

The Role of the Square in the City

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ABSTRACT

From its origins to the present time, the square has been the most representative public space in citizens' lives, a place where the flows intersect, influencing and being influenced by the most relevant social and political transformations.

Many city squares in Albania have been reconstructed, remodeled, aestheticised, privatized and commercialized. Their space has been divided and organized to support consumption rather than other forms of public life. These processes have changed not only the appearance of the squares, but also the life that flows on them, have put in doubt the idea of the city as a common good, starting from its main public space.

In the light of these changes, arise questions as what character should have the Albanian square, as the main collective memory that forms and gives sense to the city, to make the city competitive in the most advanced levels of creativity and social cohesion.

Is important to know what social-cultural profile is creating the city, given the behavior of people in relation to the square as the main public space.

To what extent can we perceive these “new” regulated spaces as “public”?

To what extent does the city square represent the city of nowadays and the society of our times?

KEYWORDS: public space, city square, contemporary city.

1 INTRODUCTION

... The square...this lesser rebellious field which secedes from the limitless one, and keeps to itself, is a space sui generis of the most novel kind in which man frees himself from the community of the plant and the animal....and creates an enclosure apart which is purely human, a civil space. (Jose Ortega y Gasset)

The idea that space is interdependent with social relationships is not new. The notion has been present in sociology since the inception of the urban ecology theories of the Chicago School and earlier, Kevin Lynch contribution was to provide empirical research on city planning, studying how individuals perceive and navigate the urban landscape till Steven Holl in his book “Urbanisms - Working with

Doubt” (2009) To better understand the square in the context of cultures and Albanian cities, nowadays urban planning studies and competitions for their centres as the latest “bravest” approach that exists, should be analyzed by putting and facing not only functional analysis but their decomposition through a new sensitive conceptual.

2 PURPOSE

The aim of this paper is to put forward new ways of understanding and interpreting the city depending on how people use the Square, as the main representative public space defining the Albanian cities.

3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM - RESEARCH PROBLEMATIC

Since ancient times, a city square – be it agora, town hall square or market square – has been a public space: A centre of public, political and social life in European towns, a place of sociability where citizens could gather, for discussions, for spending their leisure time, etc.

More recently, however, we can observe that many city squares have been reconstructed, remodelled, aestheticised, privatised and commercialized. Their space has been divided and organised to support consumption rather than other forms of public life. These processes have changed not only the appearance of the squares, but also the life that flows on them.

To what extent can we perceive these regenerated and regulated spaces as “public”? And, in as far as the public is not coherent – for which groups of society is this space in fact “public”?

The lack of deep studies of the relation that people have with public space in general and with the square in particular, affects the legibility of the cities’ identity and facilitates the chaotic and nonprofessional interventions on it.

The Square in Albanian cities still does not identify its self as an important cultural heritage. He still fights for his identity, since the time of its genesis His identity fought constantly against rapid political, social and cultural transformations. He is always seen by the "aesthetic" and ideological perspective and never as a space of social interaction and cohesion neither as a collective memory that forms and gives sense to the city. In this sense he has a noted absence of treatment by the phenomenological characteristics that define the quality of urban life. Space energy and mystery, the quality of light, color, sound and smell make the experience of urban subjectivity which should have the same importance as the objectivity. Built with stone and glass walls, concrete or brick, the city is a subjective experience as much as the objective reality. This synthesis of objective and subjective understanding of the city in general and urban space must be at the center of the territorial policy conception and urban designed. Time, light, stone, history and urban geometry as a whole form a unique Impression. The combination of these inner sensitive aspects requires an internal intellectual interpretation with spiritual and poetic terms that are not found in planning documents (Holl.S. 2009 “Urbanisms - Working with Doubt”).

4 OBJECTIVES

To study the historical layout in order to identify the main features that make the Albanian piazzas unique.

To know how this features are transformed through the years and under what complex factors.

To identify the implications that this transformation has had to the people's perception of the piazza, to the public life and to the city.

To study the interactions of individuals-piazza-public life-city, under the theoretical approach of urban phenomenology and urban sociology.

5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Since the end of World War II until today, Albanian cities and their planning have passed in various difficulties that for the worse or for the better have eventually marked their features. Given that urban planning and furthermore, the spatial planning of the city has always been, among others, a means of expression political thoughts and state ideology, or a way for the benefit or economic speculation, has led that the main public space of the city, the square exactly, undergo continuously and numerous distortions and interventions. As a consequence there has been never the required time to fully consolidated the professional thought on these spaces, so representative of the city and to its people, leading to the gap of the lost identity and to a dangerous and abusive nebula.... till maybe someday the main square risqué to be transformed to a conglomerate, without name and form, and above all without any identity.

At a time when only two years have passed from the change of the legal framework in relation to territorial planning, which expanded the frameworks of the City Planning, again it doesn't bring any solution as it still remains a cool instrument that cannot deepen the core of described problematic on public spaces, but tries to solve it in a pragmatic and mathematics. Thus arises the necessity for a relation between planning and social studies, an interdisciplinary dialogue between urban and sociology for conceptualizing of new possible planning instruments redesigning the city and its spaces.

6 EXPECTED RESULTS

The new perspective of analyzing the Square relatively to the human behaviour will give us a new approach to understand the city and its public space.

The revealing of the hidden dimensions of Square identity will increase sensitivity and professionalism in future interventions.

Expansion of urban theoretical approach to the Albanian cities.

New implications to the local territorial policies

Designing new principals for public space planning.

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