

Urban acupuncture – ephemeral arrangements of space



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Text is based on analysis of documents: available scientific studies, documented examples of architectural and artistic solutions, as well as comments and observations relating to these realizations. Submitting this topic to theoretical reflection is aimed to draw attention to selected issues linking architecture with art in the context of 'city acupuncture', understood as spatial realizations and intervention projects in 'sick' areas of architecture. The text discusses the characteristics of temporary architecture and art in public spaces in the context of revitalization activities.

As a result of social, cultural, economic, and political changes, the concepts of permanence, immutability, or stability are starting to relate to increasingly narrow spheres of life, and their meaning is increasingly less categorical and precise. More and more often, facilities are being designed with lifespans that are precisely defined and usually short. When this period ends, the facility simply disappears and a new one appears in its place. According to R. Kronenburg, such projects are part of the system of flexible architecture. The author also emphasizes the tendency for permanent architecture to take on certain characteristics of temporary architecture

The answer to the problems of the urban environment can be found in local and short-term architectural and artistic projects that can be categorized as temporary architecture, Land Art or Street Art. When speaking of interventions in the urban tissue, this method is referred to as "urban acupuncture".

"Urban acupuncture"

"Urban acupuncture" is a term that has connotations of medical treatment and healing. The idea of urban acupuncture was first conceived by the Finnish architect and urban planner Marco Casagrande. It is a reference to ancient Chinese medicine. According to this theory, the city, just like the body, is a whole that functions only if there is a proper flow of energy which is directly related to the development of the city. All of the elements that make up a city should work harmoniously together while remaining in harmony with the lives of the residents. If this order is disrupted, an intervention is necessary [2]. However, there have

been many opinions that far-reaching, expensive and time-consuming changes in the city's structure are not always needed to change the flow of energy in a city.

An alternative solution is urban acupuncture, which, through small changes and interventions, affects the functioning of the city as a whole and influences local communities, their perception of the surrounding reality and their ability to shape it.

In particular, temporary architecture can smoothen the "urban fabric" that has been disturbed by bad energy flow [2] and repair it by introducing structures which are subtle in their expression and temporary but produce the desired effect.

Temporary architecture

Until recently, temporary architecture was a marginal phenomenon. It appeared mainly in the form of temporary exhibition structures, which were erected for single events, or temporary structures to fill empty plots before permanent buildings were built. However, in recent years, transient and portable temporary architecture has been gaining in popularity and its revival brings about ethical, artistic, environmental, and social values.

The growth of modern cities leads to a deficit of space. Temporary architecture, on the other hand, does not waste valuable space that can later be reused for a different project. At the same time, it is an element of the theory



Fig. 1. Paper Church in Kobe, Japan, 1995 (designed by S. Ban). Source: https://architektura.info/architektura/polska_i_swiat/architektura_dla_ofiar_katastrof_naturalnych_shigeru_bana, accessed on: 30.11.2020

of urban acupuncture and is designed to heal the fabric of the city in places where such healing is needed.

In his analysis of the role of temporary architecture, urbanism researcher Robert Temel points out that such short-term interventions, despite their small scale, can create powerful effects that impact neighborhoods: „They can contribute to urban development as bottom-up planning instruments that serve as an alternative to traditional urban planning, or as incidental projects in opposition to all planning activities, thus contributing to the urban complexity” [3]. Today, institutions underline that temporary spaces are the bottom-up strategies and representations of the city of tomorrow [4]. The life span of a temporary building is shorter to the life span of the material from which it is made. An example of such structures is the church in Kobe, Japan, which was built of paper tubes. The building was erected as a temporary church, but it had to meet the standard requirements for buildings permanently used by occupants. It stood for over 10 years on its original site. It was then moved to Taiwan as a gift to the earthquake-affected community, where it gained a new life [5].

According to Maria Lubelska, it could be argued that the lines between things that are short-term and long-lasting become blurred. What is important, however, is that “when temporary buildings expire and die a natural death, or even when certain projects are never implemented, the ideas behind them are permanently embedded in architectural history thanks to their innovative nature.” [5]

Of course, the purpose of temporary architecture is not to replace and dethrone permanent architecture. But it can and it should serve as a creative addition by introducing an element into the city life that activates and stimulates people to try new activities while also functioning as a kind of artistic stimulus and incentive for citizens to adopt a more creative approach to the surrounding reality.

In recent years, cities in the United States have become particularly “active” in terms of temporary architecture. For example, vendors in Brooklyn sell their goods in artistically arranged shipping containers, the Build a Better Block group in Dallas promotes painted bike lanes and small “pop-up” businesses, and the architects in San Francisco transform parking lots into miniature parks. This phenomenon has attracted the interest of local authorities. The Washington State, for instance, created the Temporary Urbanism Initiative as part of the planning office.

The “park” movement began as an experiment in 2008 in San Francisco. Concrete barriers, a few tables and potted trees transformed a congested corner in the Castro into a place where locals gathered for lunch. The city launched its Pavement to Parks program in 2009 and it was a success. Today similar



Fig. 2. Werner Aisslinger, Loftcube, a mobile living home on the roof of an existing building. Source: <http://imaginationforpeople.org/en/project/loftcube/#>, accessed on: 03.10.2018



Fig. 3. Dekalb Market in Brooklyn (NY). Source: <http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/802841/pop-up-populism-how-the-temporary-architecture-craze-is>, accessed on: 03.10.2018

mini-parks are built each year throughout San Francisco and the trend has begun to spread to other U.S. Cities [6].

The abovementioned examples managed to excite the stagnant and lifeless fabric of the city and helped to invigorate the local community and encourage them to become involvement in the surrounding reality. The same idea is behind urban acupuncture and temporary architecture offers numerous such opportunities. This is because temporary architecture is characterized by transience, impermanence, low costs of installation and dismantling, functional flexibility, low technical requirements, and its experimental nature which allows the creators to expand their creative vision beyond the constraints that are typical of permanent architecture.

Land Art

Landscaping and land art are types of interventions that can have a serious impact be-

cause, more than any other form of art, they affect the senses of residents, even those who are generally insensitive to the beauty of art and architecture.

In the modern city, as a consequence of the relatively low supply of land combined with its increasing price, the urban development keeps expanding vertically and horizontally thus reducing the amount of green areas. This increases the distance between residents and the environment. Green areas are too far away for many citizens to see from their apartment windows, and no longer serve their function of protecting against the sun.

According to many surveys, green areas that are close to their homes are those that citizens value the most [6]. Moreover, residents feel closely associated with these areas, and if they are aesthetically pleasing this bond becomes stronger, which in turn is correlated with a decrease in aggression and the number pathological families [7].





Fig. 4. Mini-park in front of Tony's Pizza Napoletana in North Beach, San Francisco. Source: <http://archrecord.construction.com/news/2011/10/Parklet-Program.asp>, accessed on: 03.10.2018



Fig. 5. Green roofs in Chicago. Source: <http://inhabitat.com/chicago-green-roof-program/>, accessed on: 30.11.2020

Designing and landscaping horizontal spaces is relatively easy but what can be done for people living in tall buildings, who are increasing in numbers in modern cities? The solution may lie in temporary gardens, e.g. on roofs and balconies. The city of Chicago has made it mandatory to plant green roofs on all newly constructed public buildings [8].

An ephemeral form of a green wall are the so-called temporary vertical gardens which are installed in shopping malls and cultural centers. Green walls are also becoming increasingly common in hotels, stores, and apartments. Vertical gardens were introduced by Patrick Blanc who invented the vertical hydroponic garden, and the advantages of such solutions include the protection of buildings from cold in winter and from overheating in summer. To popularize vertical gardens, a project entitled "Temporary gardens. Revitalization of neglected urban spaces" was completed in 2011 in the Podgórze district in Krakow. For several months, the residents of this district participated in workshops taught by a

group of artists, which culminated in a public presentation of 5 temporary gardens during the Garden Festival [9]. The project included hanging gardens on post-industrial buildings of the former Miraculum factory (at 23 Zablocie Street), which today bustles with life and culture (art galleries, studios, associations, publishing houses and foundations).

Ephemeral forms of landscape architecture are one of the ways to both, educate the public about the need to connect with nature and show them how to satisfy this need.

Street Art

Henri Lefebvre once said that the future of art is not artistic, but urban [10]. The city is the development goal of contemporary art, which is increasingly used as a means of expressing much more than artistic experiences. It is the living fabric of the city and its community, which is simultaneously local and global, that are expressing its greatest emotions, fears, anxieties, but also concepts, ideas and hopes for the future. More than any other form

of creative expression from the intersection of ephemeral architecture and art, street art focuses our attention on the city itself, on the boundary that exists within it between what is private and individual and what is public and normalized. In addition, it refuses to be ignored – the defiant and "cheeky" nature of street art arouses emotions practically in everyone. These can be positive or negative, but they are almost always present.

Street art thus reaches those areas which other art trends can not. This art is mainly visible in districts that are neglected, ignored, and pushed to the margins of city life. Street art is located in the public space, which is accessible to all, open, heterogeneous and changeable, and makes references both to the material reality, i.e. a specific territory, area, or place in public space and to social interactions [11] It is strictly contextual: what matters most is the place where the work or art is created and the reaction of the audience. The purpose in this case is to transform and restore urban space for a specific community. It certainly breathes fresh air into the urban space and, at the same time, it serves as a lens for examining current social and cultural problems. Despite its transient nature, it is preserved in the public memory through digital photography and the Internet and it helps people to see what was previously unnoticed or purposefully ignored.

Conclusions

Art is increasingly becoming a means of communication for residents of modern cities. Quasi-architectural structures become embedded in the public space and transform it while also changing how this space is perceived by the local community. The purpose of "Urban Acupuncture" is to heal the society through interventions designed to heal the city in which it dwells. Leszek Maluga states the following: If a work of art is created in the right place using the right means of expression, it can create the effect of "pressure" that has long-lasting spatial, aesthetic and social consequences. Ephemeral actions, on the other hand, do not leave permanent material traces, but if they are noticed in the context of the city space, they can change how people see and think about the spatial environment [12].

Ephemeral architecture in all its forms is closely related to the local context. It is the location that serves as inspiration because this type of architecture is always created in response to specific needs of the local community and in reaction to the perceived "painful" locations in the tissue of the city, which need treatment. Its purpose is to draw our attention and remind us about forgotten and neglected places, but also about facts from the past, about forgotten values and ideals.

When speaking about the broadly understood ephemeral architecture, it is important to include both ephemeral architecture in the



Fig. 6. Hanging gardens in Miraculum. Source: <http://www.pracowniak.pl/festiwal-ogrodow-tymczasowych/>, accessed on: 03.10.2018

literal sense of the term, but also temporary landscape architecture, Land Art, and Street Art, because all these forms of artistic activity are characterized by their transience and impermanence, which is why their appearance functions as an intervention that enters the urban space to draw attention to a specific problem or to stimulate the intellect. The variety of available solutions opens many avenues for interpretation and aesthetic evaluation.

To sum up, the contemporary urban fabric is subjected to numerous ephemeral interventions whose purpose is not only to transform the urban space, but primarily to change the attitude of the local community towards the surrounding public space. Urban acupuncture can help to refresh, invigorate, and improve the structure of a city so that its residents can live better, closer to each other, closer to nature, and closer to their community. Such interventions stimulate thinking, make us stop and reflect, and reveal what may be hidden and overlooked, but is often vital for a given community.

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CORRECT QUOTATION FORMAT

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Abstract: Development of modern cities, technological progress, reising pace of life, fast-changing fashion and increasing needs of society make the offered urban solutions lose their relevance relatively shortly after their introduction forcing to search for new concepts. In response to those changes, multifunctional, mobile spatial forms are proposed, often with direct possibility of making changes. They have been called 'injections' of new ideas and qualities and fall within the definition of 'urban acupuncture'.

Usually, the short lifetime of such objects determines cheap, easy to apply solutions. These are ephemeral forms: temporary, short-lived, corresponding to the needs of a specific place at a specific moment. Temporary actions are a form of provocation, it forces you to look at a known place from a different perspective. These types of interventions are aimed to improve or suggesting of the necessity to improve the quality of existing public space, architecture and its health. Text is based on analysis of documents: available scientific studies, documented examples of architectural and artistic solutions, as well as comments and observations relating to these realizations.

Submitting this topic to theoretical reflection is aimed to draw attention to selected issues linking architecture with art in the context of

'city acupuncture', understood as spatial realizations and intervention projects in 'sick' areas of architecture. The text discusses the characteristics of temporary architecture and art in public spaces in the context of revitalization activities.

Keywords: urban acupuncture, art, architecture

Streszczenie: AKUPUNKTURA MIASTA – EFE-MERYCZNE ARANŻACJE PRZESTRZENI.

Rozwój współczesnych miast, postęp technologiczny, rosnące tempo życia, szybko zmieniająca się moda i zwiększające się potrzeby społeczeństwa sprawiają, że oferowane rozwiązania przestrzenne tracą swoją aktualność w stosunkowo krótkim czasie po ich wprowadzeniu, a także skłaniają do poszukiwania nowych koncepcji. W odpowiedzi na zachodzące zmiany proponuje się wielofunkcyjne, mobilne formy przestrzenne, często z bezpośrednią możliwością wprowadzania zmian. Nazwane one zostały „zastrzykami” nowych idei i jakości oraz mieszczą się w określeniu „akupunktura miasta”.

Zazwyczaj krótki czas istnienia takich obiektów determinuje tanie, łatwe w zastosowaniu rozwiązania. Są to formy efemeryczne: tymczasowe, krótkotrwałe, odpowiadające potrzebom konkretnego miejsca w danym momencie. Działania tymczasowe to forma prowokacji zmuszającej do spojrzenia na znane nam miejsce z innej perspektywy.

Tego typu interwencje mają na celu poprawienie lub zasugerowanie konieczności procesu poprawy jakości zastanej przestrzeni publicznej, architektury i jej zdrowia.

Praca jest oparta na analizie dokumentów: dostępnych opracowań naukowych, udokumentowanych przykładów rozwiązań architektonicznych i artystycznych, jak również odnoszących się do tych realizacji komentarzy oraz obserwacji.

Poddanie tego tematu refleksji teoretycznej ma na celu zwrócić uwagę na wybrane zagadnienia wiążące architekturę ze sztuką w kontekście „akupunktury miasta” rozumianej jako realizacje przestrzenne i interwencyjne projekty w „chorych” obszarach architektury.

W tekście zostały omówione cechy charakterystyczne architektury tymczasowej oraz sztuki w przestrzeniach publicznych w kontekście działań rewitalizacyjnych.

Słowa kluczowe: akupunktura miasta, sztuka, architektura