

BARNAŚ JANUSZ\*

## HOME WITHIN A CITY – A SIGN OF A LOCATION

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### DOM W MIEŚCIE – ZNAK MIEJSCA

#### Abstract

The paper constitutes an attempt at outlining the problem of the influence of the architectural form on urban space and its recognisability. The author discusses the problems associated with visual communication at the stage of both sending and receiving a visual message in the form of architecture. The perception of the solutions contained within an architectural form should constitute an understandable spatial message that is based on elements of the tradition and culture of a given area. This image should possess a distinct code which bestows upon it a specific character that shapes the identity of a place. This identity is constructed not only through the spatial solutions that have been implemented and made compatible with the surrounding context, but also through a distinct symbolism of the delivery of the message itself, as well as the creation of a new identity of a location.

*Keywords: architecture, architectural form, city, context, identity of a location*

#### Streszczenie

Artykuł jest próbą zarysowania problemu oddziaływania formy architektonicznej w przestrzeni miejskiej i jej rozpoznawalności. Autor omawia problemy związane z komunikacją wizualną na etapie zarówno nadawania jak i odbioru komunikatu, jakim jest obiekt architektoniczny. Postrzeganie rozwiązań formy architektonicznej powinno być zrozumiałym przekazem przestrzennym bazującym na elementach tradycji i kultury właściwych dla danego obszaru. Obraz ten powinien posiadać swoisty kod nadający mu określony charakter kształtujący tożsamość miejsca. Tożsamość ta budowana jest nie tylko przez przyjęte i dostosowane do kontekstu rozwiązania przestrzenne, ale również w wyniku swoistej symboliki przekazu oraz kreacji nowej tożsamości miejsca.

*Słowa kluczowe: architektura, forma architektoniczna, miasto, kontekst, tożsamość miejsca*

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\* Ph.D. Arch. Janusz Barnaś, Institute of Architectural Design, Faculty of Architecture, Cracow University of Technology.

## 1. SPACE

All cultures create systems of ordering space in their own unique manner. This ordering is performed in all cultures on the basis of four dichotomous types of space which stem from the value systems adopted in a given culture, as well as the archetypes which are acknowledged by it<sup>1</sup>. These spaces, which complement each other, are: original and secondary space, public and private space, central and peripheral space, as well as religious and secular space. From among these types of space, it is within the public and central types of space that we can observe the occurrence of the phenomena we are interested in most often.

## 2. IDENTITY OF A LOCATION

The problem of the influence of architectural form, whether singular or composed of a larger number of elements, within urban space, and at the same time of its recognisability, is one which escapes attempts at simple evaluation and categorisation and is the subject of numerous studies and analyses<sup>2</sup>. Every work of architecture, through its form, sends a certain visual message, creating an image which shapes the character and identity of a place. This applies both to existing structures, which make up the “genius loci” and which have a very important impact on the preservation of the character of a place, as well as on the emergence of new structures and architectural forms. New forms can change this character through their spatial solutions and define it anew. The process of design is a very complex, multi-threaded and multidimensional affair – we can mention many factors that can influence its course and end result – the work of architecture itself.

The image of a structure should be shaped by the identity of a place. Over the course of the development of the idea of creating a new architectural space, the process of inspiration plays a particularly important role. The conclusions drawn from an analysis of the character of the identity of a place are usually an inspiration for the development of the idea of a work of architecture and are visible in its final form. That identity, depending on culture, can have a different character and expression. The image of a space should possess a distinct DNA which exemplifies the identity of a place. That identity is constructed not only through the spatial solutions that are used and adapted to the appropriate context, but also through the symbolism of communication, and the creation of a new, different identity<sup>3</sup> of a place. The value of new architecture is that which it adds to the public space of a city and the degree to which it respects the qualities that already exist within it, instead of just how it is in and of itself.

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<sup>1</sup> A. Szymiski, Genius Loci – czyli o odkrywaniu i na nowo definiowaniu znaczeń w istniejącej przestrzeni miejskiej (trzy przykłady), *Czasopismo Techniczne PK*, iss. 6-A/2008 p. 163, [after] Jałowiecki B., *Spoleczne wytwarzanie przestrzeni*, KiW, Warszawa 1988, p. 192.

<sup>2</sup> J. Żurawski, edited by K. Lenartowicz, *Siatka prostych*, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Krakowskiej im. Tadeusza Kościuszki, Kraków, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> „...identity always persists within a civilised country, not only in architecture, as it is a way of life and not a fashion... it is the courage to be oneself in architecture” Kucza-Kuczyński K., *O tożsamości*, *Architekt* ip. 4, 2000, p. 8.

In the case of the lack of such context, architecture, depending on its location, starts to use pretexts<sup>4</sup>, metaphors which create new content, which demand keen awareness and an intuitive perception of the character of a space, as well as responsibility for the decisions being made, on behalf of the architect.

Apart from this somewhat intuitive and individual method of determining and creating the identity of a place, there exists the possibility to establish local regulations that can create mechanisms that are meant to preserve and continue the existing identity of a location in the manner of clear guidelines for newly designed buildings that feature a predetermined form which is in line with the existing identity and which can extend it in a creative manner. One example of this is the system of Local Identity Codes used in the development of the spatial development plan of Kamienna Góra in Gdynia<sup>5</sup>. Developed and put into force in 2005, this local spatial development plan contains a geometric recording of the dimensions and proportions of each element of the urban tissue, including the width of urban interiors, buildings and streets. Similar Local Identity Codes have been developed for the City of Freemantle in Australia, the Isle of Granaries in Gdańsk and many other areas.

### 3. RECEPTION OF ARCHITECTURAL FORM

Buildings that “communicate”, that express certain forms of content or make a certain impression have been built ever since humanity laid the proverbial stone upon stone. They have played an important part in the history of societies in terms of social communication and continue to do so today. Pillars, columns, architraves, architectural orders, the towers of churches and city halls, as well as the richly decorated facades of palaces – present in the architectural tradition of the past similarly to the modern skyscrapers – were and are something more than simply useful objects. Representative structures are not only purely utilitarian forms, but are also carriers of ideas and messages. The role and scope of perception and visual imagination is varied in different cultures. According to Edward Hall<sup>6</sup>, each culture creates its own world of perception. The culture of the West is seen as a culture in which the role of visual perception is dominant. Rasmussen claims that it is rare that, upon seeing a building, a person is capable of describing it in detail. The appearance of a building seen against the backdrop of

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<sup>4</sup> Space without qualities, an „empty space”. There, where it meets difficulties in determining urban design motivations, stretches an empty space. Architecture likes this situation. It results in freedom and a lack of bounds. Urban motivations are replaced with pretexts. (...) A pretext understood in this manner makes it possible to plausibly accept new shapes and their warm reception by the beholder, providing the creator with a measure of fun and peace of mind. In a space without qualities, architecture requires – a justification, a theory, idea or ideology which justify the actions of the actions of an author in their own eyes and in the eyes of the public.” Kozłowski D., *Dzieło architektoniczne w przestrzeni miasta – o formie, kontekście, użyteczności*, Czasopismo Techniczne PK, ip. 6-A/2008 p. 86–89.

<sup>5</sup> M. Zawadzka, *Znów piękne miasto? O potrzebie badań architektonicznych w przestrzeniach publicznych miasta*, Czasopismo Techniczne PK, iss. 13-A/2007 p. 488–489, [after] Dominiczak J., *Wzory planów prostokątnych w miastach. Studia z trójmiasta Gdańsk – Sopot – Gdynia*, doctoral thesis, manuscript available at the Library of the Faculty of Architecture of the Gdańsk University of Technology, Gdańsk 1989.

<sup>6</sup> E. Hall, Foreword, [in:] *Visual Anthropology. Photography as a Research Method*. John Collier, Malcolm Collier, Eds. The University of New Mexico Press. Albuquerque 1986, p. 17.



Ill. 1. Torre del Borgo expansion, Bergamo, Italy, design: CN10 architetti, Gianluca Gelmini, <http://www.gianlucagelmini.it> – retrieved on 2016.06.18 Ill. 2. Dynaform exhibition pavilion, Frankfurt am Mein, Germany, design: Bernhard Franken, [http://www.daz.de/sixcms/media.php/178/frankenarchitekten\\_portrait.pdf](http://www.daz.de/sixcms/media.php/178/frankenarchitekten_portrait.pdf), – retrieved on 2016.05.22 Ill. 3. The building of the local market places, rua da esplanada 1º maio, Abrantes, Portugalia, 2015, design: José Mateus e Nuno Mateus c/ Ricardo Guerreiro, Fábio Cortês, Ana Fontes, Bruno Martins, Filipe Cardoso, João Dantas, Marc Anguill, Sofia Raposo, Miguel Torres, source: Neira J., ARX Portugal fits Abrantes municipal market into narrow plot, <http://www.designboom.com/architecture/arx-portugal-abrantes-municipal-market-portugal-07-15-2016/>, – retrieved on 2016.06.25 Ill. 4. Reconstruction of the southern wing of the castle in Linz, Austria, design: Hope of Glory – HoG architektur, <http://architazer.com/projects/southern-wing-schlossmuseum/> – retrieved 2016.05.25 Ill. 5. Blai bach concert hall, Germany, design: Peter Haimerl architektur, [http://www.designboom.com/architecture/peter-haimerl-konzert-haus-blaibach-germany-11-08-2014/?utm\\_campaign=daily&utm\\_medium=e-mail&utm\\_source=subscribers](http://www.designboom.com/architecture/peter-haimerl-konzert-haus-blaibach-germany-11-08-2014/?utm_campaign=daily&utm_medium=e-mail&utm_source=subscribers) / – retrieved on 2016.05.20

the surrounding structures of a city remains in human memory not as a realistic image – like a photograph – but rather as a set of associations and spatial imaginings, which the building has left in our minds<sup>7</sup>. Impressions, communicated through vision, should, without a doubt, meet certain aesthetic criteria. If the form of a building is a type of message, then this message should have a recipient that is willing, instead of one that is forced. Such a form of acceptance, which is also a choice, is a clear act of its ennoblement, according to Władysław Tatarkiewicz<sup>8</sup>.

#### 4. LOCATION AND IMPACT

The location of a house within the urban space has substantial influence on its impact on the surrounding space and the identity of the general location. By improving the quality of the urban tissue and giving a location a new form of use, we can increase the attractiveness of this part of a the city. The location of an urban commercial space in the frontage of the historical centre of Abrantes<sup>9</sup> is an example of this. The urban marketplace – located on the site of a former transportation hub, which was in critical technical condition – in the form of a commercial gallery made up of stalls placed beneath a glazed roof, has breathed new life into this abandoned fragment of the town. Not only has this led to the creation of a visually attractive work of architecture that blends in with the context of the existing frontage, but the introduction of a new form of use has caused the stimulation of social life in this area. The previously inaccessible part of the site now has a circulatory path through the interior of the building that runs along the commercial spaces located inside. Two nearby streets that were previously separated, are now connected together.

The change of the identity of the location on a much larger scale, or even on the scale of an entire city, through the introduction of a spatial element in a much more perceivable context, has taken place after the reconstruction of the southern wing of the castle in Linz<sup>10</sup>. The castle, which towers above the city, lost its southern wing, which was its most visible part when looking from the direction of the city, in a fire in the year 1800.

In 1965 the headquarters of the National Museum of Upper Austria was established in the castle, which has, over time, increased its collection to an extent that made it necessary

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<sup>7</sup> J. Barnaś, *Modern architecture in old historical city*, ISSN: 2367–5659, Albena 08.2015, p. 519–526, SGEM International Multidisciplinary Scientific Conferences on Social Sciences and Arts, Architecture and Design, 26 August – 1 September, 2015, Albena, Bulgaria : conference proceedings. – Sofia : STEF92 Technology Ltd., 2015, ISSN 2367–5659). – p. 519–526, ISBN 978–619–7105–50–06 [after] Rasmussen S. E. *Odczuwanie architektury*, Wydawnictwo Karakter, Kraków, 2015, p. 47.

<sup>8</sup> „A work of art is a recreation of an item or a structure of forms, an expression of experiences, but it is only that recreation, structure, and expression that is capable of impressing of eliciting joy, sadness or shock.”, Tatarkiewicz W., *Dzieje sześciu pojęć: sztuka, piękno, forma, twórczość, odtwórczość, przeżycie estetyczne*. PWN Warszawa 1979, p. 52.

<sup>9</sup> J. Neira, *ARX portugal fits abrantés municipal market into narrow plot*, <http://www.designboom.com/architecture/arx-portugal-abrantés-municipal-market-portugal-07-15-2016/>, retrieved on – 2016.06.25,

<sup>10</sup> L. Itzkowitz, *Design Details: A Modern Addition to the Schlossmuseum in the Historic Linzer Castle*, <http://architizer.com/projects/southern-wing-schlossmuseum/>

to expand the building. The building that has been constructed on the basis of a design that won an architectural design competition held in 2009 is a truly modern interpretation of the historical part of the structure that once stood at the site. With the use of modern forms of expression and the latest technologies, the designer created a space that is fully compatible with the modern understanding of a museum. The forms of architectural expression that were used are minimalist, while the finishes are made of purely modern materials, which nevertheless reflect the character and feel of the structures of the castle hill. The solutions that were used here aided in preserving and constructing the identity of the location, facilitating the harmonious coexistence of modern architecture with the cultural surroundings of the city. This general impression is further strengthened by the mechanisms of human perception of visual messages and visual reception.

Edward T. Hall provides us with information regarding the limited capabilities of human perception. Humans can hear from a distance of 35 metres and any sound beyond that distance is perceived to be heavily reduced in volume. Our sense of smell is even more limited, and the social field of view is thought of to have a range of around 100 metres. At a larger distance, individuals seem to become barely recognisable human beings. It can be assumed that this mechanism of perception also applies to buildings<sup>11</sup>.

At the same time, we can encounter solutions based on components that contrast with each other and which introduce new quality through not only the use of modern technologies, but by implementing solutions that contrast with their cultural surroundings in terms of form, while possessing unique artistic value that underscores the identity of a location. We need to stress that it be understood that there are rich sources of inspiration that are derived from tradition. The rule of thumb should be that every building is a part of a larger whole in the properly composed space of the city. The idea plays a key and timeless part in the creation of a work of architecture. There are numerous sources of inspiration upon which a work is based and developed. When designing the concert hall in Blaibach<sup>12</sup>, its designer was faced with the problem of the placement of the sizeable form of the building in the very centre of the town with a clearly defined built environment that featured comparably small structures. Through the use of bold design decisions in terms of form and function, he managed to obtain a satisfying result. The large space of the building was hidden underneath the town's market square. The heavily tilted rectangular massing of the building seems to dive beneath the surface of the square, while the entrance is located underneath the slant. The town has gained a new spatial dimension that underscores its centre, with a windowless façade made using local materials.

## 5. A NEW IDENTITY – THE PHENOMENON OF THE MOMENT

At times, it would seem that a defined urban space with an entrenched identity and historical expression can be changed by the introduction of a temporary form with a very strong aesthetic expression. The historical frame of urban spaces – that of the square

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<sup>11</sup> E. T. Hall, *Ukryty wymiar*, PIW, Warszawa 1987.

<sup>12</sup> Blaibach concert hall, Germany, design: peter haimerl architektur, [http://www.designboom.com/architecture/peter-haimerl-konzerthaus-blaibach-germany-11-08-2014/?utm\\_campaign=daily&utm\\_medium=e-mail&utm\\_source=subscribers](http://www.designboom.com/architecture/peter-haimerl-konzerthaus-blaibach-germany-11-08-2014/?utm_campaign=daily&utm_medium=e-mail&utm_source=subscribers) /– 2016.05.20

– becomes a stage for a new scenography associated with a one-off cultural or commercial event. Such buildings are created only to exist for a weekend, a month, a season, or for the duration of some exceptional artistic event and are usually the fullest realisation of the idea of bestowing a new identity associated with that event to a location<sup>13</sup>. The most important part here is played by exhibition buildings which make use of existing explorations in terms of form, structure and finishes in order to obtain the most optimal manner of influencing the beholder. They are an expression of the accumulation of intellectual potential directed towards making new discoveries. The existence, function and form of these types of buildings serve primarily as a form of social communication. It is a sign of our times – the turning of the architectural form of a building into a professional and perfect means of communication. The result of such an approach was a building that was erected in Frankfurt, which resembled a car of a certain brand and depicted the impression of the dynamics of driving a car, at the same time interpreting it anew<sup>14</sup>. The use of materials that bring to mind associations with technology – aluminium, stainless steel and glass, rounds out the message that is being broadcast. Such a temporary change in the identity of a location gives the architect a pretext for unrestrained experimentation in terms of form.

## 6. THE NEW LIFE OF A HISTORICAL MONUMENT

The expansion and revitalisation of the historical monument that is Torre del Borgo, whose history reaches as far back as the Middle Ages, was a highly difficult and controversial task.

The context and identity of the location demand their due respect in such cases. The expansion of the historical monument entailed the conversion of the aging structure into a public library. Such an intervention is always controversial and will never perfectly fit in with the rest of a historical building, while the expansion of historical buildings are considered to be activities that lower their value. Torre del Borgo is widely recognised as a priceless monument of the history of architecture and its expansion was met with heated discussions.

Torre del Borgo is, after all, one of the most famous structures in its wider surroundings, being a part of mediaeval fortifications that are a monument to history. The expansion was necessary due to the poor technical condition of the complex. It was designed by Gianluca Gelmini, who developed a design in which the load bearing structural elements necessary to keep the tower vertical provided the spaces required by the new form of use of the structure. The architect gave them a form that is radically different from the medieval stone walls. The broken, black walls are a testament to XXI century architecture.

The expansion of the historical monument has brought it to life – the tower has regained its former glory, and its mediaeval outline is now more visible. As a consequence of adding

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<sup>13</sup> BMW Dynaform exhibition pavilion, Frankfurt am Mein, Germany, design: FRANKEN \ ARCHITEKTEN GMBH, <http://www.franken-architekten.de/index.php?page=projectdetail&lang=de&cat=0&param=overview&param2=38&param3=0&>

<sup>14</sup> T. Giuliani, T. Kehler, *Dynamik ausstrahlen*, Architektur als Markenkommunikation, under the editorship of Gernot Bauer, Birkhäuser Verlag, Basel, Boston, Berlin, 2002 p. 33.

modern architectural forms to the tower and introducing a new form of use – a public library – it has gained an entirely new expression. The tower is no longer simply a relic of older times, but has gained new life without losing its original character<sup>15</sup>.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

The currently used design methodologies based on multi-criteria analysis and in-depth research of the site of a future construction project, as well as the current processes of creating works of architecture, can be helpful in maintaining and constructing the identity of a place and are conducive to the harmonious coexistence of currently designed architecture with its cultural surroundings within the space of a city. At the same time, they allow the development of solutions based on components that introduce contrast through the establishment of new qualities by the means of modern technologies, as well as solutions that feature unique artistic value that underscores the identity of a location. The understanding of the existence of rich sources of inspiration and the awareness of the fact that every building should be a part of a larger whole in an appropriately composed urban space is of key importance.

The process of creation, which at times is akin to play, and at times borders on suffering, should lead to the creation of a perfect form or work.

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<sup>15</sup> Torre del Borgo expansion, Bergamo, Italy, design: CN10 architetti, Gianluca Gelmini, Andrea Pressiani, <http://www.gianlucagelmini.it> – retrieved on 2016.06.18.



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