Sustainable Public Spaces - Urban Design and Transformations vs. Myth, Ritual and Ideology

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1. INTRODUCTION
The city, as a result of social processes, represents the actual condition of the society. At the same time, this amalgam of people, space and buildings should be a secret well from which the primeval human need for ritual behavior derives its strength, meaning and validity. Unfortunately, the contemporary city is losing its traditional values and the eternal duality between 'secret' and 'profane' becomes, in our modern world, just an intellectual phrase without the necessary metaphysical foundation.

Caught in the web of new technologies, strong economic forces and intrinsic elements of everyday life, urban space can no longer respond to the rational and irrational demands of its consumers. It is almost impossible to recognize and decode inherited archetypes, to enjoy discovering their mystical meanings and to find the well-hidden power of inherited memories and self-sustaining life. Consequently, the lack of urban identity brings new problems to the city and its physical structure unable to respond at twists of fortune created by nature and people. Therefore, the historical connection between urban space, its activities and ritual values for the community could help us to (re)shape our built environment and improve its human dimension, which is important for its existence.

2. THE ROLE OF MYTH, RITUAL AND IDEOLOGY IN THE CITY LIFE
Urbs - the city - is usually defined as a significant concentration of people, wealth, power, buildings and open spaces. At the same time, the city should be a historical and multiscalar product. Depending on time, space and human factor urbs has a twofold role in our lives. It can be used as a stage for our everyday or extraordinary rites and/or it can be a major participant in them.

The city as a social artifact radiates unique energy and commitment. It has a strong impulse for surviving and a need for eternity hidden deep inside its urban being. Due to the fact that all architecture proposes an effect on the human mind it is not surprising that the ritual, through centuries, was an inseparable element of its creation. Every cityscape and every building shaped by a ritual do not just have an everyday purpose - they are expressions of one time and one society.
Evidently, the mythical role of the ritual is very important for the community. Through its basic characteristics - violation of the established prohibitions and liberation from negative and socially unacceptable impulses, ritual supported by acceptable mythological background represents a unique force. A person involved in ritual ceremonies is able to perceive its being from a different perspective and a group becomes aware of its strength and coherence. Consequently, the ritual participant transforms the temporary and profane state of mind into a secret and universal condition.

Rituals and celebrations, as repetitive and periodical events, remind us of life cycles and the eternity of the Universe. Unfortunately, the personal feeling of immortality could be used as a device for ideological manipulation, especially in autocratic systems. However, every system follows a basic ritual pattern that includes sacrifice, catharsis, exaggeration, act of giving and constant presence of authority. At the same time, the most important ritual principles are formalisation, traditionalism, archaic and game elements and, often, spectacular features. All of them are usually incorporated in the urban space that should provide scenery for ceremonial events of the community.

The background of surrounding ideology, its myths and rituals always accompanied the act of creating places for different human purposes. Therefore, through a proper understanding of the act of planning, designing and making urban places and settlements, we could easily understand ourselves. Sometimes these urban rites had a very important mundane and cosmic role, but sometimes they were just a routinized event. The perfect shape of the city matrix usually ought to reflect a divine ruler and presupposes of an ideal society. Founding rituals and myths of propitiousness follow its inauguration, but after this moment of divine generosity, the city becomes an inseparable part of human history. Finally, it offers its physical structure as a place for every aspect of life - from symbols of the power and eternity to everyday needs, from divine glory to human dust.

2. SHAPING THE URBAN PUBLIC SPACES

According to one of the possible classifications, this time given by Fernand Braudel, we could define three major city types - open (ancient Greece and Rome), closed (medieval) and towns from the Renaissance onward, controlled by the state or a powerful ruler. Their urban structure was shaped by different historical conditions and the role of rituals was subordinated to the highest power of the society.

At first, cities represented a divine prototype made by rulers in order to create their own microcosm. Therefore, this manifestation of the supreme ruler's will was used every time the highest authority, as a representative of the official ideology, had to be approved and imposed on the society. It was a kind of initiation ritual for the new system and it has been used up to our time, especially for new towns and capitals (for example in conquered or colonized countries or when they became independent). From Khorsabad, Constantinople, Rome, St. Petersburg to Versailles and Paris, from totalitarian experiments - Berlin, Rome and Moscow to democratic capitals Washington, Chandigarh and Brasilia, the same principles were applied, although under the different circumstances. The main aim was to emphasize a new ideology and its validity, but the stands opposed each other completely.

This celestial model, used by ancient regimes, was transformed later to the polis, a concept preferred by ancient Greeks and later reused during the Middle Ages. This populist city created by the will of ordinary people (citizens) does not have monumental ceremonial complexes shaped for an absolute ruler. Instead, it has democratic places suitable for everyday
rituals and ceremonies, profane activities, and the decision-making process shared by every member of the urban community. The rituals are different too. The glamorous epiphany, triumph and imperial adventus, as represented by the inherited absolutist ritual system, together with more civil ceremonies become a very interesting symbiosis of archaic inheritance, pagan rites and new Christian chronology. Different ceremonies, games, triumphs, coronations, funerals, carnivals, season holidays, mysteries and feasts are true metaphors for the social reality - the mixture of cultures, traditions and dynamism of the medieval society.

Depending on the supreme ideology, public spaces and public buildings derive their logic from rituals too. Created under the radial, concentric, orthogonal or completely organic patterns, those spaces connect and, hopefully, dignify different town districts that usually have administrative (ruling), religious, commercial and residential role.

2.1. The Square
Perceived like a civic center and/or market place the square has an important role in the urban ritual. Usually combined with a ceremonial axis, it should be a place where citizens can freely speak and express their independence and self-awareness. Unfortunately, as one of the main ritual points in the city, the square is usually an object of manipulation. Considering its danger to the ruler, the size and functions of squares are changeable. It can be too small or too large but the result will be the same - it will be difficult to gather a critical mass of people able to dethrone the ruler.

The city square has many functions. However, as a place of everyday rituals - shopping, traffic and communication, or as a stage for special celebrations, games and even extreme events, like a revolution, this piece of city tissue offers exciting surrounding for human physical and psychological needs. The only, but eternal question for the architect profession, is how to determine the right scale of its space, proper combination of functions and, finally, how to give a breath of life to this social creation, whose importance for urban survival is incontestable.

2.2. The Street
As a line that connects urban sites that are important to one society, the street, beside its practical function, presents strong political statement. There is no celebration without the street. Its urban frame, materialization, proportion, regulation, and even function, expresses the accepted way of life or the strong ruler's intention to impose and mould desirable social attitude.

The ceremonial streetscape is especially important along the ceremonial axis - the most important direction in every city. It usually stretches from the main urban gates to the most important public buildings representing the community structure and sources of power (religious, political or economical). Buildings along such a route could be a palace, a temple or cathedral, a town hall, a parliament, a court of law, and important cultural institutions like a library, a university, a theater - depending on the period or ideological demands. But, the most important factor for every public space is to be recognizable and readable, adjusted to human scale. Otherwise it could become just a fancy drawing on a flat surface.

3. THE CENTRAL EUROPEAN EXPERIENCE
The towns in the north part of Serbia situated on Pannonia plains, are part of a long thread of continuity – since the ancient times up to present day, during many centuries of their
existence. This fact confirms the thesis that throughout history, towns are always built in the same places. They grow up for quite pragmatic reasons. The locations are often along the rivers or at the crossing of the "main market roads". Their purpose was often to be a market for the exchange of goods or to be a fortress - the boundary between the Ottoman Empire and Medieval European countries.

The main streets and squares are part of the longest thread of the continuity, as they appeared before the towns were completely established. The streets in these old towns usually followed the most natural routes. The squares were established at the crossings of the main directions or inside the fortress in front of the church and surrounded by principal buildings. The width of the streets became related to the quantity of use and importance. Consequently, the dimensions of the squares and concentration of the principal buildings were related to their importance in the urban pattern and urban rituals.

The main streets in our old towns always present direct communication between the main square, the market street and the principal buildings. The proportion and scale of town blocks shape the length of a street and a square. Our experience of a street is dictated by the length of the blocks, the width of the pavement and materialization of its surface. Also, the relationship between the horizontal and vertical dimensions of a street and squares are crucial to our perception of the urban environment (Cathorpe, 1993). The proportions of our squares are represented by a ratio between 1:2 and 1:3. The relationship between the horizontal and vertical line (pavement and buildings) is between 1:3 and 1:10 for squares and between 1:1.5 and 1:5 for streets. Along the main street there are only a few blocks, usually between one block and three.

An appropriate sense of scale, distance, proportion, massing, landscaping and even architectural detailing are interwoven into our culture and it was written into the town pattern. In the most of our towns (which were reconstructed in the 19th century), the streetscape is composed of a continuous line. The visual rhythms established by buildings line façades, the style, scale and condition of the buildings, the materials of construction, and the placement of windows and doors are important attributes in defining a street elevation (Jacobs, 1985). The visual rhythms established by building line in our main streets are in numbers: 10, 14, 16, 20, 26, 28 and 32. The materials of construction are the same, and the rhythm of the placement of the windows and doors is uniform. The secondary divide of the buildings' façades is in the numbers 2 or 3, dependent on the position of the buildings in a street. The width of the pavement and the number of the stories in the building condition the visibility of an entire façade of a building from either side of the street and square. In the most of the cases the façade of a building is visible and harmonized with the width of a street and square, and the buildings are visible from different angles of view.

A lot of our main streets have trees lining them. These trees, planted along the pavement (the first ones appeared in the 19th century), dramatically affect our perception of the environment giving a different picture of the urban environment through the year. The time of year affects the patterns of sun and shade during the year. It is connected to the species of trees, but also to the height of the buildings and the proportions between the width of the pavement and the number of the floors in the buildings. The quality of light and changes in atmospheric conditions also affect transformation of appearance along the streets and squares and make them more dramatic. The character of the street scene is also defined by street furnishings, including streetlights, benches and kiosks. These elements are changeable through the seasons and they are often related to fashion and trend in urban design.
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<th>Squares</th>
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<td>Zrenjanin</td>
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<td>Panccevo</td>
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During the 20th century we had the problem of the erosion of the cultural symbols in the towns as well as their correspondence to urban activities. Roads without 'urban spirit' are replacing streets and the social role of urban spaces is being replaced by a commercial one. The main street and the square were nothing but a memory. They have lost their important role in urban life. A lot of public spaces were 'demolished' by inappropriate buildings. The image of the town was seriously damaged.

Throughout the centuries, the image of the towns has been created by the visual repetition of elements as well as by unique elements. The churches and principal buildings are usually powerful images of towns that were dominating with their position and height, but the repetitiveness of the towns' pattern, like the buildings from the 19th century in the main street, also represent it as much as does the unique elements. Repetitive elements are the true urban form that expresses the way of life and culture of the community (Lozano, 1990).

We could easily discover similarities between towns in the central part of Europe, because they were established at the same time under similar conditions. If we compare our towns with those in Hungary, Germany, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Italy, we can notice main similar elements in morphology and urban pattern. In our traditional towns, urban spaces were attractive and inviting and they followed the principle “buildings define the space”. This makes a significant contrast to a philosophy that considers towns as a collection of buildings (which was the philosophy of the middle part of the 20th century). Therefore, a very important task in the future will be to rescue towns (especially their historic central parts, like main streets and squares) from 'demolition', greed and temporary fashion. The reconstruction of these parts has to consist of the elements we can learn from the past. It can help the urban designers to bring the attraction, harmony and “the sense of belonging to the space” to citizens and consumers of the open public places. Obviously, we have to learn again how to build for a timeframe of centuries.

4. CONCLUSION

The sustainable circle of historical urban context could offer very interesting lessons for contemporary planners and architects. At the same time, the continuity of the cityscape and respect for inherited codes of our existence should be the starting point for our new urban investigation. However, the well-known fact that the city should be used as a medium of human expression has to be observed from different angles. It is not enough for urban space to be just a manifestation of someone's power or an answer to everyday needs - it should be a transmitter of progressive ideas and a decoder of symbolic messages that could awake our forgotten subconsciousness.

The only question is are we ready for this intellectual adventure?

REFERENCES

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