaptation: the growing risk of floods and droughts, the effects of other violent weather events, heatwaves (tropical nights in cities), and so on. Scientists are trying to develop solutions aimed at minimizing the risks associated with these phenomena (mitigation measures), on the one hand, and at developing



Solutions promoting small-scale rainwater retention in a new housing estate in Stockholm

Fragment of the master plan for a degraded area – part of the former Gdańsk Shipyard site. xBy JEMS Architekci

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an urban structure and forms of architecture that are immune to these risks, on the other.

Mitigation measures cover the development of energy-efficient buildings and ecological architecture, blue-green infrastructure (vegetation and water), and solutions that promote small-scale water retention. These issues are closely interlinked, and they should become part of comprehensively understood urban and architectural planning and design.

Master plans

Another aspect of this issue involves determining how these transformations should be planned. Sustainable development policy is linked to two issues: the need to develop comprehensive measures for designing architectural and urban space, and efforts to ensure the involvement of all stakeholders in co-deciding on the directions of these transformations. Hence, an important aspect of the work of today's architects and urban planners involves designing new instruments for planning urban development, including master plans for selected areas. Such plans are independent of those provided for by law and allow us to define a well-thought-out and coordinated development policy for selected areas. Their development is also linked to the implementation of new methods of planning, including co-creation with the participation of all stakeholders, for example through workshops



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or other consultation processes. The form of these planning processes and documents is one of the most important elements of discussions held in the study of contemporary urban development processes. For this reason, the city authorities set up information points that enable all residents and tourists to find out more about current projects and initiatives.

Spatial planning, especially in the context of the idea of sustainability in the broad sense, is currently the subject of a wide variety of disciplines, with urban planning and architectural issues playing a significant role. However, we discuss not only detailed design solutions, but also planning and designing methods, which may be reflected in new statutory solutions. ■

Further reading:

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