Present-day issues

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Culture of village public spaces – exemplified by the commune of Krotoszyce

Introduction

Public space is, by definition, accessible and serves the general public. This is where intense life goes on. All important social, cultural and symbolic objects are available in this space.

The village square is also the site of many behaviour patterns. Although it is a public space, it is prima-rily a social space of its inhabitants. This is also where the highest number of symbols identifying residents with their "own space" is found. This space is certainly shaping human attitudes and behaviours, it facilitates building relationships, and thus affects the quality of life.

The reach of private and commonly used spaces

In the hierarchy of spatial layout the most basic unit is the house. Central village square is in a way second, after the house, in line of other spaces. It is an outer space and is commonly treated as an extension or supplement of the house. Although every person measures space subjectively, space regarded to be one's 'own' has a defined limit, and the owners identify themselves by taking responsibility and caring about it [5].

Today's country house owner perceives their space similarly to an owner of a suburb or city house. They get into their car on their driveway and go to work or school without meeting or talking to neighbours. Reception of used space by a rural resident has narrowed. Central village square with a well, bus stop, church, PGR (State Agricultural Farm),
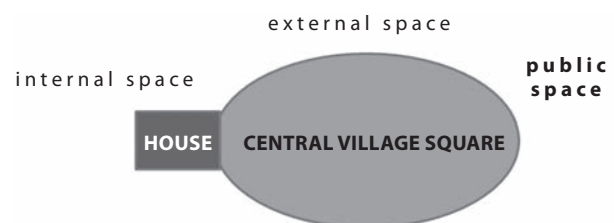

Fig. 1. Space relations diagram

shop is nowadays usually only seen through the wind-shield. Along with group interests, community bonds and the perception of a village square as an extension and supplement of the house have disappeared. Therefore, it can be assumed that the lower the social capital possessed by rural residents, the weaker the community bonds and the smaller the reach of the house, i.e. space perceived to be 'one's own' (Fig. 1).

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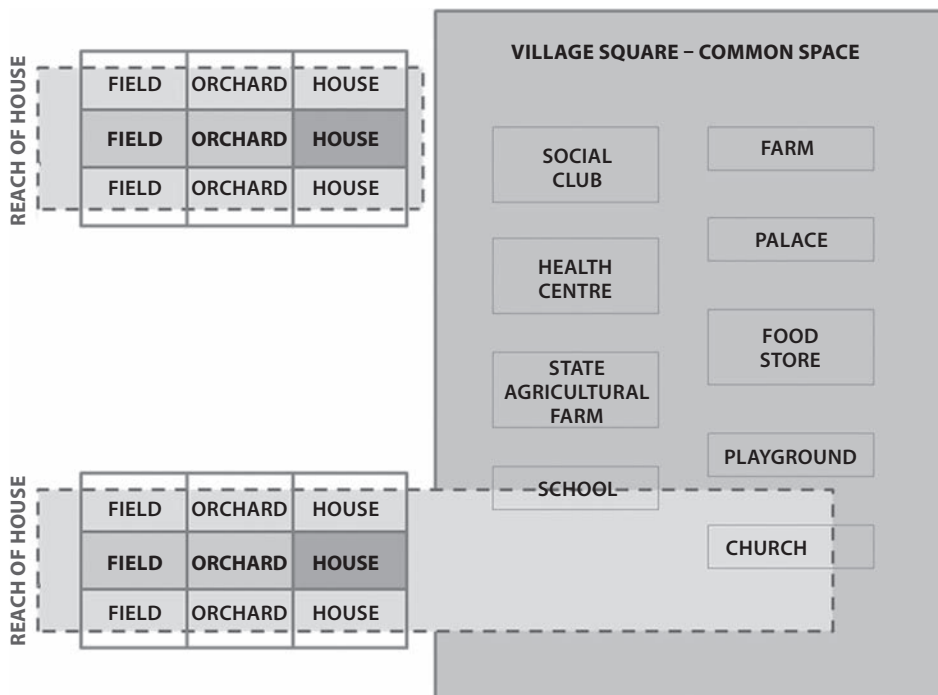
Space's impingement on people. Tradition

Fig. 2. Relations between public space (commonly used) and home space (private)

The village square, full of symbols, identifies residents with their own place and culture. Culture of space consists of many behaviour patterns, which are customs of a given community related to their beliefs, tradition and social order. Although not every space is a human's living environment, each territorial community must have its space in which it can exist.

Space directly affects our senses and feelings. People react to elements of spatial composition: closing, opening, rhythm, light, colour, the vertical and the horizontal. Space is experienced while watching and moving in it. Every person reacts to space in their own unique way [4].

The very quality of public space depends also on the current fashion. Tastes and preferences vary and they change with time. In reality, they form and influence the reception of a given space. The quality of space is essential to determine the identity of a given area, it is usually connected with a promoted and established vision.

Dehumanized space appears where no man's land (or space) exists [6]. The loss of identity contributes to the polarization of both space and society and it is usually related to social status. Therefore, the reach of public space is defined by a 'perceived' private ownership, thus indicating who, as a member of a given community, is entitled to be in this space and how it ought to be used.

Socially accepted and traditionally sanctioned behaviour patterns have changed over the last few decades. Previously homogenous rural residents who were engaged in the same type of activities, with similar spatial habits, have become less traditional nowadays [3]. Social and cultural customs sometimes identified with the social capital, specific to a given area have lost their significance. Traditional customs expressed in the frequency of contact with each of the elements of the rural environment such as church, well, bus stop, dirt track to the pastures have changed similarly to the reach of used space (Fig. 2). It seems that the biggest influence on this situation was the popularization of individual means of transport as well as a visible increase in family autonomy.

Planning entries

According to the legislative intention, public space area should be distinguished in planning documents through graphics and detailed entries allowing to shape it in a specific direction. In the 2003 Site Planning and Land Development Act, public space ground has been defined as an area 'of special importance in satisfying residents' needs, improving quality of their life and conducive to social contacts as regards its location and functional and spatial characteristics'.

In planning documents, public space is identified graphically, which allows to distinguish it from other common-access spaces. The way a public space is developed and arranged is the key element deciding about the state, appearance and overall image of the village. The specificity of planning entries determining the formation of a 'space that feels right to the recipient and user' should be the selection of such elements so as their co-existence could raise positive

emotions and associations, based on the place's tradition or function. Appropriate scale, properly used material, colour, accent or architectural dominants give such a possibility. The existing construction development lines and building dimension limits arrange and form the borders of these spaces.

According to the act, a commune should not manage space freely. During the planning procedure, commune's administrative organ is obliged to consider all interests at stake, and the planning document is a common ground for all interested parties, including the local community. Through the competences given to a mayor (governor, president) by law, this official has a coordinating function and stimulates spatial development according to predispositions, possibilities and also traditions.

According to the current law, spatial planning should be based on social participation. Participation can be manifested in residents' active role in creation of planning documents, e.g. proposals, participation in public debates, presence at municipal council meetings, as well as in indirect ways, i.e. when people express their preferences, needs, wishes and tastes through research, surveys, polls and other forms of anonymous expression of opinions.

Krotoszyce municipality

Figs. 3–6. Village central square in Tyńczyk Legnicki, Krotoszyce, Kozice, Złotniki

Residential preference surveys of Krotoszyce's residents were compiled by the authors of this article in spring 2010 – these surveys were aimed at finding out which points are important for the residents of the municipality and its individual localities[1]. They were formed as part of a study of conditions and directions of municipality's land development. The questions pertained not only to the pros and cons of the development of various localities, but also requested residents to name central places associated with celebrations, daily life, and worthy of showing to a new-comer. The questions also asked to name "the heart of the village", a place associated with events, a charming but also popular place or the one connected with recreation. The survey aimed to pinpoint public spaces in different localities of the municipality.

Unfortunately, answering these questions proved to be very difficult for the residents of Krotoszyce. An im-

[1] 87 surveys, each containing 19 questions.

age of a municipality with no public spaces accepted by its inhabitants emerged from the survey. Localities[2] do not have a meeting place accepted by the residents. It is difficult to identify the central place of the localities. Perhaps this situation is a consequence of many years when the residents had no influence on the space surrounding the home or apartment. The residents do not identify with the space, they ignore it. The constantly degraded public space of those localities, does not correspond to the needs and tastes, and is therefore mentally bypassed and pushed out of consciousness. The young people are more likely to identify with public spaces of shopping centers of larger cities rather than with the space around their home or school.

The authors of the publication assumed the village square – the central place to be the space in which they found symbols of worship, bus stop, shop or village information boards (Fig. 3–6). In Krotoszyce there is no established central place. The residents pointed to several places important for them, and while older residents pointed out: the field – stadium, where "Krotoszyce Days" are held every year, the church, the municipal office, the younger people mainly chose the bus stop – a meeting place and a symbolic 'window on the world', as if it were the first step on the 'path to a better world'[3].

There is no place that all the residents would consider central, which would have cultural meaning and value. The question about the 'heart of municipality' proved to

be one of the most difficult. The residents gave mostly negative responses, and in other cases a specific location could rarely be identified. As in the case of the question: what is the symbol of the locality, answers 'there is no and 'none' were dominating. It seems that a place that could take over the function of a village square should be created or rearranged and this ought to be the main request to the urban plans.

Proposals included in the polls, indicating what the municipality should remove, eliminate, what is the most urgent need, what would residents donate to their city – should be considered as proposals, suggestions to the newly created local development plans. The aim should be to expand the cultural, entertainment and recreational activities offer to protect the needs expressed by the residents in surveys [1].

Commuting to work (on foot or by means of transport) is the most common, usually rhythmic and daily movement of the population, so any loss of time on the way to work exceeding the necessary minimum is met with disapproval of the working people. So it is not surprising that the biggest nuisance for Krotoszyce residents is communication, with about four fifths of the respondents complaining about it. In the polls, most complain about holes in the roads, no sidewalks and overgrown side-spaces that make people's everyday functioning more difficult. The Krotoszyce municipality not only lacks communication links in the form of roads, but the quality of existing ones raises reservations. Improving the roads is the most urgent priority for the residents.

Interestingly, very few people claim the need to construct new bike lanes, despite the declarations, in answer to another question, of active way of recreation. Unfortunately, this may indicate dominance of private car transport and unrealized possibilities of alternative transport options.

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[2] Krotoszyce Municipality comprises 14 villages: Krotoszyce, Wilczyce, Krajów, Czerwony Kościół, Winnica, Janowice Duże, Tyńczyk Legnicki, Kozice, Warmątowice Sienkiewiczowskie, Babin-Kościelec, Prostynia, Złotniki, Dunino, Szymanowice.

[3] It is connected with the fact that the municipality is situated not far from Legnica and this city is a place of work for most of them.

Conclusions

Each locality has its central place or places. The larger the town the more likely it is that there are several such sites. However, in the Krotoszyce municipality there are no places which people could identify with. This poll question was a clear sign that the indication of such a place is problematic for residents. Most people did not answer this question.

In the Krotoszyce municipality population has changed after World War II and the present inhabitants are newcomers or their descendants, therefore, they did not inherit the cultural manner of using public spaces. They were not involved in recreating their surroundings related to the field of concepts, meanings, and ideas, and did not produce acceptable relations between common public spaces and particular participants. Commonly personalized news and entertainment (TV, video, computer, phone, etc.) result in even greater isolation of man and limited human activity in public spaces. Today's rural community is much more diverse than it was several years ago. In addition, the

increased mobility of rural society causes the situation in which village residents take completely different places in the social division of labour, and they cross the barriers resulting from the social status inherited by them [2].

Varied levels of culture of the residents, their different habits, needs and preferences cause the ineffectiveness of the functional programs implemented so far, which depend mainly on the number of inhabitants. Until now, new investments more often harmed the image of the rural areas rather than improved it.

An important role is undoubtedly played here by the shape and records of the planning documents which relate to communication, administrative and economic conditions of everyday life. Currently, rural social space is not created in relation between private and public space and does not shape social behaviour. This space is created by trying to protect the cultural and environmental values contained in the specific regulations under the pressure of economic interests of developing new jobs.

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Kultura wiejskich przestrzeni publicznych – przykład gminy Krotoszyce

Kultura przestrzeni składa się z wielu wzorów zachowań funkcjonujących w zmieniających się warunkach. Centralny wiejski plac to przestrzeń społeczna i publiczna, której symbole utożsamiają mieszkańców z ich własnym miejscem. Jednak upowszechnienie się w ostatnim czasie indywidualnych środków transportu, podobnie jak wzrost autonomii rodziny, zmieniło zasięg użytkowanej zastanej przestrzeni. Przestrzeń dotąd społeczna stała się niczyja, podobnie jak podtrzymujące ją wspólnotowe więzi i grupowe interesy.

Na terenie gminy Krotoszyce ludność, po II wojnie światowej, wymieniła się, a obecni mieszkańcy są przyjezdnymi lub ich potomkami, zatem nie odziedziczyli kulturowego sposobu użytkowania przestrzeni. Nie zaangażowali się także w wytworzenie swojego otoczenia powiązanego ze strefą swoich pojęć, znaczeń i wyobrażeń, i nie wypracowali relacji pomiędzy przestrzenią publiczną (wspólnie użytkowaną) a poszczególnymi uczestnikami zdarzeń.

Nowe inwestycje najczęściej szkodzą wizerunkowi wsi. Jednocześnie zróżnicowany poziom kultury mieszkańców – ich różnorodne nawyki, potrzeby i upodobania – powoduje nieskuteczność wdrażanych programów funkcjonalnych, zależnych w dużej mierze od liczby mieszkańców. Obecnie wiejska przestrzeń społeczna tworzy się w relacji nie tyle przestrzeni prywatnej do publicznej, co pomiędzy próbami ochrony wartości kulturowych i przyrodniczych a presją rozwoju interesów ekonomicznych.