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MIESTAS IR BENDRUOMENĖ: URBANISTINIO PAVELDO ATGAIVINIMO LINK

City and Community: Toward Revitalizing Historical Urban Legacy

SUMMARY

The article provides a discussion about possibilities to preserve and revitalize urban heritage. The author emphasizes that currently we are dealing with consequences of industrial urban design that dominated during the second half of the last century. This kind of thinking and planning had significant consequences on urban planning and urban design and has largely changed the face of cities in various parts of the world. Reconsideration of the idea of “usable past” (once introduced by Lewis Mumford) might be helpful in preserving the legacy of traditional city and revitalizing the contemporary urban milieu. Small and middle-sized cities and towns might especially benefit from this kind of attitude, moreover so that despite of large cities that have a huge impact on urban discourse very many people in Europe and elsewhere still live in the cities that are not so large and thus potentially they are more able to integrate the city and the community in solving various issues.

SANTRAUKA

Straipsnyje aptariamos urbanistinio paveldo išsaugojimo ir atgaivinimo galimybės. Pabrėžiama, kad iki šiol susiduriama su industrinio miestų projektavimo, vyravusio antroje praėjusio amžiaus pusėje, padariniais. Būtent toks mąstymas ir planavimas turėjo reikšmingų pasekmių urbanistinio planavimo bei projektavimo praktikai ir ženkliai pakeitė miestų veidus įvairiose pasaulio vietovėse. Galima būtų pasitelkti „naudingą praeitį“ (apie kurią rašė Lewis Mumfordas) šiems uždaviniams spręsti, išsaugant ir atgaivinant urbanistinį istorinių miestų paveldą šiuolaikinių miestų kūne. Nedideliams ir vidutinio dydžio miestams toks požiūris galėtų būti bene naudingiausias, juolab kad, nors šiuolaikiniame urbanistiniame diskurse vyrauja didieji metropoliai, tiek Europoje, tiek kituose kontinentuose didelė dalis žmonių gyvena nelabai dideliuose miestuose. Tokioje urbanistinėje aplinkoje potencialiai lengviau integruoti miestą ir jo bendruomenę, sprendžiant įvairius uždavinius.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: miestas, industrinis projektavimas, urbanistinis planavimas, modernizmas, urbanistinis paveldas.
KEY WORDS: City, industrial design, urban planning, modernism, urban heritage.

PILLARS OF URBAN CULTURE

Whenever we talk about cities today despite changes in the perception of its history we usually mean not only its architectural 'hardware' – public and private buildings, streets and plazas – all cast in stone or more recently in glass and concrete –, but also people who occupy them that is we are also referring to communities that make urban life meaningful, as cities without people are either tombs, ruins or at the outside historical museums maintained exclusively for the tourist consumption and profits that this booming sector brings. Though some sociologists like Saskia Sassen are inclined to call some popular urban localities (like Florence or Venice) an international cities, I find this label somewhat misleading, as these cities of almost unlimited tourist consumption are hardly international in a true sense of the word because they gradually lose some essential qualities that used to make their life truly urban.

As Isidore of Seville wrote in the 7th century: "A city (*civitas*) is a multitude of people united by a bond of community, named for its 'citizens' (*civis*), that is, from the residents of the city (*urbs*) [because it has jurisdiction over and 'contains the lives' (*contineat vitas*) of many]. Now *urbs* (also "city") is the name for the actual buildings, while *civitas* is not the stones, but the inhabitants" (The Etymologies, 305).

However, more often than not a modern city is viewed as a spatial structure, yet in addition to architectural structures the city contains individuals and communities of urban dwellers who differ from the inhabitants of countryside. Dur-

ing recent decades the balance between urbanites and the residents of the countryside is radically shifting. More than half of the world's population now reside in cities and it is expected that by 2025 more than three thirds of them will be urban dwellers. Even if these forecasts or expectations are somewhat exaggerated, the change of global balance between the urban and the rural makes us face enormous challenges and reconsider the ideas and practices of urbanization that dominated since the ascent of the modern era.

The connection between the urban dwellers and their urban surrounding has taken various forms and common public space was one of the first manifestations of urban culture. Already as early as the 10th- 9th centuries the Greek agora physically embodied an assembly of citizen who gathered in a public place to perform their military duties, to celebrate and occasion or take part in the city's political affairs and thus since antiquity the communities of free people, the urban dwellers developed into the most – important element of urban culture. It should not be forgotten, though, that foreigners, slaves and women have not been endorsed the status of a citizen in this civilization

Meditating on the essence of urban spirit, the medieval Christian thinker of the seventh century Isidore of Seville has made this accurate and memorable distinction between *urbs* – a city of stone and *civitas* – a city of people. Thus since medieval period a city was continued to be understood not only as cluster of architectural structures but also as site where humans

interact and exchange their skills, use their creative energy to produce forms of urban life. French urban sociologist Henri Lefebvre has insightfully noted that throughout the medieval period, „The city preserves the organic character of community which comes from the village and translates itself into a corporate organization (or guild).“ (Lefebvre, 200: 67).

The American author who made cities a passionate object of his life-long activities – Lewis Mumford further developed this distinction between the two continuous elements – *urbs* and *civitas* that characterize human life in a changing urban setting. While discussing the peculiarities of medieval urban development and drawing a distance from such influential authors as Augustus Pugin, John Ruskin or William Morris who often exalted, romanticized and/or misinterpreted medieval European city, Mumford nevertheless commented on its undeniable accomplishment observing that „In certain respects, the medieval town had succeeded as no previous urban culture had done. For the first time, the majority of inhabitants of a city were free men: except for special groups, like the Jews, city dweller and citizen were now synonymous terms, External control now became internal control, involving self-regulation and self-discipline, as practiced among members of each guild and corporation. *Dominium* and *communitas*, organization and association, dissolved one into another. Never since the great dynasties of Egypt had there been such a religious unity of purpose under such a diversity of local interests and projects. Though the social structure of the town remained a hierarchical one, the fact that a serf might become a free citi-

zen had destroyed any biological segregation of classes and brought about an interesting measure of social mobility. (Mumford, 1989: 316). Mumford was a perceptive historian and critic of urbanism and he realized well the importance of community as an essential part of the city-making. Among many other insightful observation, Mumford emphasized that as soon as city reaches a stage that he labelled megalopolis, it ceases to be means of association and abandoning one if its historically important functions, it starts to disintegrate structurally causing important consequences to the entire culture. Mumford envisioned that megalopolis eventually develops into *tiranopolis* and finally reaches the state of *necropolis* – the dead city where all of its former vital functions become paralyzed and the whole urban body becomes frozen and finally takes shape of total cemetery. The concept of city as *necropolis* can not only be applied to define a certain stage of urban development in a theory that contains a cyclical character, like fore. g. the one developed by Lewis Mumford in his early treatise titled *The Culture of Cities*. From my point of view on a smaller and less abstract scale it can be applied to some current practices of urban planning, especially those that were widely used in the modern period based on the mechanistic and largely inhuman ideas of le Corbusier and his followers. Though it is not possible to get back to medieval times when the links between the city and its community were far stronger than in industrial and post-industrial times, it is still important to realize the connections between the urban environment and the communities that co-habit its space.

AMBIGUOUS LEGACY OF MODERN URBANISM

Most of the contemporary cities have expanded during the last two centuries and their growth to a larger or lesser degree were affected by the reigning trends of urban planning and urban design shaped under the tutelage of Modernist imagination mixed with the widespread and unshakeable faith in never-ending Progress and technological advancement that seemed to be the guiding imperatives to urban planners. Thus the legacy of planned urbanism of the last century remains at least ambiguous if not occasionally destructive. Some of the most influential urban planners like Le Corbusier were almost obsessed with the ideas of Progress and saw the historical legacy of European cities as the main obstacle to build the desired city of the future free from the haunting memories of the past. Le Corbusier literary hated the legacy of medieval urbanism and glorified Roman builders and Louis XIVth who adored rationality and pre-fabricated geometric perfection rather than what le Corbusier believed to be chaos and disorder. Though the spatial politics of Modernism are quite adequately researched and the legacy of modernist planning subjected to criticism, the results of this kind of urban reasoning are abundant in many part of the world where architectural and urban modernism was viewed as solution to multiple urban problems. First and foremost, modernist urban planning neglected urban and architectural heritage as something that prevented the construction of the 'brave new world'. As early as 1922 le Corbusier drafted his ill-fa-

mous plan of restructuring Paris into what he believed had to be a three-million city of the future. Appealing to the urgent need of an 'urban surgery' he proposed to demolish the historical center of the city – that according to urban planner was an anachronism in the age of automobile and to built a couple of dozen of high-rise building in their center surrounded by open spaces, ironically, borrowing the idea of a 'green belt' from the humanist tool-kit of Ebenezer Howard who himself never dreamt of such radical transformation of any historical city. This concept of urban planning known as Plan Voisin was first offered for the reconstruction of Paris's Marais quarters and eventually was attempted to be exported further to Algiers. Immediately after WW II the essential contradictions of this outdated concept of a modern city was rejected by perceptive social critics Paul and Percival Goodman who while analyzing this burnt-out case concluded that „The esthetic ideal is the geometric ordering of space, in prisms, straight lines, circles. It is the Beaux Arts' ideal of the symmetrical plan. The basis of beautiful order is the modulus, whose combinations are countable, so that we should have to simulate mass production even if technical efficiency did not demand it. Space is treated as an undifferentiated whole to be structured: we must avoid topological particularity and build always in a level < ... > The profile against the sky is the chief opening of space and the prime determinant of feeling.“ (Goodman, 1960: 46).

Nevertheless, despite of Le Corbusier's failure, his numerous disciples continued to plan and design cities according to his failed recipes, most often bringing disastrous results epitomized by Brasil's capital city designed by Lucio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer that was according to sociologist Zygmunt Bauman was intended not for human beings but "for the accommodation of homunculi, born and bred in test tubes, for creatures patched together of administrative tasks and legal definitions" (Bauman, 1998: 44).

Commenting on the consequences of application of Modernist planning on the worldwide scale and rethinking the consequences of heedless urbanization and globalization during the last century Zygmunt Bauman observed;

„The lesson which planners could learn from the long chronicle of lofty dreams and abominable disasters which combine from the history of modern architecture, is that the prime secret of a ‚good city‘ is chance it offers to people to take responsibility of their acts ‚in a historically unpredictable society‘, rather than ‚in dream world of harmony and predetermined order‘. Whoever feels like dabbling in inventing city space while guided solely by the precept of aesthetic harmony and reason, would be well advised to pause first and ponder that ‚men can never become good simply by following the good order or good plan of someone else.“ (Bauman, 1998: 46).

It is not at all surprising that modernist planning practice inspired and fueled by the ideas of le Corbusier and the like, largely contributed to the destruction of community and creation of its caricatures. On the other hand, the zoning

rules applied to the modern city enabled such spatial policy that implemented and maintained segregation, often – as for example in US urban context disguised as proliferation of ‚neighborhoods‘. While commenting on urban policies and practices of the second half of the last century Henri Lefebvre aptly observed that

„At the same time this society practices segregation < ... > On the ground it projects separatism. It tends (as in the United States), to form ghettos or parking lots, those of workers, intellectuals, students (the campus), foreigners and so forth, not forgetting the ghetto of leisure or ‚creativity‘ reduced to miniaturization or hobbies. Ghetto in space and ghetto in time. In planning, the term ‚zoning‘ already implies separation, segregation, isolation in planned ghettos. The fact becomes rationality in the project.“ (Lefebvre, 2000: 144). Tendencies of this kind turned into the politics and practice of city-making were, according to Lefebvre, destroying contemporary city. (Lefebvre, 2000: 145).

The growing feeling of contemporary agoraphobia went hand in hand with pathological strife for absolute security that took different shapes: from spatial ghettoization and gated communities to the (enormous abundance of urban surveillance technologies embedding the principles of Panopticon drafted by Jeremy Bentham before the ascent of the modern city. Authors of perceptive and timely volume titled *Architecture of Fear* compiled and edited by American urban planner Nan Ellin have vividly demonstrated the counter-productivity of these security measures and devices most often than not just creating an illusion of

security and proliferating because of growing fear of strangers and outsiders. (Ellin, 1997). Discussing the related issues with one of the contributors to this ground-breaking volume urban sociologist Steven Flusty

“I was persuasively informed that „In Los Angeles, the proliferation of gated communities, of luxury laagers as I called them, appeared as response to elites (and, in all fairness, quasi-elites profoundly felt fear of criminal victimization. This despite the fact that statistics showed Los Angeles to be per capita one of the least criminally victimized cities across the U.S., that crime rates had been dropping precipitously across the city long before gating had become pandemic, and that the neighborhoods most enthusiastic about gating were the ones that had, and continue to have, crime rate so low as to be negligible or even non-existent before any gates were even installed. What was radically changing across the city, however, even in those extraordinary halcyon neighborhoods, was the ethno-cultured composition and distribution of affluence.“ (Flusty and Samalavičius, 2017: 52).

As one of the greatest urbanists of the last century – Jane Jacobs who was neither architect, nor sociologist in professional capacity- has persuasively argued in what turned out to be her last book,

„For communities to exist people must encounter each other in person.“ (Jacobs, 2004: 37). And yet, despite of this indestructible fact, this essential imperative is often neglected because creating public space for all urban dwellers was hardly an imperative or priority of modern urban planners who often worked out boundaries, enclosures or closed spaces instead of making them open and accessible. As another keen observer of contemporary urbanization and its policies has remarked „Our cities frequently lack proper centres that express the whole life of a multifaceted community. The centres of many cities built in the last fifty years, or the centres of Old European cities reconstructed since the destruction of the Second World war, have been described as soulless.“ (Sheldrake, 2001: 152).

During recent decades the failure of modern urban planning was acknowledged more willingly that after the first WW II decades when the impetus of reconstruction was largely blinded by its seemingly universal scope and character. The demolition of Pruitt-Iggoe quarters in St. Louis, USA was a symbolic breakthrough in the continuity of the modernist city and for bad or for worse was replaced by post-modern visions of urbanism.

CHALLENGES OF CREATIVE CITY

There had been numerous proposals dealing with the development of contemporary city that inherited the ill legacy of modernist planning and yet is open to further transformations. One of numerous and most promising the responses to the crisis of modern urbanism at large

was the concept of Creative City introduced and elaborated by Charles Landry who like his predecessor Jane Jacobs lacked the formal ‚initiation‘ into the guild of urban planner and designers. Among many then novel aspect of his concept there was a rejection of the myths

pursued by modernist urban planning that considered an architect/planner a Demiurge of urban space who according to this modern myth has created an entire city *ex nihilo*. Landry's emphasis on the need of education in the sphere of 'urban literacy' enabled to provide a more complex (and with some reservations – somewhat holistic) understanding of urban environment and the role of professionals in shaping its current forms and functions. His suggestions that in order to solve entirely complex and no less complicated urban problems require the competences of numerous disciplines because these tasks involve imagination, intu-

ition, holistic thinking and regular experimentation should have been taken seriously, yet there is some doubt whether this really happened. Nevertheless, despite wide-spread criticism of Landry's concept that according to his numerous critics embodies potential for neo-liberal policies toward urbanity, his ideas ought to be reconsidered more seriously as they provide a possibility to understand cultural potential of otherwise neglected cities. His focus on creativity – despite its numerous drawbacks, is nevertheless challenging as no previous urban theories gave managed to focus on the cultural potential of cities.

URBAN HERITAGE AND THE URBAN COMMUNITY

Besides the globally renowned 'international cities' like Venice, Florence or any other world famous urban locality, there are a large number of small and middle sized cities that are far less known and because of their relative lack of fame are less targeted by the global tourist industry.

Most of the medieval cities were rather modest in size, yet this did not hinder them to become important trading and cultural centers. As Edith Ennen has demonstrated in her classical study of European cities, most of medieval cities were rather small. As she has observed – a town with a population of 10 000 was a large one and the main towns of the medieval period often had no more than 20 000 inhabitants. (Ennen, 1978: 185). Even one of the most notable cities of Europe – Florence, that played an essential role in triggering Renaissance had a population hardly exceeding 100 000 inhabitants dur-

ing the 15th century. Nevertheless being somewhat modest in size according to the contemporary standards they were fully capable of performing their urban functions and attracting the dwellers. That means that one does not need a large number of people to make an urban community. Perhaps quite on the contrary, a more modest size of a city is a better guarantee of the interpersonal relations of its dwellers and formation of a communal feeling that a large one where identification with the city and its community becomes largely problematic. Thus being somewhat smaller in size means not only a challenge but also a possibility of organizing meaningful relations and associations between its dwellers.

What does this mean to contemporary urban policies? Middle-sized and small cities, especially those that have managed to maintain their historical

heritage are full of potential that could be used while making up visions of their future. Sociologist Svetlana Hristova has timely emphasized the fact that no less than forty thousand EU citizens live in what she calls „small urban areas“, i.e. have from 10 000 to 50 000 inhabitants and no less than twenty percent of them live in medium-sized cities, i.e. having from 5 0 000 to 250 000 inhabitants and she goes on to suggest that these cities have strong and largely unused cultural potential. (Hristova, 2015: 48-49). Though I would have some reservations as to the possibilities of drawing on the concept of Garden City drafted by Ebenezer Howard back in the end of the nineteenth century – having in mind insightful critique of this seemingly flawless and omnipotent idea presented by Jane Jacobs and many other authors – small and medium sized cities indeed have a lot of potential that was so far neglected. Misunderstood or misinterpreted during a period when bigness dominated. In the sphere of economics, this tendency to exalt size was opposed by the godfather of alternative economics – E. F. Schumacher, who convincingly argued that the habit to adore enterprises and institutions of large sizes was in fact inherited from the industrial era, when large-size structures seemed to be flourishing.

Though, as we know some influential observes of modern urbanism like Henri Lefebvre were skeptical as to the durability of historical city, because as he famously noted „As social text, this historic city no longer has a coherent set of prescriptions, of use of time linked to symbols and to a style. This text is mov-

ing away. It takes a form of a document or an exhibition, or a museum. The city historically constructed is no longer lived and no longer understood practically. It is only an object of cultural consumption for tourists, for aestheticism, avid for spectacles and the picturesque.“ (Lefebvre, 2000: 148). Being a perceptive observer of modern urban development, Lefebvre nevertheless seems to have underestimated the real potential of urban cultural heritage. Even if in a contemporary global consumer society historical cities are most often offered solely for tourist consumption that does not mean this is an only viable option. In fact the future of the development of historical cities depends on how their role is understood and what other roles they can assume. Not every city needs to (and should) be turned in an open air museum, not every city needs to (and should) become solely an object of tourist consumption. However, there exists a mutual relation between the community and the environment. As architect Robert Adams has insightfully observed „communities take their identity in part from their surroundings“, (Adam, 2018: xviii). thus community needs an environment with which it can identify itself, but the problem is how can one identify with an environment that has been either erased or remade so as to be faceless and placeless like many modern urban environments were transformed during the last century.

Thus small and medium-sized cities viewed from the perspective of unique place with which inhabitant can identify themselves become extremely prospec-

tive in terms of potential uses of their heritage. Some researchers call for the making of a kind of collaborative community and when such community is established „it shares an interest for caring about the place where they live – even on a temporary basis – the engagement of professionals involved in the

previous phases should become superfluous, or rather restricted to specific circumstances. By that time, the connection between people and places would be nourished by initiatives and projects born and discusses within the community itself, departing from actual needs and wishes.“ (Baratin et al. 2018: 1461).

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