

BOGUSŁAW PODHALAŃSKI*

HOPSCOTCH

GRA W KLASY ALBO ENE, DUE, RABE, MIASTO!

S u m m a r y

How to play the city game in the greatest city in the world? Build, do not ask for anything. And how to locate skyscrapers? Far enough away from each other, to ensure that the worse does not fall on the good one. And what to do when the territory ends? Occupy another, and call it all Mexico City. And how do you plan the development of this city? Do not plan, development will be faster. And is this city inhabitable at all?

Keywords: *hopscotch, city, game*

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Jak bawić się w największe miasto świata? Budować, nie pytać o cokolwiek. A jak lokalizować wieżowce? Na tyle daleko od siebie, aby ten gorszy nie upadł na ten lepszy. A co robić, gdy się kończy teren? Zajmować kolejne i nazywać to wszystko Mexico. A czy planować rozwój takiego miasta? Nie planować, rozwój będzie szybszy. A czy w takim mieście można w ogóle żyć?

Slowa kluczowe: *gra, miasto*

* Ph.D. D.Sc. Arch. Bogusław Podhalański, City Rebuilding Laboratory, Institute of City and Region Design, Faculty of Architecture, Cracow University of Technology.

Motto:
I love Mexico City.
I can really take in the smog here.
I feel truly free in this metropolis.
W. Cejrowski

1. Introduction

How to play the city game in the largest city in the world? Build, build, build! Do not question anything or ask about anything – just build! How to lay out the location of skyscrapers in such a city? Simple, build them far away from each other so that in the event of an earthquake the uglier one does not fall onto the prettier one, if it is in fact prettier at all. What do you do when you run out of land? Get more, swallow another town, another village and call it all Mexico City, Chongqing, Tokyo, Lagos or Bombay. How do you plan the development of such a city? You do not plan it at all, it is futile, its development will progress faster than that of the master plan. Alright, but how can you live in a city like that? You definitely can, as most of them have populations in excess of ten million inhabitants. Various sources [10] provide different figures regarding the number of inhabitants of the largest metropolises, which, in all probability, is simply impossible to establish properly [9] due to the various different methods that are being used around the world to calculate it, as well as the fact that official data only provides the number of legal residents. The persons who stay there illegally are usually not included in the statistics. The largest metropolises, along with their metropolitan areas, are currently achieving population levels that are higher than those of some smaller countries, surpassing them in income and area. Thus, in the global model of a world economy, their role is becoming more and more pronounced, with some theories claiming that we are currently going back to the historical concept of city-states. Just like the “polis” of the Greeks – the modern metropolises of intelligent people [12] – they greatly influence the course of the global economy. The convoluted nature of the functioning of such gargantuan economic organisms is at times similar to a game which is often played by the most important players, as well as amateurs, a game which is full of surprising and inconceivable factors, with the reward being further development and prosperity, with the losers suffering the downfall of a given idea, venture or business. The factors that determine who wins or who loses are either a set of objective economic phenomena, the condition of the “player”, or simply luck. Just like in a game of hopscotch, an idea “stands on both feet” or desperately tries to hold its balance on one foot and “jump” to another space, hoping to successfully complete this “game”.

Square 1. Space

The question of whether space is a function of time in the situation when we are discussing the problems of the city game seems not entirely out of place. Actually, one could directly point towards an illustration (Ill.1), as it directly depicts the matter of this issue – in the urban game, where its space is what counts, developing it becomes more problematic and difficult as time goes by – and, if it is successful at all, requires an ovation from passive spectators.

Square 2. Form of the space

The game of spatial form is nothing other than a competition for the composition of a city. Its difficulty increases proportionately to the scale of the city. The composing of large scale complexes is a discipline in itself, as it requires not only appropriate knowledge and skill, but is also directly dependant on the “strength of authority”, a factor which the “composer of the urban space” needs to acknowledge. Another factor is the statement that an ineffective central authority is not able to introduce any sort of “grand scheme” into a space. Looking back into the history of urban planning [6] indicates that numerous examples of the city game see great changes in their spatial structure introduced at a time when a new, powerful idea takes hold in society. Such ideas often lead to a regime change and allow the new authority to introduce its own coherent vision of spatial order without looking at the costs or difficulties of such an operation. When the results of such an intervention are positive, they can influence the manner in which a city develops over a longer period of time. In this scenario, even in the event of a large technological breakthrough, for instance in the mode of transportation, the pre-existing model (usually geometric [8] in nature) is given the chance to carry on as the basic layout of the spatial composition of a growing urban organism. This model, or rather its interpretation, is the crowning achievement of the victory of a given idea in the game for the future of the space of a city. What is interesting is that cities that are under democratic rule usually do not possess a well-defined, stable and unique spatial structure. Their development is far more chaotic and haphazard when compared to more centralized regimes.

Square 3. The function of a space

This is nothing other than another element of the game for the city space, which illustrates the optimal use of a given space in its particular temporal context. The players are usually all of the participants of the building process, which ceaselessly persists from the moment of the inception of a given settlement. The final participant in this process is the current owner or manager of the area in question. Should the development of a city come to a halt, nature usually turns out to be the winner, causing a catastrophe that finally destroys a given urban organism, or a political force that possesses the influence to exert its rule in the sphere of spatial planning over the entirety of the settlement.

Square 4. The space of beauty

The twin angels of Portugal, both beautiful, yet each in their own way. One white and one black. The first, white angel, is the angel of hope and of a beauty that is even more refined than that which is contained in nearly every public space, or the marvellous large scale stone structures of cities, with their squares, perspectives and views of the landscape – all the way to the horizon (fig. 4), or perhaps confined to the dark bolts of the blue sky, which cut apart the blinding white of the streets of Alhama. The angel of the beauty of the gardens, in which the figures of the Apostles seem to walk amidst the greenery and the shimmering sound of fountains, the majestic statutes of kings and the sombre statues of bishops, the striking stone details, the many forms of sculpture with a finesse and meticulousness that is seemingly impossible to achieve



- Ill. 1. Hopscotch. source: <http://www.improvisedlife.com/2011/10/11/role-model-playing-hopscotch-at-any-age/>
- Ill. 2. Jardim do Paço Episcopal de Castelo Branco. phot. by Author
- Ill. 3. A city which is no longer. Azulejo from the gardens of Castello Branco. Phot. By Author
- Ill. 4. Lisboa, View of the Hieronymite monastery and the Tag. phot. by Author

with such a material. (Ill. 1) The second, black angel, is the angel of crisis, of the empty buildings for sale or rent, the littered pavements, abandoned houses, the sadness of the *fado* music that can be heard from the bars and its sound of *saudade*¹, a yearning, perhaps for power that has been lost in the world, which has irreversibly passed along with the sound of the ocean

¹ *Saudade* (Port.) melancholy, nostalgia, yearning,

waves traversed by sailing ships, into history. The angel of the modern, inner city districts, the graffiti-covered walls, located in modernist areas, easily accessible using the incredibly efficient public transport system. Of housing estates with apartments that the inhabitants of the traditional tenement houses could only dream of. Of districts inhabited by migrants from the former colonies, where the young people think of travelling to in order to find a better future than in their own country. However, despite it all, this black and white pair of angels causes the inhabitants, so used to the shifting wheel of fortune, to express a joy of life in their altruistic smile and behaviour, one which can only be obtained for money elsewhere.

Square 5. The space of chaos

Gzell, [1, p. 109] when writing about the city, claimed that its traditional incarnation had died. (Ill. 3) Namely, that the city, understood as a logical composition of the built environment and the intentionally empty spaces, has lost its fight with liberalism. The megalopolis has emerged, the space of which is formed of “*groups of single family houses(...), without streets, squares, direction, axes and all the other qualities that make up a city (...) that do not inspire an urban motivation for architectural design, but that are nevertheless an excellent experimental field for psychiatrists...*” . The abandonment of urban composition and seeing it as an obstacle in the real estate developer’s quest for profit cannot be counterbalanced by stating that “*a city, under a liberal doctrine, is a machine for making money*”. We can only add that it is also a machine for making its inhabitants mentally ill due to their constant exposure to chaos. Finally, even the collapse of a skyscraper onto its chaotic surroundings will not increase the overall level of ever present chaos. The only means of protecting ourselves from spatial chaos, apart from fleeing from it, seems to be accepting it.

Square 6. The space of *sacrum*

The space of cities, understood as the common space for a given urban community, which is inclusive of the various different stances towards reality, should have qualities that are not only focused on its physical form, but also, perhaps if only in its parts, possess a certain spiritual fragment which can be related to the sacred spaces in the broad sense. This issue is discussed at length by Nadrowski [3] in his book. Uścinowicz [7, p. 188-192], on the other hand, addresses the issues of geometry in sacral art. Interestingly, the topic of the geometric layouts of cities, beginning with the first urban modules of the ancient past, tied to the construction of “typical” houses and buildings within a given city, continually emerges throughout the history of urban design, pointing to a deeply ingrained need for organizing the built environment [5]. Along with the geometric layouts of cities and the sacred spaces comes the concept of symmetry, and with it, the idea of an intentional composition of not only just space, but, perhaps, first and foremost, the architecture that makes up this space. It is this wonderful harmony of proportions, scale and expressive forms which allows us to proclaim certain specific parts of cities as spaces of *sacrum*. A city that has been completely deprived of its sacred spaces is on the losing side of its own game. An example of this is the history of Nowa Huta, which, even though it was planned without religious spaces, its inhabitants, its community, was forced to fight for their inclusion [2, p. 6-8].

Square 7. The quality of space

Perhaps the final and most important element, which is perhaps the overarching goal of this game about the city. The quality of the space of a city is determined by the quality of its public spaces. The elements which influence this quality are numerous, and they have been discussed in an even more numerous amount of publications [4]. To repeat them is not the aim of this essay, which is why it is only fitting to mention the existence of a wide body of written work on the subject. The fashion for establishing numerous ranking lists of cities, which are often based on a very complicated set of criteria with which they can be compared, does not lead to any meaningful results if these criteria are chosen arbitrarily. Nevertheless, among the many sets of criteria, there is always one which makes at least some vague references to the quality of urban spaces, usually regarding its main public spaces. The private spaces, even those of the highest quality and artistic level, do not constitute a meaningful measure of the quality of a city, as, by definition, access to them is deliberately limited. We cannot state then that the urban space is of high quality when the basis for such a claim is an area which is publicly inaccessible.

Conclusions

One, two, three [11]... What is the result? A city!

The city – Mr Architect, play it to me. But honestly. Compose it.

The article was supposed to be about Mexico, but I prefer Lisbon. In the form of a little personal compositional choice.

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