

## SOCIOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF ARCHITECTURE AND URBAN SPACE

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**Abstract:** Architecture and urban space play an important role among the sociological and psychological factors that influence humans and their well-being. Sociology and psychology analyse the role of architecture in the conscious shaping of urban space in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This issue is very important from the point of view of sustainable development, as well as education of civil engineering graduates and urban sociologists.

**Key words:** urban space, sociology, psychology

### INTRODUCTION

Architecture and urban space play an important role among the sociological and psychological factors that influence humans and their well-being. Sociology and psychology analyse the role of architecture in the conscious shaping of urban space in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This issue is very important from the point of view of sustainable development, as well as education of civil engineering graduates and urban sociologists.

Sociology of settlement, the city and the housing, deals, among others, with building (or architectural) activity of man, and his perception and needs. At the same time, interpretative sociology deals with this dilemma as well. However, there is little interest in those problems in Czech sociology. Beside a few articles, no monograph on the topic has recently been published. The last publication, “The Genesis of The City”, written by Horská, Maur and Musil, mainly concerns social and spatial aspects of the city. In his essay in the Sociological journal (*Sociologický časopis*), M. Illner points to many significant urban problems which call for sociological analysis. These problems, which have a direct impact on the formation of social and spatial urban structure, include residential segregation, suburbanisation of the city’s periphery, depopulation of downtowns, revitalisation of habitation, revitalisation of industrial areas and integration.

Another important sociological question concerns the development of urban society, which has an indirect spatial implication. In the case of the Czech society, this means:

1. quantitative stagnation of town population and changes in its demographic structure,
2. the socio-economic structure of citizens is changed. On the one hand, there is an extreme drop in the amount of industry workers; on the other hand, the employment rate in services is increasing,
3. unemployment of citizens is increasing,
4. privatisation changes relations between owners and users; moreover, it often changes living conditions,
5. growing socio-economic differences in urban societies,
6. there is a slow, but irreversible ethnic, national and cultural population heterogeneity,
7. big cities expand to surrounding areas, thus creating metropolitan regions [Illner 2003, p. 132-134].

At present, sociology does not solve these problems from the viewpoint of urbanism and architecture.

Urban population, similar to European societies in general, is ageing. Some of the districts already have the character of places for “elderly people” and are losing their age heterogeneity. Meanwhile, the extreme drop in the amount of industry workers does not change workers’ district areas, as even the workers who switch their profession retain their social-economic status.

The increase in unemployment results in severe dilapidation and sometimes even devastation of workers’ districts. This problem has a negative influence on the young generation due to its depressive action, as well as the negative values it promotes.

Privatisation, by changing the owners, causes strong feelings of uncertainty among some inhabitants. At the same time, certain parts of blocks, built in 1960-1990, become blocks for the “poor” and gradually acquire the same character as some habitation for people of very low social and economic status. This fact continuously causes growing socio-economic differences.

## SOCIOLOGY, ARCHITECTURE AND GENIUS LOCI

There are numerous important findings concerning the problem how man can perceive different architectural symbols as well as urbanized areas. A contemporary person, in the excessively technical world of impersonalised architecture of “modern” buildings, loses his/her perception of territory, aesthetics, sense of harmony and dimensions, etc. One is either forced to accept this deficit of perception, or these needs even become corrupted. Sociology does not solely con-

sider a person's position in the society, but it explores his/her values, feelings, views, and needs.

At discussions with civil engineering students, we find out that these problems are reflected in their values and needs. Most of them search for places with a certain identity, which affect them with their aesthetics, cosiness, and atmosphere. These could be the possible factors in the issue of the society's "uncertainty".

When attempting to interpret the relationship between territory and an individual, I was captivated by the theory of a Norwegian historian and theoretician of architecture – Christian Norberg Schulz. I have been teaching sociology of settlement and the city, and recently aesthetics, as well as given courses in sociology at the college of civil engineering, CTU (Czech Technical University) Prague. This theory attracted me all the more as even when I had not known the monograph *Genius Loci* (translated into Czech in 1994) I used to emphasise in my lectures the same aspects, which were academically analysed by Schulz in 1979.



Fig. 1. Schulz wrote: Thus, the book does not deal with economic and social problems. The existential dimension is not "determined" by socio-economic conditions, even though they can facilitate or hinder the completion of specific existential structures." (photo by the author)

Rys. 1. Schulz stwierdził: A zatem książka nie dotyczy problemów ekonomicznych i społecznych. Wymiar egzystencjalny nie „zależy” od warunków społeczno-ekonomicznych, chociaż mogą one ułatwić lub utrudnić realizację określonych struktur egzystencjalnych.” (fot. autor)

In his book *Genius Loci*, Ch. N. Schulz wrote: "All works are connected by an identical view, that architecture is a resource, which provides "existential support" to every person. Therefore, my intention is to examine rather the psychological influence of architecture than its practical character, even though I suppose a relationship between those two aspects exists. In the book, I included a profound analysis of perception and symbolisation and I emphasized the fact,

that man must not get the support for his existence merely by way of scientific cognition. Man needs the symbols, meaning works of art, which represent life situations. There are no different kinds of architecture, but only different situations, which require different solutions to satisfy the physical and psychological needs of man. Architecture consists in the visualization of *Genius Loci*, and the duty of an architect is to create places filled with meaning, thus helping people to live [Schulz 1994].

Contrary to Ch. N. Schulz, I believe that architecture is strongly determined by social and economic conditions and they directly symbolize the socio-economic status of the owner, irrespective of the fact whether it is a public or residential building. During the long period of monitoring of the building symbolism in Bohemia, it was found that buildings always strongly symbolize their owner. For example, new administrative buildings in Prague are increasingly ostentatious, *but also* more and more frigid and inaccessible to people. New residences, especially single-family houses built after 1990 in the outskirts of Prague, reflect their owners. If a house is built by a person who rapidly became rich and his/her socio-economic status improved, the residence has features which make it distinct. Such proprietors want to show their status by using towers at family houses or using varying materials, colours, etc., which do not match those of the neighbourhood or the atmosphere of Czech villages (irrespective of the fact they are placed in the capital's outskirts). In the Czech Republic, such buildings are known as "business baroque". Satellites of Prague, mostly, are spreading very fast and they often consist of villas and houses which represent quite diverse styles, e.g., the popular "American house" style, which has completely destroyed Bohemian country style.

Ch. N. Schulz in *Genius Loci* describes spatial, environmental, and building influence on man; moreover, he analyses in detail the *Genius Loci* of Prague of the 1970's. Unfortunately, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, on account of the political and economic transformation, Prague is gradually losing its *Genius Loci* in certain places. The example is the new building at Charles square (Karlovo náměstí), which, in my opinion and feeling, but also in the opinion of architects, misbecomes the context of surrounding buildings.

Architecture must grow out of everyday life, it *signifies* how a person understands nature, other people, and even oneself. At present, part of the population, fortunately the smaller one, neither understand themselves, nor the others around them; they emphasize their own rampant individualism, which rejects or even diverges from the natural environment.

The consequence is the loss of identity. There is no identity to put into buildings, or places. That is how people lose the "feeling of the place" and their identification is decreased.

## THE SUSTAINABLE BUILDING DEVELOPMENT OF A “GENIUS LOCI”

Buildings surround us. Constructions greatly influence the human living environment in any case. Constructions, mainly great ones, have a strong impact on the place where they are built. They occupy part of the landscape, which is oftentimes considerably changed by them. It is not possible to analyse or fully describe the impact of construction works just by technical means.

Nowadays, the term “sustainable development” is used in many fields of human activity and it is associated with an evaluation of the activities’ results. There exist many interpretations of that term, but generally sustainable development is understood as economic, social and technological development, through which the contemporary generation satisfy their needs, but which will not limit the future generation’s ability to satisfy their needs *as well*. The basic 1992 Czech act on the living environment defines the term as development, which preserves for contemporary and future generations the possibility to satisfy basic vital needs, and, at the same time, which will not decrease the nature’s diversity and which will preserve natural ecosystem functions [Brutlandová 1991].

I. Rynda extended the definition further, writing: “The (permanent) sustainable development is a complex set of strategies, which enable, by using economic instruments and technicalities, to satisfy human needs, *such as* material, cultural and spiritual ones, while fully respecting the environmental constraints. At present, to make it possible worldwide, on a global scale, it is necessary to redefine the socio-political institutions and processes on local, regional and global levels.” [Metodika ... 2003 page 5].

Sustainable development, above all, signifies a balance between three basic fields of our existence-economic and social aspects, and the environment [Zákon... 2001].

For these reasons, civil engineering graduates should have, besides professional education, also some knowledge of the so-called sustainable development problems and of everything that is connected with human settlement from the point of view of the influence of construction development on the society and its way of life.

If we think about sustainable development in areas which are affected by construction activity, we must admit that most of what surrounds us is buildings. Man needs a building in order to have:

1. a place to live (to keep oneself warm and dry),
2. a place to work (in the last decades, in Europe, North America and other parts of the world, most of the inhabitants have ceased to work in agriculture, so they need buildings for their jobs),
3. means of transport
4. a place for recreation (theatres, cinemas, entertainment centres, restaurants, etc.)

We build every construction primarily for the desired effect. The effect always means different things to people of different professions:

- to an economist – an effect, a profit,
- to a producer or company owner – the profit from production,
- to a future occupant – *a place to live*,
- to a statesman – jobs in a region, flats etc.,
- to an architect – an outstanding building where s/he can prove his/her skills,
- to a sociologist – stability of the social system,
- to an ecologist – preservation of the natural environment, etc.

In this context, we ask ourselves the question about the social aspects of sustainable development and the kind of knowledge a civil engineering student or graduate should possess. The knowledge which civil engineering graduates should have is directly connected with the environment, and from the viewpoint of sociology, with sociology of cities, which deals with everything connected with human settlement. This knowledge facilitates the analysis of social aspects. Nowadays, these aspects are reflected in civil engineering.

What kind of knowledge should a civil engineering student have to deal with the problems in this field?

It is very important to be aware of the impact of civil engineering on the environment and the society as an entire complex or individual parts in regions, cities, and villages – the social aspects of sustainable development.

Knowledge of the relationships between science, engineering, and the society.

The knowledge of sociology, which means social, or possibly socio-psychological knowledge, regarding social competence in making decisions.

1. The knowledge of the contemporary society and its gradually changing social structure. The main trend is the decrease in the amount of industry workers, the growth of middle class, and the steadily increasing wealth of a small but richest part of the population.

2. From the point of view of a dwelling, the needs are connected with the characteristics of a particular social group, i.e., their status or age. The residential, professional, and vital needs differ depending on the type of people and such factors as the possession of children, being of working age, prior to it (e.g. adolescents) or past working age.

3. A graduate should have the basic knowledge of needs and behaviour of the above-mentioned groups, their views on, e.g., territory, transport, materials, and colours, i.e. factors, which contribute to feelings of well-being in a place (together with the knowledge that these factors are largely individual preferences).

4. More questions concern the awareness of continuity in the building space, with ancient building and transport solutions; this is the viewpoint of historical retrospective, but also of the future (from the sociocultural viewpoint).

5. The continuity of urban area usage is very important for changes in the development, in reconstructions, and particularly in new uses, as in the case of the so-called brownfields, which are *reused* nowadays.

6. A civil engineering graduate should be aware, also in connection with the legal regulations on EIA procedure, of the social aspects of this procedure.

7. A graduate should receive particular information on the possible application of the results of sociological research of the above-mentioned problems as well as many other issues. Graduates will not conduct research, but they should be familiar with their scope [Šafránková 2003, p. 227-233].

## CONCLUSION

In my essay, I wanted to present some views on and approaches to architecture in the context of sociology. Sociological and psychological aspects of the influence of architecture can be observed in connection with man, his perception and needs, as well as from the viewpoint of buildings in a space and their symbolism, which influences us.

At the same time, I believe that architecture also has a socio-economic dimension, as it symbolises the socio-economic status of a building's owners.

The relationship between architecture and sociology is also part of the topical idea of sustainable development. Sustainable development of architecture may consist in architecture which has a positive influence on human perception, and satisfies human aesthetic needs, as well as needs for safety, well-being, and security. Lastly, architecture should also have an *inner* positive charge to be able to attract a person's concern, which seems inevitable in the contemporary fast-paced era.

The students and graduates of particular majors at a college of civil engineering should be made aware of the above-mentioned aspects and encouraged to apply *this knowledge* in their co-operation with architects.

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SOCJOLOGICZNE I PSYCHOLOGICZNE ASPEKTY ARCHITEKTURY  
I PRZESTRZENI MIEJSKIEJ

**Streszczenie.** Architektura i przestrzeń miejska odgrywają ważną rolę pośród socjologicznych i psychologicznych czynników, które wpływają na ludzi i ich samopoczucie. Socjologia i psychologia badają rolę architektury w świadomym kształtowaniu przestrzeni miejskiej w XXI w. Zagadnienie to jest kluczowe z punktu widzenia zrównoważonego rozwoju, jak również edukacji absolwentów inżynierii budownictwa i socjologów miasta.

**Słowa kluczowe:** przestrzeń miejska, socjologia, psychologia

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