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## University as a terminal: socio-material infrastructure for post-neoliberal society

Krzysztof Nawratek, University of Sheffield

Abstract:

*Using as a pretext design proposals for University of Silesia's campus urban development, made by the students of the second year Master of Architecture programme at the University of Plymouth in the academic year 2014-1015<sup>1</sup>, the chapter explores the possibilities and conditions of existence of special urban territories, excluded from the logic of short-term profit. These type of territories exist / could exist based on different value systems, and the purpose of their existence and development should be defined based on logics going beyond the financial gain of individual or collective actors. The chapter focuses on the possibilities of the occurrence of urban spaces enabling social experiments, allowing testing post-capitalist future in a context of contemporary Polish university campus.*

Something interesting starts to appear in Katowice<sup>2</sup> - just recently local protests against some unwanted development and some stronger opposition to the Katowice city council' policy appeared; one can see more vocal local intellectual elite (in local civic associations and in the University) capable of expressing their opinions of crucial problems of the city. Katowice (or Upper Silesia region in general) is not the center of Polish urban studies or urban activism (although Professor Marek Szczepanski from the University of Silesia is a well-respected researcher, expert of new town Tychy, located nearby Katowice), however, it does not mean that there is no in-depth reflection on urban issue in the city. There are two places where this reflective thought could be found - the University (where Professor Tomasz Nawrocki leads a new center for urban studies) and (more or less formal) local groups of activists.

In 2014, on the invitation from the University of Silesia, along with students of the final year of Master Programme at the University of Plymouth I have visited Katowice. We were invited to work on a project of spatial development of university campus ('academic quarter'). Behind the invitation and project we have been working on, lies the dream of a friendly university, open to residents of Katowice, expressed by Deputy Vice-Chancellor Professor Ryszard Koziółek (Koziółek 2014), who personally invited us to Katowice. His dream, as we could guess, was not shared by all policy makers in the City Council and at the University. There is a fear of the students, as a group of loud young people who are drink too much and behaving in a funny way. It is obviously not only Polish fear or prejudice; it is similar in Plymouth, Sheffield, Belfast and many other British university towns. In Poland universities are (at least partly) autonomous and independent from direct political pressure, therefore there is always a possibility of a political tension between the

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1 On the invitation of Professor Ryszard Koziółek, a group of students in their final year of the Master of Architecture programme at the University of Plymouth, under my (Krzysztof Nawratek) supervision has worked in the academic year 2014-2015 on development projects of the academic district in Katowice. Students were in Katowice for nearly two weeks gathering information and conducting various types of consultation (see: <https://www.us.edu.pl/warsztaty-i-spotkania-dotyczace-dzielnicy-akademickiej-z-udzialem-studentow-pod-opieką-dr-krzysztofa>) and then over the next few months, they have produced several variants of development proposals.

2 Katowice is a capital of the Silesia Voivodeship. The region is one of the main industrial centres of Poland, traditionally strongly connected to coal mining. Katowice has unsuccessfully applied to become a European Capital of Culture in 2016, but in the process several new cultural institutions were created and a new generation of young urban activists emerged. Katowice is still relatively rich city, unemployment (3,8% in December 2015) is much lower than in the Silesia Voivodeship (10%) and the country (10.3%).

University and a City Council. However, in Katowice the real reason of this lack of enthusiasm towards idea of open and friendly university lays probably more in a modernist view of the city than in any political or cultural tensions.

The idea of strict zoning – the notion of the city with precisely spatially defined functions, is still pretty strong in Katowice. This is a modernist attitude, leading to sorting functions, to dividing the city into specialized areas. Urban planning based on fragmentation is somehow related to the *identity politics* focused on strongly defined unique subjects. However, there is an alternative to this kind of urban development and politics. The city, especially the contemporary 'mongrel' city (Sandercock 2003) is a concoction of different functions and different residents. What makes city unique as a political entity is its spatiality, allowing diverse logics to operate simultaneously, side by side, potentially without any interaction. So, the city has an ability to unify and integrate but in the same moment it could protect weaker actors, could allow a creation of autonomous spheres (they are not necessary spatial zones) and local experimentations.

The city is created not only out of buildings and spaces but also out of regulations, laws, conventions, culture. This means that architecture should not focus solely on buildings, but on buildings and spaces in the context of socio-political, cultural and economic conditions (Awat et al., 2011). Therefore, the Katowice project was not only a question of the 'best' (urban or architectural) solution but above all the question of alliances. Before discussing the architecture and urban planning as particular spatial practices, we need to ask questions in the field of ethics and social sciences, and finally, political questions, questions about priorities and hierarchies.

Cities (also in Poland) still have land, buildings, infrastructure; the city has money from the budget and the possibility to impose local taxes. The city is equipped with an army of officers and employers at cultural institutions. It is relatively easy to imagine a development policy focused on its residents, both permanent and temporary (such as students). The university is in an even better position: it has certain level of autonomy to afford socio - spatial experiments.

One of the key concepts I would like to consider here is the notion of sphere | territory as the general conditions necessary for the formation and development of subjectivity. Sphere | territory is a notion not necessary based on ownership, as will become evident when looking at the example of the discussing “Rojava revolution” (Nawratek 2015a), but it cannot be ignored that the land / territory could provide an essential support (becoming an essential , “natural” infrastructure) to create the social and political subject. As the Declaration of YAJK (Free Women's Union of Kurdistan) (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan, 2016) states:

*Before everything, women's ideology cannot exist without land. The art of harvest and the art of production are connected to women's artistry. This means that the first principle of the women's ideology is a woman's connection to the land she is born on; in other words, patriotism.*

YAJK's patriotism has nothing to do with xenophobia, and, furthermore, it is patriotism that is not built on the politics of identity, patriotism, which does not demand their own state. Such patriotism is full of respect and concern for continuous negotiation of various land users: land is seen by YAJK as an inclusive infrastructure. The way how land is defined by YAJK is one of the most perfect materialization of the notion of sphere | territory (Nawratek, 2015a):

*The base space becomes then a common space, a shared 'plane', which is used – cultivated by the members of the community. Again – the emphasis on the community as an entity composed of diverse elements, is only conceivable if the possessive relationship with the land is rejected, and the land is accepted as a multifaceted entity that allows various groups to use it in various ways; the entity existing outside of now, submerged in the past and at the same time reaching into the future.*

Lets now return to the Katowice project and to the question of the specifics of urbanity. Warren Magnusson (2014) shows that the city is rooted in a particular political ontology that makes urban political entity drastically different from the political body of the national state. The city is much more corporal; its residents are much more physically interacting with its materiality comparing to interaction with a national state, which is strongly grounded in the symbolic sphere of ideas and ideologies. Paradoxically, the dominance of praxis over symbolism, corporeal-material practical interactions over identity politics makes the city more open to accepting post-political, technocratic governance. This openness makes city potentially vulnerable and its governing body not really interested in any social experimentations. Obviously, the symbolic sphere does exist in the city, therefore, it cannot be ignored while talking about urban phenomena. For example, while city politicians in Katowice use the phrase "academic quarter", they underline its separation from the city, its uniqueness and autonomy. By doing this, they ignore that in the current "academic quarter" of the city, several non-academic functions are located, and there are also several residential tower blocks and few run-down social houses. Therefore, to avoid segregation as an urban practice, we should start with a new, more inclusive language, focused on interactions, knowledge production and openness. By adopting such a language, we will be able more freely talk about the university campus as a part of the city center while retaining autonomous (which means allowing for greater freedom in experimenting) the management of this area. Seen from such a perspective, the University of Silesia could be seen as potentially a strong space of democratic producing of socially useful knowledge, the space where this knowledge is tested and applied.

Therefore, one of the projects (Heracleous et al., 2014) created by my students asks the question about a post-coal Silesia, of Silesia, of Silesia, of Silesia, where the energy production is still an essential part of the regional economy, but it is a new, more 'green' production. The University of Silesia is not a technical university; nobody should expect historians engaged in research on geothermal sources, although the departments of physics, chemistry and biotechnology could be involved in research on new energy sources. Even if humanities and social sciences are not directly related to research in the technicality of post-coal Silesia, there is still a question of social structures and cultures of this new society: this is a space where University of Silesia could be engaged. This engagement could go beyond theory: it could become a program of social and cultural experimentations.

The idea that university could be seen as a laboratory for social change is also essential for another project (Duffill et al., 2014) whose starting point, influenced strongly by Guy Standing's (2014) work on precarity is the fact of endemic employment of young people on temporal ('zero hours') contracts. This type of contract puts young people in a highly precarious position, making any long term life plans almost impossible. Social insecurity, precarious life is something against which, according to the authors of the project, the University should work in a much more proactive way. The authors of the project (being students themselves) believe

that university as a strong, wealthy and influential social institution should help its graduates to avoid a fate of social and economic instability. The project put a university in a position of an active actor supporting creating students' cooperatives – becoming an incubator of alternative (post-capitalist?) economic activities. Interestingly, authors of this project do not shy away from the involvement of private capital, for example, by allowing the construction of dormitories by private developers. However, but this 'deal with the devil' is needed to get the funds required to help students in the creation of new, sustainable and more innovative jobs. It is not 'anti-capitalist' vision, but rather kind of transition way or the hybrid model of growing new ideas out of existing economic regime<sup>3</sup>. It implies a deliberate release of part of available resources (land, buildings) in order to strengthen the autonomy, including financial, of remaining part of the public university. Spatially such a solution would create a structure of 'patchwork', fragments of privatized land mingled with fragments owned and managed by the University. This solution needs university to become a very smart player, able to secure key spaces and buildings, allowing control of the private fragments (Hillier, 1996).

The question of a relationship between the university and other actors is important in all projects. One of them focuses directly on an idea of University-NGOs hybrid (Bush et al. 2014). On the one hand, the project attempts to create an 'open-source' university, on the other it wants to put students beyond academia, but not into any for-profit organisation. The project creates another spatial patchwork, academia-NGOs concoction, hoping to build conditions for new, hybrid post-academic identity. The project is interesting because of two reasons: - it focuses on creating the set of conditions, without defining precisely an end-product (it is still an unique approach in architecture projects), and ; it attempts to imagine an academic education beyond academia. Yet, it does not happen, as it is nowadays often expected, in a purely commercial environment.

The authors of another interesting project (Oxley et al., 2014) decided to respond radically to the declaration of Professor Koziółek about building a friendly University, open for all citizens of Katowice. In their proposal, University of Silesia become a 'shelter autonomous zone', offering space and infrastructure to marginalized groups: homeless people, addicts, poor, neglected children. The radical character of their proposal is especially visible in their architectural proposal (Oxley, 2015): they want a Social Work department building to become a night shelter for the homeless - being open for them also during the day. In this proposal the building belongs more to homeless people than to students and staff member. This project has a pretty strong pedagogical justification, as it allows students to interact (from day one of their academic career) with the group of people they will be working with when they graduate.

All of these projects see the university as a special place – not only as the place of knowledge production but as a place to practice virtue and social responsibility. It is, therefore, a model of the *socially engaged university*, going far beyond a reductionist vision of neoliberal academia serving the needs of 'the market' and evaluating all human activities from financial perspective. It should be relatively easy to imagine another "special place" analysing a position of Royal Castle of Wawel, the heritage center in Kraków, which is one of the cornerstones of Polish national identity. Wawel is a vital tourist destination, but the tourist function is just a derivative of logic unrelated to a contemporary capitalist system.

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3 This perspective is inspired by work of The Foundation for P2P Alternatives <https://blog.p2pfoundation.net/>

There is an ongoing discussion on a position of architecture and architects in the field of a struggle for social justice - very interesting is the voice of Reiner de Graaf, a partner in OMA, one of the most influential architectural companies in the world. De Graaf (2015) writes:

*If you study the history of architecture, and particularly that of the last century, a striking confluence emerges between what Piketty identifies as the period of the great social mobility and the emergence of the Modern Movement in architecture, with its utopian visions for the city. From Le Corbusier to Ludwig Hilberseimer, from the Smithsons to Jaap Bakema: after reading Piketty, it becomes difficult to view the ideologies of Modern architecture as anything other than (the dream of) social mobility captured in concrete*

So if we are serious about any (progressive) changes in our cities, two conditions must be fulfilled. Firstly, we must dream, and our dream must be founded on a particular system of ethics (De Graaf says that hard work is the value, not inherited wealth). Secondly, we need to create an infrastructure which will allow this dream to become reality. Neoliberal anthropology sees humans as competing individuals, as an outcome, we get inequality and social hierarchies are seen as natural and unchangeable. All projects presented in this chapter are coming from very different anthropological perspective. They regard people as cooperating persons. In this perspective, social hierarchies are questioned, and individual wealth is, at least, suspicious: only what serves a common good can be justified.

Let's also consider the second condition I have mentioned above: the construction of infrastructure of progressive change. Katowice is an interesting example of a city that is expanding something what could be called "infrastructure of conservative reproduction". On the one hand, the city issued hundreds of millions euro on the so-called "culture quarter", with several new buildings, such as new museum, concert hall and a conference center (another example of zoning in Katowice's urban planning), on the other hand, many buildings in the city are empty. Few months ago a group of local anarchists have attempted to squat one of these buildings but was stopped by police. The "Culture Quarter" is an example of creation an infrastructure for a conservative local elite, serving their aspirations to be seen as "cultured Europeans" but also allowing this elite to reproduce itself (conference center building as a part of 'culture quarter' is a good hint what the zone is all about: networking, meetings, cultural consumption, reproduction of hierarchies).

An infrastructure for progressive changes would be something very different to infrastructure for conservative reproduction. First of all, it would be built out of existing urban resources, but it would also focus on the city's inhabitants. The notion of "*radical inclusivity*" (Nawratek 2015) means that any waste and exclusion is wrong, therefore existing spaces, buildings and other elements of built environment must be used for a common good, but this perspective also rejects any social exclusion. The "Never Happened" Squat in Katowice would be a good example of such a progressive infrastructure. The idea was to use the unused building for a benefit of Katowice's inhabitants, also from marginalised groups: homeless, immigrants, unemployed. Modern turbo-capitalism is a highly inefficient system: it leaves a lot of buildings and spaces as unused waste, it also produces people that nobody needs. Contemporary turbo-capitalism is stuck in a vicious circle of financial speculation; it produces less and less things that are universally (socially) useful. Contemporary cities could choose to follow the mainstream neoliberal logic or oppose it. They have means to do it, cities

are owners of buildings and land, under their governance they have schools, cultural and social centers and (sometimes) universities. There are also religious centers and sports centers, parks and roads. There is (unfortunately) an army of unemployed people and a crowd of pensioners who very often would love to become more socially engaged.

The “alternative” urban development strategy is not the universal one, it must be site-specific because it is based on local, existing conditions and resources. But it is not impossible to create (and there are several cities where it was successfully done: Barcelona, Bologna, Curitiba, Bogota, just to name a few). The seeds of such post-neoliberal thinking are present in the contemporary world (Gibson-Graham, 2005), even if there are not too many examples of holistic post-capitalist urban development strategies'. The fundamental condition is not technological, but strategic and intellectual: it requires the adoption of the non-individualistic perspective of agency achieved out of cooperating persons, not competing individuals.

One of the several interesting strategies to analyse and to learn from one could find in Cleveland (Kruth, 2016). Health-Tech Corridor is the largest economic project in the city, founded on cooperation between three the major players of the city: city council, University and Hospitals. Then, there is a company which was created by these key actors to 'mediate' between their diverse economic interests and the society – the Evergreen Cooperative. This solution was so innovative and so successful that was coined the Cleveland Model. The Cleveland Model is a strategy of hacking the system: local players have agreed to work towards keeping land value low to prevent land speculation. If the land speculation is unprofitable, then more productive usage of the land is possible. Still, of course, we are dealing with capitalism, but it is not a neo-liberal model where scale and territory do not matter (Staniszki, 2012). This model is very much spatial: different parts of the land are governed by various regulations. Neoliberalism accepts external spaces where capital can escape state regulations, in the form of tax havens, and in general, in the form of outsourcing. The Cleveland Model creates internality: the particular type of territory, where the relationships between economy and society are adamant. This is a model that has inspired the projects of University of Silesia campus development. Taking as a starting point a classic text by Ronald Coase, “*The Nature of the Firm*” (1937), an edge can be defined, where market relationships become less efficient than other kinds of management (in time he developed a theory on transactional cost, which gave him a Nobel Prize in 1991):

*...a firm will tend to expand until the costs of organizing an extra transaction within the firm become equal to the costs of carrying out the same transaction by means of an exchange on the open market or of organizing in another firm.*

Coase analysed businesses, but his text can also be a starting point to analyse the contemporary neoliberal city. It makes a useful distinction between “natural”, competitive environment of the market, where all actions are made based on price mechanism, and more “sophisticated” structure of the firm, where actions are made based on plan and strategy. This distinction looks very similar to a position of an ancient Greek Polis – as an entity built on deliberated political will. There is an internal sphere “inside” the city where the survival and development of the community (of city's residents and users) is the most important objective; and there is an “external sphere”, where logic of competition and profit operates. Cities are not able to change what outside, but still may, to a much greater extent than they governments would like to

admit, shape the rules of the game on its own territory.

Architecture as such also has the potential of becoming the infrastructure for social change. Every building, from the simplest shed to the technologically sophisticated high-rise, can be seen in a context of matter and energy flows. Every building, even the most environmentally unfriendly, is an actor in local ecological systems: building consumes energy, produces waste, channels rainwater. It is used by plants and animals as shelter or a place to grow on. Every building exists in two dimensions: internally, being a kind of "black box" and externally, by interacting with the environment. Architects tend to focus really on internality of buildings, the only external dimension they take into consideration is the building's look. It is a mistake because this approach reduces buildings to separate silos. In reality, buildings are rather nodes in the network of diverse socio-political, economic and cultural processes. Seeing architecture as a spatial manipulation of energy and matter in a context of a wider ecological field would change drastically the way how buildings would be designed. Master students from the University of Plymouth while working in Katowice have tried to use this holistic approach to their projects for University of Silesia' campus.

The phenomenon of inclusiveness on a scale of a building or city depends on an ability to support unconditionally any user. This lack of any preconditioning is crucial in order to discuss political or social systems: inclusivity is often challenged by a notion of unity. Socio-political systems have a tendency to totalize fragments into the unified whole. The city could be seen as an 'un-unified'. "City" exists always in a plural form: its fragments could be alien or even hostile to each other, but, if designed properly, this hostility is not challenge the city as a whole. While discussing tensions and antagonisms in society, and by putting it in a context of the city, we can endeavour to find a solution. Simple manipulation of space and time could make any antagonism irrelevant. The multi-storey building is not only an attempt to multiple capitalizations of a value of the land where the building is located, but it is (can be) successful attempt to circumvent the tension of several actors attempts to use the same piece of land.

So, talking about the building (or a campus) as a terminal, I mean the possibility of using of the building in diverse ways by different users (human and non-human actors). The building becomes much more than just a postmodern game with various meanings; the building is much more than just a container for functions and technologies (Pawley, 1998). It becomes a terminal, a part of the inclusive infrastructure, allowing the technological, social and political experiments. It becomes a 'universal socket' (it could easily be pre-fabricated and mass-produced) allows to plug-in new experimental structures (built and unbuilt).

When the public square is occupied by any political group, this group could force users of the square to behave in a certain way, attempting to form a political subject. Whatever they do, they are not able to completely erase an inclusive potential of the square, which 'essence' allows anybody to walk, jump, sit or lay on the ground. What restricts such actions is (often) not a square as a physical space (material infrastructure) but conventions, social pressure, norms or regulations. Each space (material infrastructure) has this residual element of openness, some kind of 'free radical', having the potential of diverse interpretations and usage. Space, objects and buildings unify and connect its users on a functional level: users of a bus are connected by the fate of the machine, students of the University of Silesia are united by space and activities (mostly pedagogical) organised by the institution.

In conclusion, what I believe that is needed is an external framework that will allow us to create a sphere for experimentations – the sphere | territory I have mentioned at the beginning of this text. This external framework marks a gap, distance from the mainstream neoliberal context, and it is defined by time and/or space and/or regulations.

Projects done by students of Master of Architecture programme at the Plymouth University for the University of Silesia campus show how the University can take advantage of available resources (land, buildings, students, researchers, general public) to create the infrastructure for social experimentations, to extend extremely narrow, business-focused objectives of the neoliberal university. These projects are realistic – they could be executed without any bigger problem. There are no actual technical or financial constraints preventing a university to do it. The only obstacle is the lack of a political will and imagination.

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