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THE SPACE OF THE SHOPPING CENTRE IN POLAND

ABSTRACT. The socio-economic transformation in Poland that took place after 1989 caused radical changes in Poles' lifestyle. The transformation enabled the society of producers to change into society of customers. Aspects of the creation of social space in the shopping centre by marketing specialists and managers are presented in the paper, the main objective of which is to identify the space of the centre.

KEY WORDS: post-modern consumerism, society of customers, shopping centre, place.

The change in factors of social stratification and mechanisms for creating city space caused by the transformation of economic, social and political system in Poland brought about modifications in social structure of the cities (Rykiel, 1999). The changes can also be noticed as far as living conditions and quality of life are concerned. Living conditions are understood as a level of the fulfilment of needs; quality of life is a satisfaction by living conditions. It is equivocally emphasized in the literature that uncritical taking over the consumerist way of life by Polish society and fascination by mass appearance of new shopping centres (malls) is prevailing.

According to J. Schor (1999), consumerist society is characterised by a constant increase of expenses spent on consumption. Those expenses are crucial to the functioning of the economic system which influences the development of culture, ideology and morality. Insatiability is a norm and social and political stability depend on supply of consumer's goods (Szlendak, 2004).

The origin of Polish consumerism is different than those in North America and Western Europe. In actual socialism, when the idea of industrialisation was propagated, a quantitative growth of production was stressed, acknowledged to

be socially useful and politically legitimate, while consumption was recognized as incidental to production and hardly tolerated. The domination of political space was a fundamental principle of shaping social and spatial structure of the city (Jałowicki, 1988). According to the then governments, the development of shopping centres was impossible and unnecessary. Trade and services were nationalised. There was no overproduction and diversity of goods, which would force the appearance of quick and cheap methods of distribution, as it was, for instance, in Western Europe in the 1950s (Makowski 2004).

Changes in economic, social and political system, connected with the transformation from totalitarianism to democracy, enabled the society of producers to change into a society of customers. Because the economy lost its ideological dimension, the working class, determined by the existing structure of industry, became insignificant. The principal class division was changed to that between a developing class of large and medium bourgeoisie and the working classes (Rykiel, 1999).

According to T. Szlendak and K. Pietrowicz (2004), Polish capitalism is the one without capital, i.e. incomplete. The basic features of this formation are: (1) private property of the capital, i.e. the means of production and land; (2) a concentration of the capital; (3) peculiarities of individual and collective consumption. The principles of free market economy are applied to Poland but there is no capital that might be invested. The middle and upper classes are not developed and individual initiative, understood as undertaking the own economic risk, is three times lower than in Western Europe.

On account of radical social transformation, new models of rationality, hierarchy of values, ideals and customs have appeared (Rykiel, 1999) in collectivist society. The individuality and necessity of personal satisfaction have regained importance. The identity is something that can be shaped in different ways (Bauman, 1993).

Consumerism has become an ideology (Szlendak, 2004). The accepted value system has fundamental impact on the uniformisation of needs. To achieve and maintain the appropriate social status, it is necessary to possess adequate goods. A lack of proper goods indicates that one is unable to consume, i.e. he or she cannot gain and confirm his or her social status. In consumerist society one's position strongly depends on the consumption of goods. Everything may become an object of consumption and a set of desirable goods is faddish (Makowski, 2004). Possessing is but an accumulation.

Post-modern consumerism (Szlendak, 2004) has little in common with gaining goods and services. The principal values of consumerist culture are utilitarian and hedonistic. Consumerism is not rational, and buying and consuming goods or services is not to satisfy basic needs. The space is organised in order to make consumption pleasant because pleasure is the fundamental rule of post-modern consumerism. The shopping centre is a place where higher-order and

luxurious needs, resulting from the fundamental rule governing consumerist society, can be satisfied (Makowski, 2004). The needs and their means of fulfilment are created by marketing and advertisement specialists.

Created architectural form becomes human surrounding. The surrounding is in a position to determine and reinforce sensitivity, influence awareness and differentiate between the internal and external worlds. The architectural structures of shopping centres are similar all around the world. Outside shopping centres are monotonous, with gloomy walls and parking places and discourage people from entering. Inside there is a spectacularly created space – full of colours, lights, finely gardened courtyards, waterworks and cosy shopping alleys.

The chief aim of the designing, building and arranging shopping centres is to isolate customers from external impulses. Different types of shops and services not related to trade are placed under one roof. The underlying purpose of the enclosed mall is to make people feel they are outdoors. The shops are located along alleys resembling city promenades. There are more analogies to traditional city shopping streets; there are, however, fundamental differences. The “street” in a shopping centre is always safe, clean, quiet, coloured, and cosy.

The interior of the shopping centre is filled with senses. The trade-mark is a symbol. Wrappings and brands, through marketing and advertising, give identity to sold products. Words, advertising slogans – like created surroundings – are to determine and to deepen consumerist’s sensitivity. By means of the slogans it is possible to relay marketing ideology of a company to the consumer and persuade him that buying and possessing ordinary goods proves the class affiliation and enhances prestige.

The question is: what kind of space is the one of the shopping centre? A variety of ways in which space of the shopping centre is used does not allow answering the question unequivocally. The space embodies and reflects non-spatial cultural and symbolic values. What is evaluated by space is not the reality itself but rather its image (Jałowicki, 1991). By experiencing the space of the shopping centre, a post-modern consumerist gives values to space and makes it meaningful, i.e. changes it into a place. The space of a shopping centre can be a place even for “imperfect” (Karwacki, 2004) consumer, i.e. one who cannot afford to be involved in mass consumption.

If tradition contains phenomena of the past which a given social group, community or society treats as important for their present and future (Rykiel, 1999), the celebrated anniversaries of a mall’s opening (named as birthday) are the tradition of the place. Therefore, from the point of view of the homeliness conception (Rykiel, 1999), the space of the shopping centre should be granted as homely space.

If the sense of the shopping centre is created by sales managers, it is an inauthentic place. It is the part of space where one has no feeling of affiliation with and cannot discover or define values of space. It is referred to as placelessness (Madurowicz, 2002) or profane.

There is also another approach to the subject where consumerism is compared to religion. W. Sitek claims that consumerism has succumbed to sanctification and shopping centres (hypermarkets) became temples of consumption (Czwojdrak, 1999). According to G. Ritzer (2004), religion and consumerism compete and the atmosphere of purchasing is identified with the one of religious service. It seems that, in Catholic Poland, Sundays have become the true holy days because of parking lots being filled with costumers before noon. The relationship between man and the place is a value if it is a result of a choice rather than an obligation. Such interpretation allows to maintain that the shopping centre may be categorised as sacral.

A main square with a centrally situated church was the place which used to organise the city space (Madurowicz, 2004). H. Libura (1990) claims that nowadays the street rather than church is the important element that organises the city structure. Despite having integratory function, the street will not get status of the place, except for old-town areas or residential districts, because it cannot release sense of security, stability and tranquillity (*ibidem*). The fulfilment of the needs is “guaranteed” by proprietors and managers of the shopping centre. However, is it the sense of insecurity in city streets that makes consumerist buying goods in “the street” of shopping centre? A concentration of many shops under one roof seems insufficient.

In actual socialism, downtowns lost functions which had defined their special role (Jałowicki, 1991). Attempts to restore the specific role of a downtown, made in Poland after the transformation, have brought various results due to the lack of concept and money. Shopping centres, on the other hand, function not only as trading places but also play entertaining, cognitive and social role. It is believed that most visitors to shopping centres are “perfect” customers, wealthy and keen to buy goods. An average consumer believes his visit to a shopping centre ennobles him because it enables to purchase the proper (required to prove the status) goods and allows to move in appropriate society (of similar status). More importantly, shopping centres are thought to be the symbols of development and growing wealth. The problem of the limited spatial accessibility of shopping centres does not exist in Poland because they are usually built within the city (near the downtown). Well developed public transport enables everyone, not only car owners, to visit shopping centres and “consume”.

If the city is a reflection of human needs, demands and abilities – of culture (Pirveli, 2000) – the mass appearance of shopping centres indicate the developing or already developed consumerist society. However, if consumerism is an ideology, human needs are, like in actual socialism, artificially created. The needs are a reflection of urban forms and their substance.

In actual socialism new cities were planned in accordance with the governmental principle of total control over social relations. Architectural space was to be regular, repeatable and uniform. Functional planning of space had to be

subordinated to the needs of the city. Qualitative diversification of space was removed. The history and its signs were rejected. That newly created functional order was to assure “rational” happiness (Bauman, 1998).

If you know one shopping centre, you know all of them. Like cities in actual socialism, shopping centres are repeatable, they do not differ. The managers of shopping centres control and also manipulate the behaviour of the customers. Due to permanent artificial lighting, constant mild temperature and a lack of clocks inside the mall it is difficult to notice passing time. The architectural shopping centre space is rationalised (Ritzer 2004). The rationalisation consists of buying and selling efficiency, measurability, predictability and the control over the customer (*ibidem*). Fully rationalised space is no longer meaningful, therefore shopping centre designers create an internal atmosphere of fantasy to make the space “magical” (Ritzer, 2004). The ultimate goal is to create and maintain an illusion of the place. Consumerism in the rationalised shopping centre is (or should be) pleasant – using the socialist slogans – it should provide a “rational” happiness.

There are few differences between the city in actual socialism and the shopping centre. They were based on different ideologies and there were various circumstances of developing projects of the city and the shopping centre. Most importantly, however, the shopping centre did not turn out to be a utopian project.

A possible combination of terms *culture* and *mass consumerism* is determined by the way of understanding *culture*. Vit Klusak’s and Filip Remuda’s documentary starts with a sequence of three shots: the 1980s – a crowd standing in a neverending queue; Vaclavské Naměstí – a crowd rising heads; 2004 – a crowd running through a meadow to see the opening ceremony of a new shopping centre. In an unusual advertising campaign preceding the opening of “the Czech dream” there were slogans like “Don’t go! Don’t buy! Don’t wait!”. In spite of that, at the day of the opening, fifteen hundred people came to the appointed place on a suburban meadow. Surprisingly, they found themselves in front of a hanged tarpaulin imitating a hypermarket (Sobolewski, 2004).

The post-modern city is organised closed to the places of consumption. According to B. Jałowicki (2005) the city is becoming redundant, alienate and unsafe. There is emptiness between the adjacent garage and the parking of shopping centre.

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