

AGNIESZKA JANOWSKA\*

## ARCHITECTURE WITHOUT A PATTERN, OR, INTUITIVE RATIONALISM OF SMALL URBAN COMMUNITIES

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### ARCHITEKTURA BEZ WZORCA CZYLI INTUICYJNY RACJONALIZM MAŁYCH WSPÓLNOT MIEJSKICH

#### Abstract

Residual spaces have been created as a result of collisions of various urban systems and ideas. Their small size, complicated geometry, and poor location or neighbourhood make their development irrational from an economic point of view, but allow for their annexation and use by small, non-profit communities and urban organizations. This does not mean that those forms and spaces are chaotic works of architectural dilettantes. Intuition in matters of spatial order is accompanied by a pragmatic approach to form and structure, based on ad hoc activities, and, above all, accompanied by a pragmatic approach to smoothly combined and re-arranged functions to accommodate the local or current needs.

*Keywords: residual spaces, spatial waste, informal architecture, social architecture*

#### Streszczenie

Przestrzenie resztkowe powstawały i powstają w wyniku zderzeń różnych systemów i idei urbanistycznych. Ich niewielkie rozmiary, złożona geometria, niewłaściwa lokalizacja czy sąsiedztwo czynią ich zabudowanie nieracjonalnym z ekonomicznego punktu widzenia, lecz umożliwiają przejęcie i użytkowanie przez niewielkie wspólnoty oraz organizacje miejskie, które nie kierują się imperatywem zysku. Nie oznacza to, że kształtowane przez nie formy i przestrzenie są chaotycznymi dziełami architektonicznych diletantów. Intuicji w kształtowaniu ładu przestrzennego towarzyszy pragmatyczne podejście do formy i konstrukcji, oparte na działaniach ad hoc, oraz przede wszystkim do funkcji zestawianych i zmienianych w płynny sposób tak, by dostosować się do lokalnych czy bieżących potrzeb.

*Słowa kluczowe: przestrzenie resztkowe, odpady przestrzenne, architektura nieformalna, architektura społeczna*

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## 1. Objects which Complement the Structure in Residual Spaces<sup>1</sup>

Spatial waste appears in the urban fabric as a result of planning which fails to account for the larger context, as a result of changes made locally with a disregard for their connection to the neighbouring structures. Residual spaces obstruct the smooth use of a city and break its structure. Some interventions which lead to the destruction of the urban structure is almost imperceptible; their incremental appearance robs public space of its social nature. The places providing for free city life and social interaction gradually vanish, and an increasing number of structures undergo social or economic gentrification.

Architectural objects which are appropriate for their urban context and which complement the network of spatial waste should, on the one hand, complete the composition of the urban fabric and, on the other hand, stimulate the healthy development of social activity, consisting in proper reception or co-creation of the new form and function. The goal of corrective measures is to create new spatial and functional connections among the fragments of the structures which have previously been independent. That will help users understand the space which surrounds them, feel it consciously, and engage in the co-creation of the city.

Depending on the type of spatial waste, various measures must be taken to re-use it, also taking into account its location in the urban structure. Factors such as small size or complicated geometry, complex environment, or the structure of the objects in the vicinity of spatial waste make its re-use economically irrational but facilitate the annexation and use of such spaces by local non-profit communities and urban organizations<sup>2</sup>.

In this article, I have exemplified how spatial waste can be recycled by social communities and organizations for their spatial purposes where the priority is the creation of egalitarian public space rather than profit.

The constructions presented enabled the community to reclaim *places* for inhabitants-users and to reintroduce them in the urban structure, mainly by rebuilding the public and social spaces.

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<sup>1</sup> A **residual space** (my own definition) is an area which fulfills all of the following conditions:

- it is spatial waste, with inconsistent and accidental form, created as a result of the overlapping of various not fully developed spatial structures and which do not constitute a consistent spatial layout;
- it is a space which must be complemented in order to: complete the composition of the inner structure, improve social relations, create or restore spatial order in the place or return it to the place, or develop the practical and functional values of the place;
- it is an area the development of which is problematic because of its form and the binding legal framework and requires the use of particular means of composition and construction, as well as legal and social measures, so as to return the residual spaces to the structure of the city.
- On the basis of research, five types of residual spaces have been identified: vertical, large-scale horizontal, changeable, impact damping structures, and corner-edge residual space [JANOWSKA A., *Przestrzenie resztkowe w mieście (Residual spaces in a City)*, doctoral dissertation, a typescript, 2016, p. 41–42].

<sup>2</sup> The projects discussed in the article were realized in urban areas which had been given to social organizations by city authorities or by institutions or, occasionally, in private areas.

## 2. Spatial Waste Recycling<sup>3</sup> – Special Cases

Like any other investment, the use of residual space in compact urban development requires appropriate legal solutions regarding construction regulations<sup>4</sup> and respect for property. In the case of some of the facilities presented which complement spatial waste, several exceptions to the legal restrictions had to be made. In Poland, it is extremely difficult to obtain a permission for such a deviation. Consequently, there are very few projects of residual space restoration.

### 2.1. Rotterdam

The phenomenon of the disappearance of the clarity of an urban structure is characteristic of areas neighbouring with communication lines in the form of arterial roads or railway lines which divide urban space. Elements which are necessary in the urban infrastructure become barriers which prevent the free use of space<sup>5</sup>.

The construction of the Luchtsingel footbridge<sup>6</sup> in Rotterdam is an example of a successful attempt at restoring the continuity of space on several levels at once, in the direct vicinity of destructive edges: over a railway line and one of the main arterial roads cutting through the city (Ill. 1, 2 and 3). The result changes the quality of the space: it enriches the area with new functional – cultural and prosocial – solutions.

Luchtsingel was created within the framework of the *I/We/You Make Rotterdam* program, the main assumptions of which were made during the 5<sup>th</sup> Internationale Architectuur Biennale Rotterdam 2012 event, for the central district of the city (RCD<sup>7</sup>). In total, thanks to the activity of the local community and nonprofit organizations, the program included the execution of 18 diverse interventions related to that footbridge, including social vegetable gardens, cafés, subdistrict recreation rooms, recreational areas, playgrounds, scenic points<sup>8</sup>.

There are numerous uninhabited apartments in Rotterdam, many of them in the city centre. The actions undertaken within the framework of the *I/We/You Make Rotterdam* project,

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<sup>3</sup> **Space recycling** (my own definition) – a spatial intervention consisting in the complementation of residual spaces with form or function [JANOWSKA A., *Przestrzenie resztkowe w mieście (Residual spaces in a City)*, doctoral dissertation, a typescript, 2016, p. 41–42, 170–180].

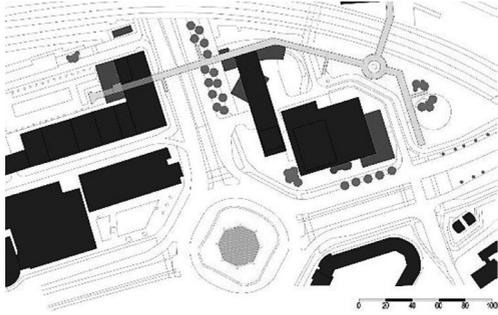
<sup>4</sup> The issue refers to the provisions of the Building Law and the technical conditions concerning, among other things, privacy, fire safety, construction independence, proper distances from existing objects and from property borders, and current and new users' appropriate comfort of life. It is also important to provide sufficient lighting and solar access, and to minimize obstruction of view.

<sup>5</sup> Kevin Lynch calls them edges. According to his definition, edges can also fulfill a positive function in a city – as lines which bind and connect two areas [LYNCH K., *Obraz miasta (English: City Image)*, Wydawnictwo Archiwolta Michał Stepień, Kraków, 2011, p. 53–104]. The horizontal, multi-scale constructions in residual spaces in Rotterdam and Zürich which are presented in this article confirm Lynch's thesis.

<sup>6</sup> Luchtsingel, designer: ZUS + Hofbogen BV, construction: 2015, location: Schiekade 988, Rotterdam, the Netherlands. ZUS: Zones Urbaines Sensibles [<http://www.urbanista.org/issues/issue-1/features/making-city-5th-international-architecture-biennale-rotterdam-2012>, access: 8/13/2015].

<sup>7</sup> RCD – Rotterdam Central District.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.urbanista.org/issues/issue-1/features/making-city-5th-international-architecture-biennale-rotterdam-2012>, access: 8/13/2015.



1a



1b



2



3a



3b

- III. 1. Luchtsingel, Rotterdam – a) location of the footbridge in the district structure (drawing prepared by the author on the basis: <http://maps.rotterdam.nl/#/>, dostęp:13.08.2015); b) a social garden in the residual space (photo by author)
- III. 2. Luchtsingel, Rotterdam – footbridge built over the edges of railway traction and wheeled traffic arteries (photo by author)
- III. 3. Luchtsingel, Rotterdam; a) a cafeteria in the residual space near the parking lot and railway traction areas, on the axis of one of the descents from the bridge; b) meeting place above the car park, at the exit of the building included in the Luchtsingel system (photos by author)

the promotion of spatial experiments consisting in – like in the example discussed above – the construction of new objects, or the introduction of changes in the function of buildings, apartments, or neglected lots encourages the inhabitants and local entrepreneurs to take greater care of the common space and to reclaim spatial waste.

## 2.2. Zürich

As in the example mentioned above, a horizontal, multi-scale residual space was used, located around a railway viaduct in Zürich<sup>9</sup> (Ill. 4 and 5). Buildings for trade and services were constructed in the area below the viaduct, a grocery store building filled in the forked area of the viaduct, and an above-ground bike path was constructed around the site. As in Rotterdam, the entire construction joined previously disconnected parts of the urban structure.

The development of the residual space had an impact on the surroundings. *Frau Gerolds Garten*<sup>10</sup> (Ill. 5 and 6) was opened just next to the abovementioned railway line and the registered office of the Freitag<sup>11</sup> company, even before the pedestrian and bike path was opened. The formerly neglected area was transformed into a flower and vegetable city garden, a meeting place where local festivals and exhibitions are held. Also, small stores, galleries, and restaurants – which make use of the produce from the garden – were established there. In this way, a green service quarter was created in the post-industrial waste space. Not only was the land reclaimed; for the most part, the project was executed with the use of recycled materials.

## 2.3. Brussels and Berlin

Green areas in the city, created in spatial waste, are becoming more common. They enrich the urban fabric with recreational areas in places which have previously served completely different functions. Those areas are changing into formally and functionally interesting points of districts.

One example of the actions initiated by the Brussels city authorities are the processes of the revitalisation of degraded areas within the framework of a transformation of neglected districts with complex social structures. One of them was the Reine-Verte Botanical Park at Rue Vert 126, in the multinational Schaerbeek district<sup>12</sup> (Ill. 7). This park was created

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<sup>9</sup> Viadukt, designer: EM2N, location: Zürich, completed in: 2013.

<sup>10</sup> Freitag – a recycling designer company which makes fashion accessories of old car and advertising tarps. The seat of the company was constructed with the use of about a dozen transport containers.

<sup>11</sup> Frau Gerolds Garten, Zürich, Hardbrücke district, was created on a community initiative in 2012. Kraut + Quer, a company which specializes in sustainable, ecological interventions related to urban greenery, takes care of the garden. Each year, a different artist organizes artistic events, exhibitions, and workshops [<https://www.fraugerold.ch>, access: 6/14/2017].

<sup>12</sup> Apart from the example described, the program of a revitalization of degraded urban spaces in the center of Brussels also included the creation of: squares, bike paths, walking paths, social vegetable gardens, public and semi-public parks in the Ixelles and Schaerbeek districts, and street greenery which accompanies pedestrian and motor vehicle traffic routes in the Schaerbeek district. These elements formally connect important points in the district and provide connections between public spaces [Degros A. De Cleene M., *Bruxelles, à la [re]conquête de ses espaces. L'espace public dans les contrats de quartiers durables*, Region de Bruxelles-Capitale, Brussels, 2014, p. 90–103].



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5b

6a



6b

- III. 4. Viadukt, Zurich, location of the viadukt, the food shop and Frau Gerolds Garten near the Freitag tower (drawing prepared by the author)
- III. 5. Viadukt, Zurich; a) the food shop in the fork of the railway viadukt and, visible on the left, a walking and cycling path; b) commercial premises under the bays of the viadukt, (photos by author)
- III. 6. Frau Gerolds Garten, Zurich; a) a view of the gastronomic section located in the entrance to the garden; b) a place for meetings and local fetes, in the background a flower and vegetable garden (photos by author)

in the very centre of the city, on a steep slope within the block. On its southern border, there is a high wall which ensures the continuity of the frontage and provides a door to the park. Thanks to its complementary functions, the park meets the needs of people of all age groups in the local community. There is a playground, football pitch, social garden, and two educational areas – a small botanical garden and a vegetable garden<sup>13</sup>. There is also a social restaurant in the highest part of the park, on its northern border. Social workers monitor the performance and the work done by the inhabitants, which ensures the long-term preservation of the park's premises<sup>14</sup>.

*Prinzessinnengarten* in Berlin (Ill. 8) is a similar urban garden, but was created as a completely grassroots initiative, solely by voluntary workers. Entry to the garden is free so that every interested person, regardless of their financial situation, can join in the gardening work<sup>15</sup>. The creation of the garden has contributed to the promotion of urban culture by integrating people from diverse environments. *Prinzessinnengarten* has also become a venue for informal social education, thanks to the workshops, trainings, and cultural events which are organized there<sup>16</sup>.

## 2.4. Poznań

The problems with the development of residual areas are also caused by their unclear ownership status. Apart from policy-makers and social organizations, the inhabitants themselves are the initiators of the use of spatial waste. In Poznań, in cooperation with the *Generator*

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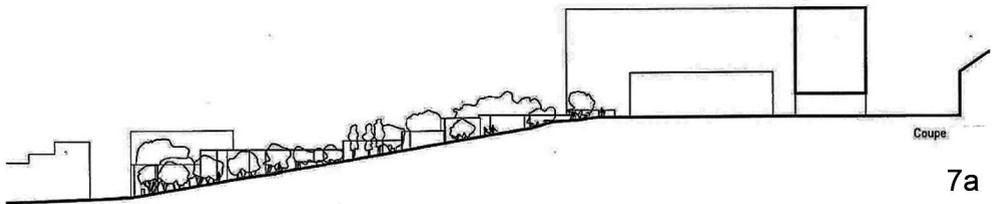
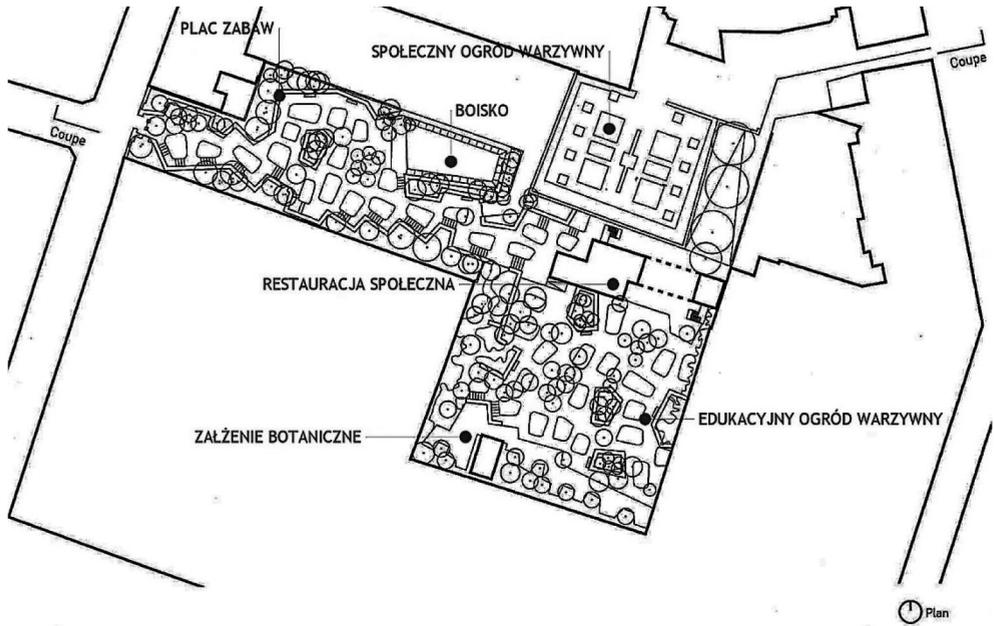
<sup>13</sup> The vegetable garden was established and is run by the inhabitants with the support of social workers [Degros A. De Cleene M., *Bruxelles, à la [re]conquête de ses espaces. L'espace public dans les contrats de quartiers durables*, Region de Bruxelles-Capitale, Brussels, 2014, p. 90–103]. Another botanical square in Brussels was created next to the stairs of the bridge over the Charlesroi channel at Rue Léon Delacroix 57, in the Anderlecht district which has a very complex social and cultural structure. Viewing platforms were made by the stairs, and boards with detailed descriptions of the plants were mounted there. The project was realized within the framework of the Parckdesign 2012 project, for the period between June and October. After that time, the viewing platforms were removed [<http://divisare.com/projects/264445-100landschaftsarchitektur-garden-bridges>, access: 7/14/2015]. Now there is no trace of the plants left unmaintained. The place was devastated, and the inhabitants turned it into an illegal dumping site.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.urbanista.org/issues/issue-1/features/making-city-5th-international-architecture-bienale-rotterdam-2012>, access: 8/13/2015.

<sup>15</sup> K. Ring, F. Eidner, *Self Made City*, Senate Department for Urban Development and the Environment and Jovis Verlag GmbH Berlin, 2013, p. 164–165.

<sup>16</sup> The history of establishment of the *Prinzessinnengarten*, located at Prinzenstrasse 35–38 in Berlin, is very different. For a long time, a non-profit organization called *Nomadisch Grun* requested the city authorities for an undeveloped land because the lot, located in an attractive place, was on sale. In December 2012, the city finally decided to lease that area to the organization [K. Ring, F. Eidner, *Self Made City*, Senate Department for Urban Development and the Environment and Jovis Verlag GmbH Berlin, 2013, p. 164–165].

Similar projects including the adaptation of spatial waste and activation of inhabitants have been realized in many European cities, for example, in Italy, in Campania (Orto in Campania) and Favara (Farm Cultural Park Favara), or in London (Gibbon's Rent).



7a

7b



III. 7. Parc Reine-Verte, a) the use of neglected interior of the quarter, 126 Rue Vert, district of Schaerbeek, Brussels (prepared by the author on the basis graphic materials contained in [5]); b) recreational area of the garden with a playground (photo by author)

*Malta*<sup>17</sup> initiative, venues for social integration were created in the Jeżyce, Łazarz, and Wilda districts. The history, specificity, and structure of their locations are completely different, which proves that it is possible to introduce a space which functions prosocially, and which is conducive to the integration and activation of local communities, even in the most difficult conditions.

In Poznań, at ul. Fabryczna 4, in a waste space which destroys the continuity of the frontage and the structure of the block, on the initiative of the inhabitants of the tenement adjacent to that area, *Ogród Wilda* (Ill. 9) was created. The garden was created on a property where a tenement had been demolished about a decade earlier. That area was discarded by its owner, so it was not possible to sell it or to build something there.

*Ogród Wilda* is a space which integrates the inhabitants of the neighbourhood who can now use a square and attend cultural events, workshops, concerts, or open-air cinema. These events also attract people from other districts of the city. The garden has become one of the most characteristic points of the district, a venue for neighbours' meetings and festivals, a playground for children – a social space and an area which is finally, after many years, safe.

An increasing number of such places are appearing in the Wilda district, which is gaining in appeal as a result. It is worth mentioning here the initiative of the activation of areas which have ceased to fulfil their original function. That is how *Madalina* (Ill. 10) – a place for social integration in the old tram depot at ul. Madalińskiego<sup>18</sup> – was created. Within the framework of the *Lato na Madalinie* (English: *Summer in Madalina*) program, weekend activities for whole families as well as meetings with publishers and people of culture are organized. In summer, a part of the area fulfils a recreational function and is accessible to the inhabitants all week long.

A district club in the Jeżyce district was created in a similar way. It is a discarded newsstand which has been adapted to the inhabitants' needs, for the *Dzielnico*<sup>19</sup> project.

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<sup>17</sup> *GENERATOR MALTA is a broad project the aim of which is to create new places – small gardens, agoras for local communities [...] – in the urban topography. By cultivating culture (cultus agri, that is, agriculture) by means of organic work, by referring to the atavistic relationship between man and the earth, we begin by co-creating a place, by being together in a group of people who play various social roles, including artists. Our agricultural experiment – we might grow fruit, vegetables, flowers, herbs – is a beginning of the creation of bonds, a harbinger of a process which will lead from cultivation to participation. It is also an educational project in which we all learn from one another. The intention is to activate the potential of people who remain strangers to one another despite sharing, day by day, a common space.* [Quotation <http://www.lepszypoznan.pl/2013/04/20/pogadajmy-o-ogrodach-czas-na-jezyce-i-wilde.html>, access: 7/14/2015].

<sup>18</sup> The tram depot at ul. Madalińskiego in Poznań was used for its original purpose until the end of 2014. *Madalina* was opened just a few months later and the *Lato na Madalinie* social and cultural program was realized. Efforts are being made to also establish a Museum of Poznań Transport there [[http://poznan.wyborcza.pl/poznan/1,36001,15985328,Czy\\_zajezdnia\\_Madalina\\_zamieni\\_sie\\_w\\_muzeum\\_.html](http://poznan.wyborcza.pl/poznan/1,36001,15985328,Czy_zajezdnia_Madalina_zamieni_sie_w_muzeum_.html), access: 5/20/2014].

<sup>19</sup> *At this moment, the actions implemented within the framework of the DZIELNICO project are planned, coordinated, and designed by activists and artists: Ela Niewiadomska, Katarzyna Wąsowska, Karol Kołodziejczyk, and Dominika Szelążek. It is all done in cooperation with an increasing number of children from the Jeżyce district, mainly children from families which are at risk of marginalization. All actions are carried out for the district and its inhabitants, for integration, getting to know one another, and for fostering interest in the neighbourhood. Generator Malta and Centrum Amarant are partners of the project.* [Quotation <http://generator.malta-festival.pl/ludzie-miejsca/miejsca/>, access: 7/14/2015].



8a



8b



9a



9b



10a



10b

- III. 8. Prinzessinnengarten, Prinzenstrasse 35–38, Berlin a) the building has an administrative and gastronomic function; b) in the garden, apart from the workshops, the seedlings grown by the volunteers are also sold (photos by author)
- III. 9. Ogród Wilda, 4 Fabryczna Street, Poznań; a) garden space created between tenement houses, accessible from the street (photo by author); b) concert ending the 2015 season in the Wilda Garden (photo Marta Adamska)
- III. 10. Madalina, Poznań, a) in the summer, Madalina is a place where are organized family festivities; b) recreation area with a city beach and a skimboard track (photos by author)

All these places engage social activists, local entrepreneurs, and, most importantly, the inhabitants of particular districts, regardless of their origins, social status, and age. These people clean the area, plant plants, install recreational equipment, and organize workshops, concerts, movies, and literary events. Most importantly: the use of waste structures and the actions carried out in these spaces become pretexts for getting to know one's neighbours, building a sense of connection, of being a part of a community, and of having the power to change<sup>20</sup> the functioning of one's street, district, city.

### 3. Conclusions

The restitution of residual space by filling it in, which does not always mean *rational* development, makes it possible to reconnect the spaces outside of the area of direct intervention, into a consistent organism of interconnected urban interiors, and the crystallization of the urban fabric. The examples presented show that the development of spatial waste helps improve the form and functioning of urban fabric and leads to the formation of new spatial relations between previously independent structures. As a result, it becomes possible to read the whole message inscribed in a city structure, which stimulates users to feel co-responsible for the quality of the form and function of their environment.

The variety of forms which complement those residual spaces is a catalyst for the co-creation and completion of designer made frameworks by users' creative activities. The results of the simultaneously conducted survey studies<sup>21</sup> have confirmed the growing engagement of the inhabitants in caring for the quality of their urban space. Local communities do not remain indifferent to the deficits noticed in their environment. They define their needs and expectations precisely and become active creators of their city, even though their actions are based chiefly on intuition. They are aware of the importance of their activity and of the interdependencies between having an impact on the form and function of a place and the sense of identity and identification with that place, which has a direct influence on the comfort of city life.

Perhaps, then, such *intuitive rationality* of space creation is indeed the essence of contemporary architecture and a way to restore consistency to urban structures?

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<sup>20</sup> Local communities are also activated within the framework of the *Odmień swoje podwórko* program directed towards the city inhabitants who are at risk of marginalization, which is a part of a larger project of the City of Poznań and the SIC! Foundation, called: *Rewitalizacja w budowie – tworzymy zręby rewitalizacji w Polsce* (English: *Revitalization in Construction – we Create the Framework of Revitalization in Poland*). The inhabitants clean their yards, discuss the functions which, in their opinion, should be fulfilled by the common space, and propose specific solutions which they later realize with the use of co-financing from the city authorities [<http://poznan.naszemiasto.pl/artykul/odmien-swoje-podworko-zaczynamy-od-jezyc,1534111,art,t,id,tm.html>, access: 9/20/2012].

<sup>21</sup> A. Janowska, *Przestrzenie reszkowe w mieście (Residual spaces in a City)*, doctoral dissertation, a typescript, 2016, p. 170–180.

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