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URBAN AND ARCHITECTURAL STRUCTURE: COHERENCE AND ORDER SPACE. THE EXAMPLE OF POZNAŃ

Uncontrolled urban growth and the increasing spatial disorder of modern cities are widespread phenomena. Given the evident problems associated with the diminishing clarity of urban centers and threats to their efficient functioning, it is essential to preserve the urban and architectural structures that maintain spatial balance. The problem lies in the loss of clarity of composition, as well as the contrasts in building scale and the excessive diversity of architectural forms. Given these trends, the need to protect urban and architectural structures that determine spatial balance and order seems justified. These are most often historical complexes composed of buildings of exceptional architectural value. Such structures serve as “strong forms” – not only symbolically significant but also critical in shaping and organizing the urban fabric. They provide a distinct urban character and play a key role in defining the identity of cities. Investments in these areas are inherently complex and carry significant risks. They demand thorough preparation, in-depth analysis, and interdisciplinary research involving experts from various fields. The introduction of excessively avant-garde solutions can undermine existing values and damage the city’s image, sometimes with long-lasting consequences. In such cases, it is advisable to adhere to the principle of continuity – skillfully integrating the past with the present while thoughtfully anticipating the future impacts of today’s decisions.

Keywords: urban and architectural structures, transformations of urban space, spatial order

1. INTRODUCTION

The freedom to shape the spatial form of contemporary cities is steadily increasing, while their complexity continues to grow. Urban structures are often created without clear rules, defining features, or recognizable boundaries. This lack of

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coherence is compounded by the degradation of existing systems, the neglect of established values, and the introduction of buildings that feel alien to their surroundings. In an era saturated with information, spatial legibility becomes increasingly difficult. As Sumień observed, “There is a noticeable spatial anarchy and a progressive crisis in the broadly understood form of the city, as well as the functional and organizational conflicts that result from them” [Sumień 1989]. New developments frequently dominate or overwhelm historical environments, both in scale and visual impact. Aesthetic considerations in planning are being pushed aside in favor of economic and technical priorities. The art of composing space – once central to urban design – is now regarded as outdated and is gradually being marginalized. Efforts to pursue spatial homogeneity and coherence are often dismissed as futile in the face of rapid urban change.

As a result, fundamental qualities of urban space are disappearing: the hierarchy of meanings, spatial closure and balance, sequential spatial experiences, and the principle of harmony. Original relationships between elements of the urban structure are increasingly lost under the pressure of various influences. What emerges is a process of urban entropy, marked by blurred boundaries, fragmentation, and the erosion or replacement of core components of the urban fabric [Karpiński 1986]. Development efforts now tend to focus on isolated sites with little regard for broader urban context. A dominant trend is the pursuit of “showcase architecture” designed to generate media attention. Such buildings aim to shock, becoming instantly recognizable and widely discussed. As one architect noted: “There is something to show and something to see, something to talk about” [D. Perrault in conversation with B. Paszowski, in: *Dokąd...* 2005, p. 49]. Bonenberg adds: “Fashionable architecture does not have to be functional, durable, or logical. Above all, it should attract attention, be well-known, and widely discussed. Its advantages are shaped by online opinion. Traditional, professional evaluation criteria are no longer relevant” [Bonenberg 2014: 97].

Visionary architectural proposals are often misunderstood by the public. Increasingly, it is the structure itself – detached from context, function, or technology – that becomes the dominant feature of architecture. On the other hand, avant-garde projects that break existing conventions and stereotypes are appreciated. Formally bold structures enrich the cityscape and, in some cases, increase its attractiveness. Urban spaces are expected to provide aesthetic experiences of the highest order. That is why layouts with very spectacular solutions are created. Their main task is to seduce, attract, and shock [Baudrillard 2005]. Actions of this type raise doubts. It seems that the problem in this case is not the restriction of architects’ artistic freedom. It is important to follow the rules that should apply in an urban environment. It is important to be aware of order and clear relationships between elements at the level of general urban planning decisions. “Architecture that screams is good for one or two buildings in a city. A city cannot consist solely of iconic buildings, because then they would all lose their

meaning” [G. Murcut in conversation with B. Andersen, in: *Dokąd...* 2005, p. 43]. According to J. Gyurkovich, “the urban structures of contemporary cities are too complex spatial organisms due to their complexity, vastness, and multitude of elements to maintain the unambiguous clarity of layout that characterized the historic city centers of European cities and which they have retained to this day. The clarity arose from the consistent language of the spatial forms that shaped the city’s structures and the precise definition of their component boundaries.” [Gyurkovich 1999: 50]. According to J. Rykwert, “the contemporary city is excessively fragmented, full of contrasts and frictions and therefore it must have many faces – one is not enough” [Rykwert 2013: 52]. In response to increasingly noticeable problems, calls are emerging to bring order to cities descending into chaos. Many of these refer to classical principles of spatial design that utilize historically proven elements.

2. URBAN AND ARCHITECTURAL STRUCTURES

Urban space consists of structures that integrate urban planning concepts, architectural complexes, individual buildings, green areas, and transport and technical infrastructure. These layouts are the result of interdependencies that have developed over centuries. Particularly noteworthy are those functioning as overarching systems. They stand out from their surroundings in terms of location, type of development, and program. These include historical formations such as old town centers, market squares, parks, and main streets. They define the distinctiveness, originality, and unique character of the urban fabric. Such systems represent so-called strong forms – structures resistant to transformation. As elementary compositions, spatial sequences, and crystallizing elements, they form the structural framework of urban layouts [Buszkiewicz 1990].

In light of the trends outlined above, one of the key conditions for the proper functioning of cities is the protection of structures that serve as points of reference – essential for maintaining spatial and functional balance in the broadest sense. These foundational elements ensure the legibility of urban environments. They shape the diversity, aesthetic quality, and directions of development. Urban and architectural structures play a vital role in reinforcing identity and shaping the image of urban centers. Initiatives in this area vary and are tailored to local needs. A common strategy for building identity involves creating so-called spatial distinctions – highlighting places characterized by valuable and unique architecture. Such efforts aim to communicate the city’s “personality,” understood as the sum of its distinguishing features [Stanowicka-Traczyk 2008]. Urban and architectural structures are becoming increasingly important components of city marketing strategies. This is particularly relevant in the context of growing competition between cities. These trends are linked to the development of individual urban centers which, in their efforts

to attract investors and tourists – as well as to meet the expectations of their residents – strive to build and promote their brand. To this end, attractive, far-reaching, and memorable concepts are created that become identifiable to users. Their presence is also significant in the context of sustainable development. Amid growing cultural and social diversity, these structures serve as spaces of tolerance and co-existence – places where different values can intersect. In the face of ongoing transformations – globalization, gentrification, suburbanization, and hybridization – it is essential to preserve clear urban layouts that enable harmonious development. In processes of urban transformation, these structures serve as valuable planning tools with important compositional, functional, and social roles.

The aim of the author's research is to determine the role of selected architectural and urban structures in the development process and transformation of urban space. The analyses conducted focus on Poznań. It features numerous such developments with exceptional values and a significant impact on their surroundings. The content of this article is a comparative inquiry – it provides a closer look at the environment, identifies current problems accompanying the investment processes in selected zones, and provides a critical voice in the discussion on the directions and principles of urban planning.

3. PROBLEMS, INTERFERENCES AND THREATS

Urban development is inevitably accompanied by spatial and functional changes, particularly through the addition of new elements to existing structures. Challenges arise when investment processes target sensitive areas – such as historic centers or compositionally complete layouts of high urban and architectural value. The key question is how to introduce contemporary forms into the urban fabric without compromising what is already valuable. Architectural and investor proposals are often met with critical scrutiny, and in many cases, such skepticism is well-founded. Negative assessments during the conceptual phase can help prevent implementations that would degrade important urban or architectural compositions. It is essential to remain aware of the long-term consequences of poor planning or design decisions. Such missteps are not only difficult to reverse, but worse, they can initiate a chain reaction of subsequent errors – the so-called domino effect. Poznań offers numerous examples that illustrate these kinds of issues and their broader impact on the urban landscape.

The presented material is a continuation of the author's research contained in a monograph on the role of urban and architectural structures in the transformation of contemporary cities. Another source of inspiration for the discussion was the analysis of the results of architectural competitions concerning the most important urban zones – Ostrów Tumski, the Old Market Square and the area around Freedom Square and Karola Marcinkowskiego Avenue.

OSTRÓW TUMSKI

The planned development of the northern part of Ostrów Tumski has generated significant controversy. Ostrów Tumski holds profound symbolic importance, connected not only to the history of Poznań but also to the origins of Polish statehood. The area is dominated by sacred architecture, characterized by strong, monumental forms. It serves both as a site of religious worship and as a major tourist attraction. According to plans prepared by the Municipal Urban Planning Studio, a new district with nine-story residential buildings is to be constructed in the immediate vicinity of Ostrów Tumski. A development of this scale would introduce a clear spatial dissonance, negatively affecting the visual prominence of one of Poznań's most valuable urban and architectural complexes. It would contribute to the devaluation of a part of the city that holds critical historical and cultural significance. The potential damage caused by an ill-considered investment of this kind would be irreparable. Concerns extend beyond the scale of the proposed development to its modernist character, which appears incompatible with the site's context. In this particular case, it seems more appropriate to introduce a structure that reflects the traditional downtown typology – specifically, quarter-block development schemes.

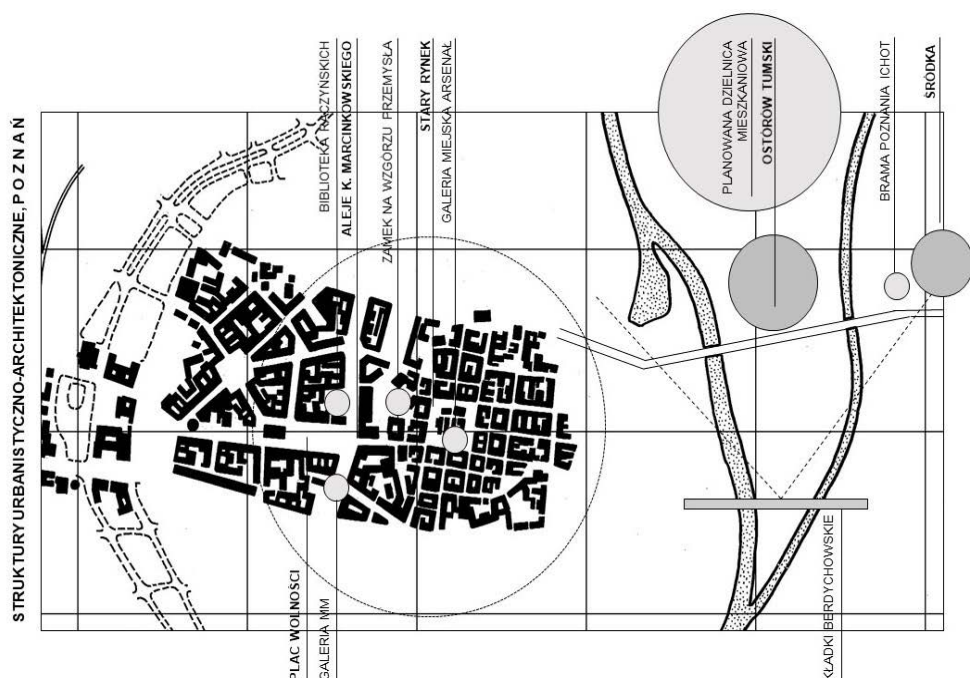


Fig. 1. Poznań, selected urban and architectural structures
[drawing: author]

To enhance architectural quality and avoid monotony or uniformity, architectural competitions should be organized. These competitions ought to be conducted under jointly established guidelines, based on a catalog of solutions that reflect the site's unique character. The case of Ostrów Tumski is exceptional due to the area's extraordinary role in shaping the identity of the city and the necessity of preserving the symbolic dimension of this historically and culturally significant space. The Interactive Center for the History of Ostrów Tumski, known as the Gate of Poznań (designed by D Artis), has been a source of controversy since its inception. The building elicits strong and divided opinions due to its minimalist, even ascetic form. For many, such an approach is unacceptable in the context of the surrounding historical environment; for others, it represents a bold and successful attempt to revitalize urban space through contemporary architecture. Situated opposite the cathedral on the far bank of the Cybina River, the building's location has contributed positively to the revitalization of tourism – not only in Ostrów Tumski but, more importantly, in Śródka, a historically significant yet long-neglected part of the city. This once-declining area has been given new life and has become a prominent destination on Poznań's tourist map. The concept of introducing a structure that deliberately contrasts with its context draws inspiration from the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. However, the impact in Poznań is not as spectacular as in F. Gehry's iconic project. Beyond the architectural value of the building itself, the organization of the entire complex is also noteworthy. Particularly commendable are the access solutions and the internal circulation layout. The building is designed to establish visual connections with the urban complex of Ostrów Tumski and, most importantly, with the cathedral. In doing so, the designers aimed to symbolically underscore the relationship between the past and the present.

When considering investment activities in the Ostrów Tumski area, it is worth highlighting one more project. Although not directly part of the historic site, its unique location allows it to be perceived as an extension of the area. This is the recently opened Berdychowskie Footbridges, designed by architect J. Gurawski and his team. These pedestrian and bicycle bridges connect the banks of the Warta and Cybina rivers, serving not only as important transit routes but also as vantage points from which to admire the landscape of Ostrów Tumski. From the south, the footbridges create a kind of landscape frame, within which the cathedral and its surrounding buildings are visually inscribed. The construction of these riverside connections has had a highly positive impact on the vitality of this part of the city. It has revitalized the park area located in the former Warta riverbed as well as Kontener-art, a popular venue and meeting place for artistic events. The footbridges also complement the Wartostrada bicycle route running along the riverbanks, which has been under development for several years.

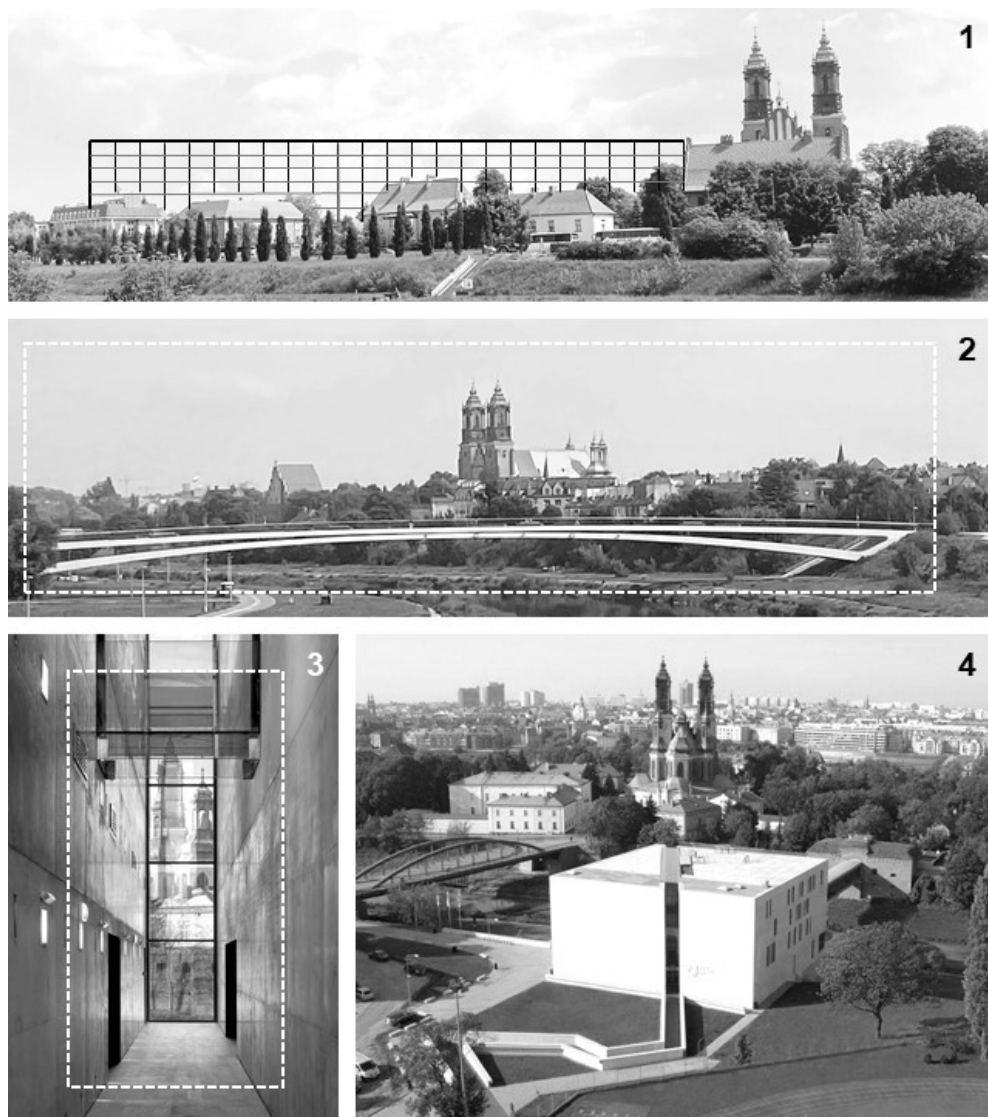


Fig. 2. Poznań: 1 – Ostrów Tumski with the outline of the planned residential development in the background [photo, drawing: author], 2 – View of the cathedral and the Berdychowskie Footbridges [photo: author], 3, 4 – Poznań Gate designed by D Artis [photo: author, drawing source: <https://www.vedag.pl/referencje/206-poznan-ichot>]

OLD MARKET SQUARE

For centuries, the Old Market Square has been Poznań's most important public space. Rebuilt after wartime damage, the Old Town complex – designed by

architect Z. Zieliński – forms a coherent and complete composition. The only architectural outlier within this layout is the Arsenał Municipal Gallery building, located within the market square block (designed by architects J. Cieśliński, Z. Lutomski, and R. Pawulanka). Due to the lack of detailed information about the historic cloth hall that once stood there, a modernist structure was chosen. In the mid-1950s, this was a bold and innovative decision. Since its construction, the building has remained controversial. For some, it represents a positive dialogue between history and the present; for others, it is an architectural and aesthetic misstep.



Fig. 3. Poznań, Old Market Square, Arsenał Municipal Gallery: 1 – existing state [photo: author], 2-6 – expansion concepts [<https://architektura.info>]

Criticism and the desire to enhance the image of this representative urban space prompted a competition to redesign the Arsenal building a few years ago. However, the results proved disappointing. The architects' proposals sparked even stronger emotions and negative assessments than the existing structure. Most concepts intensified the existing spatial chaos, often incorporating fashionable details alien to the site. Many designs featured excessive dynamism and exaggerated articulation, leading to an unfavorable change in scale and a consequent lack of harmony with the surroundings. In seeking originality, the architects prioritized distinction over continuity. Ultimately, the decision was made to abandon the reconstruction. This episode underscored the difficulty and risk involved in supplementing historic urban structures with new architectural forms. Attempts to remedy past mistakes do not always succeed and are not always feasible.

In this context, one might ask: is it preferable to imitate history and create a so-called retroversion in such specific urban areas? The reconstruction of Przemysław Castle presents a case somewhat similar to that of the Arsenal. The lack of detailed archival data cast doubt on the accuracy of the adopted architectural guidelines. Nonetheless, the castle reconstruction committee decided to pursue a historicist version of the building. Designers participating in the competition were required to adhere to these guidelines, relying on research hypotheses that were often unconfirmed by concrete evidence. As a result, the proposals represented more of an imaginative vision of what might have been rather than a faithful restoration of what actually was. Many submissions – including the winning and subsequently implemented design – featured a blend of elements from different historical periods.

The final outcome did not satisfy everyone. Critics pointed to the questionable reliability of the historical analyses underpinning the competition's framework. Media commentary frequently described the building as overly "fairy-tale-like" and naïve. Defenders, however, argued that over time the castle would simply become one of many buildings within the Old Town complex, with its authenticity no longer a subject of debate. These arguments carry a certain weight. Alongside these critical voices, an alternative proposal emerged advocating a radically different approach. J. Kozakiewicz's concept envisaged a modernist structure with large windows and an observation deck – named *Punctum* – on the hill. Both approaches found both supporters and detractors. In their assessments, comparisons were often made to the Arsenal's history, illustrating how introducing avant-garde architecture does not always harmonize well with historical surroundings.

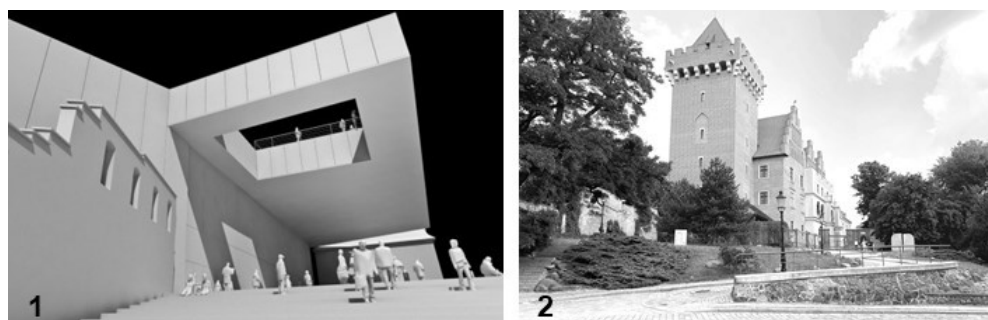


Fig. 4. Poznań, Przemysł Hill: 1 – Puncum designed by J. Kozakiewicz [<https://owentic.com>], 2 – Przemysł II Castle designed by W. Milewski [photo: author]

FREEDOM SQUARE (PLAC WOLNOŚCI)

The urban and architectural composition of Freedom Square and Karola Marcinkowskiego Avenue is one of Poznań's most distinctive features. The history of this space has been documented in numerous studies. In recent years, several new buildings have been added, each influencing the overall image of the complex to varying degrees. The area's regular layout owes much of its representative character to its simple, orderly architecture – an architecture defined by rhythm and hierarchy. The compactness of the space is further emphasized by the arrangement of greenery and small architectural details.

Recently, two buildings with starkly contrasting forms have emerged, reflecting two different design philosophies. The first is the extension of the Raczyński Library, an iconic Poznań landmark whose neoclassical façade has symbolized the city for nearly two centuries. The design of the library's north wing (by JEMS architects) was preceded by careful compositional studies. The architecture, façade articulation, and proportions of the new section are not accidental but the result of rigorous research and a skillful reinterpretation of historical principles through the lens of contemporary architecture. The new addition is clearly subordinate to the original building, maintaining a distinctly modern character while thoughtfully referencing the historic structure. The result is a compositionally coherent whole that harmoniously blends two distinct parts. This project exemplifies the importance of analytical rigor and well-founded conclusions in achieving valuable architectural outcomes.

The second notable building on Karola Marcinkowskiego Avenue is the MM Gallery (designed by Studio ADS), which opened in 2013. Its program extends beyond retail, comprising a multifunctional complex that includes shops, services, recreational areas, office spaces, and a three-level underground parking garage.



Fig. 5. Poznań, Plac Wolności (Freedom Square), Karola Marcinkowskiego Avenue:
1 – Extension of the Raczyński Library, designed by JEMS Architekci [photo: author],
2 – MM Gallery, designed by Studio ADS [photo: author]

This diverse mix allowed for considerable freedom in the building's design. The architects opted for a bold, albeit risky, deconstructivist approach. A striking feature is the main entrance, marked by a dynamically emphasized corner facing Karola Marcinkowskiego Avenue. This assertive detail closes the compositional axis of the avenue on the south side, sharply contrasting with the orderly façades of the surrounding historic buildings. The rest of the building presents a very different

character: the walls are largely windowless and clad in a material with a distinctive “pulsating” articulation. This treatment alters both the scale and proportions relative to the neighboring structures in the city center. The architecture unmistakably stands apart from its environment. This pronounced visibility has sparked considerable criticism – not only from Poznań’s residents but also from a wider audience. The MM Gallery was even nominated in 2013 for the competition recognizing the worst architectural projects in Poland, where it ranked a notable third place.

The examples above illustrate two fundamentally different design approaches within historic urban contexts, leading to markedly distinct outcomes. On one hand, there is a contextual approach that respects and subordinates new construction to established and widely recognized urban values. On the other, there is a clear intention to dominate the surroundings through an overly expressive and assertive form. In the first case, the design emerges from a careful analysis of the existing architecture, while in the second, the solutions impose foreign scales and aggressive forms and details. Such interventions are often misunderstood and receive negative criticism. They tend to lose their appeal quickly and age poorly.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In the face of increasing disorder in urban spaces, historic urban and architectural structures with deep symbolic significance play a crucial role in maintaining balance. They shape a city’s identity, continuity, and cultural distinctiveness. Their spatial organization encodes values that define the unique character of a place. Adding new elements to such environments is a complex task that demands thorough analysis, multifaceted research, expert insight, and public consultation. Interventions in the most valuable urban structures must consider diverse perspectives and factors.

Ostrów Tumski is not an area of intensive development. The spatial composition is free-form. The natural landscape harmoniously blends with the extensive development, and the cathedral building is the dominant feature of the urban complex. The structure has exceptional historical and symbolic significance. Any interference with the existing structure, or attempts to change the context by introducing structures with modernist forms and excessive scale, can negatively impact the image of this place.

The Old Market Square can be described as an urban archetype. It is a concept of coherent, hierarchical composition, a closed and complete system. Adding avant-garde structures that contrast with the historic character of the space is unacceptable; it creates too much formal dissonance.

Freedom Square is a clearly laid-out project, but its development can be described as highly diverse. In this case, we are dealing with architecture from different periods. Despite this, the overall impression is of an orderly, representative space. It should be noted, however, that newly designed buildings with excessively

dynamic articulation can increase the impression of randomness in the square's development, thus contributing to a decline in the quality of the urban space.

For a city to function well and preserve its spatial qualities, it is advisable to adhere to the principle of continuity – one that skillfully integrates past and present while thoughtfully anticipating the future impact of our actions.

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STRUKTURY URBANISTYCZNO-ARCHITEKTONICZNE A SPÓJNOŚĆ I ŁĄD PRZESTRZENI MIEJSKIEJ. PRZYKŁAD POZNANIA

Streszczenie

Niekontrolowany rozwój współczesnych miast i coraz większy chaos przestrzenny są zjawiskami powszechnymi. Problemem jest zanik czytelności kompozycji, a także kontrasty skali zabudowy i zbyt duża różnorodność form architektonicznych. Wobec tego typu tendencji uzasadniona wydaje się potrzeba ochrony struktur urbanistyczno-architektonicznych

decydujących o równowadze i ładzie przestrzennym. Najczęściej są to założenia historyczne, złożone z obiektów o wyjątkowo wartościowej architekturze. Struktury tego typu stanowią tzw. formy silne. Mają nie tylko znaczenie symboliczne, ale w dużym stopniu porządkują tkankę miejską. Nadają przestrzeni specyficzny charakter miejskości, decydują o tożsamości miast. Działania inwestycyjne prowadzone w tych strefach są ryzykowne. Wymagają odpowiedniego przygotowania, wnikliwych analiz, badań o szerokim zasięgu, przy udziale specjalistów wielu dziedzin. Wprowadzanie zbyt awangardowych rozwiązań może doprowadzić do degradacji zastanych wartości. Skutki błędnych decyzji mogą mieć negatywny wpływ na wizerunek miasta. W takich sytuacjach wskazane wydaje się przestrzeganie zasady kontinuum polegającej na umiejętnym łączeniu przeszłości z teraźniejszością, ale także na przewidywaniu skutków naszych działań w przyszłości.

Słowa kluczowe: ład przestrzenny, przekształcenia przestrzeni miejskiej, struktury urbanistyczne i architektoniczne