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## URBAN CENTRE AND ITS INHABITANTS

## CENTRUM MIEJSKIE I JEGO MIESZKAŃCY

### Abstract

Excelling growth of city inhabitants has caused Krakow to look for new and inventive ways to develop housing in order to continue the city's urban initiative. Urban housing and the great sense of urban centre has drastically changed the Cracovian twentieth century city development. The solution could be as simple as looking at the past and analyzing the city design and bringing some of those ideas through to this era. City squares have been a great solution for housing, mixed use, and entertainment purposes for centuries, so why not use them as an organizing factor throughout the city. These squares could bring a sense of community throughout the city along with a grid of urban spaces.

*Keywords: urban heart, urban evolution, multiple city squares, revitalizing town peripheries*

### Streszczenie

Gwałtowny wzrost liczby mieszkańców sprawił, że Kraków zwrócił się w drugiej połowie dwudziestego wieku, ku nowym koncepcjom rozwoju tkanki miejskiej. Nowa zabudowa mieszkaniowa i zmiana znaczenia terminu centrum miejskie wpłynęły w sposób dramatyczny na przekształcenie się wizerunku miasta. Poprawa sytuacji może być prosta – wystarczy spojrzeć wstecz, przeanalizować rozwój miasta w minionych okresach i dostosować wybrane idee do współczesnych czasów. Na przykład Plac miejski sprawdzał się w przeszłości jako dobre rozwiązanie przestrzeni publicznej w zabudowie mieszkaniowej i jako przestrzeń wielofunkcyjna o charakterze ogólnomiejskim służąca też rozrywce. Dlaczego więc nie stosować placów dzisiaj jako elementów organizujących strukturę miasta. Place i siatka przestrzeni miejskich mogą przyczynić się do odzyskania w miastach poczucia wspólnoty społecznej.

*Słowa kluczowe: serce miasta, miejska ewolucja, sekwencja placów miejskich, rewitalizacja terenów peryferyjnych*

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## 1. Introduction

What is “urban heart”? How does this relate to urban residences? Is it possible to begin to think of them as one? These questions find themselves getting asked by city government, city developers, and residents. Governments begin to study solutions on how to keep inhabitants from sprawling to the rural areas. Developers begin to find new ways to create centralized zones within the city, with the hope of creating multiple “urban hearts”. City residents begin to look at the city from a practicality standpoint. The more the city begins to conform to their needs the more “livable” the city becomes.

These three perspectives do not make it any easier to understand or deal with the growth of people wanting to live within the city limits and city centre. These thoughts only begin to understand what makes a city more livable and attractive to the residents living outside the city. With the growing number of people moving back into the city, it becomes necessary to find solutions to the problems that have been present for decades. Managing urban centrality is still regarded as the fundamental aim of contemporary spatial development strategies aiming at vitalizing town peripheries, or revival of historic town cores.

## 2. “Heart” knows no boundaries

Urban evolution in history is a subject with a comprehensive nature. A basic knowledge of this subject is required for our generation to bring past experience to bear on present and future development. A lack of understanding of the historical dimension can only limit the creativity of urban designers/planners. Implementation of future urban design improvements should rely heavily on an understanding of the past and present evolution of our cities in a social and environmental context. We should also be alert to the relative dimension of the city’s scale in its historic context. Yet, every case is unique, and there is no universal formula for solutions that can be implemented.

“Urban heart”, or urban centre, starts to talk about a point of origin that can be distinguished by not only residents of the city, but by strangers only inhabiting the city for a few days or even hours. These points begin to help the city become multiple and conform many cultures, social groups, and ethnic groups. Krakow is a unique situation because of the thick heritage and vast history present within the city. The migration from the suburbs to the city centre is starting to take a toll on the existing city structure. New developments must occur to accommodate the growing population.

Given Krakow’s existing city plan, concentrically rings around the city centre that the city government has placed as the city edge, it is possible to start conforming these spaces to adopt more people. If there was a proposal to begin to place several urban squares within the outer layers, it would begin to make the city uniform in plan and in functionality. For example, they could use the already existing city plan for Kazimierz where there are several city squares present that begin to create different atmospheres for inhabitants and residents of that part of the city. Another example, of a larger scale, is the city of Venice. This particular city has the main city centre on the river, and then periodically and often there are other squares of different shapes and sizes. Of course, this is a special case given the city layout and canals, but one can start to gather some great city planning ideas. Having these multiple squares, it becomes easy to distinguish the type of residents’ use the square most often. With this knowledge, it would be easy to plan for business types and accommodations the inhabitants would need to survive.

Krakow’s initiative to introduce green spaces into the city will also make the city as a whole be more livable. There is a opportunity to introduce more as the city begin to expand, and these elements could be, if used correctly, a linking device to connect one “ring” to the next. These spaces along with city squares could change the way people engage the city and travel amongst the city.

### **3. “Heart” knows no stranger**

In the ever-changing world of urban planning, housing is the one factor that seems to be least designed. Most planning starts with the business entity because it has the most funding power, driven by their need for expansion. Therefore, these entities become the leading candidate for prime real estate and get the most attention in the “design” part of urban design. The residential aspect of the urban planning is usually made in the cheapest way possible.

In recent years, the residential developments in Kraków started to take on the persona of “all about me”. These types of designs fail to remember the need for social interaction, and make it nearly impossible to be seen as a community. Instead, these arrangements of buildings leave many spaces in between building that become “forgotten space”. These “forgotten spaces” could be used, if better planned, to form a type of square, or uniform green space, in which business could be mixed in with housing and other mixed use commodities in an effort to become more like the well planned main city centre, that has lasted many centuries. These types of squares give the city an elementary thought process in understanding how the city works. It is easy to find yourself within the city, which is in the case of tourist makes the time in the city considerably more enjoyable for the time they are there, whether it is for a week or for a few hours.

Aside from the normal resident of a city, it is necessary to consider how your city is seen from a fresh pair of eyes. Tourists run some cities for the most part, and it becomes a high priority to accommodate their needs at any given time. This is another instance where the city has to be multiple in order to appeal to a broad scope of people. Every city square I have visited in Kraków, along with most cities throughout Poland, has done this.

### **4. “Heart” beats to a different drum**

What will be next? How will we adapt? These are questions that most urban cities will be asking themselves about the future. In the growing years there is going to be a need for sufficient housing communities for the growing population in Krakow. The city must start to change and adapt to different aspects of what people bring to the city. Like everything else, what people need and want will ever be changing, so it is vital for urban designers to stay ahead of curve in design and planning. If urban designers in Kraków begin to use the history that is present, urban squares, they could be an organizing element for the city in order to broaden the vast culture and heritage that is Krakow. With time and a well thought out plan, it is possible to make Krakow a more enjoyable city than it is at the present.