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THE *LUDUS* SPACE AS A PART OF THE REVITALIZATION PROJECT OF THE CITY OF KIELCE

Key words: ludus, museum, revitalization, city.

ABSTRACT

The director of the Museum of Toys and Play describes the role of her institution in the process of development of new *ludus* festive space in Kielce. The seat of the Museum, together with the revitalized neighbouring square will function as the main city square – the agora. It will become a place devoted to family entertainment and play and, at the same time, it will contribute to the development of the sense of regional identity. The author shows the strength of toy making traditions in Kielce and indicates that the creation of a permanent area for play and recreation will become not only a marker of Kielce urban character but will also positively influence the process of identification of the inhabitants with the city. The reconstruction of the 19th-century building of a former market and opening of the Museum of Toys and Play on the premises, constitute the first step towards development of a new social function of this part of the city, which so far has been neglected in terms of aesthetics and functionality. Additionally, the large neighbouring square devoted to recreation and entertainment will enhance cultural activities of the city, contribute to the creation of a better image of Kielce, increase the city's attractiveness for tourists and investors and help develop the city of Kielce as a new metropolis.

Kielce is a provincial capital situated in the heart of the Świętokrzyskie Mountains in central Poland (Fig. 1). The city has approximately 200,000 inhabitants and it is the capital of one of the most popular tourist regions in Poland. However, its outstanding merits in Poland's history as well as cultural heritage have unfortunately been fairly neglected in the process of Kielce's dynamic growth. In many aspects, the city is quite run down and its oldest parts need proper land management and revitalization.

The city authorities made a momentous decision to allocate a building lot for the seat of the Museum of Toys and Play. On the one hand, this decision shows that this part of the city will not become a stagnant quarter, i.e. a quarter where buildings and technical infrastructure will decapitalize. On the other hand, it became obvious that in

this part of the revitalized quarter of the city, *ludus* functions will be developed (Fig. 2). What is more, those functions have become more apparent since the former Museum of Toys and Play broadened its scope of activities to include play (since March 9, 2006 in the new seat). Buildings of cultural, historical or sacral value as well as indispensable institutions are important assets of any city which aspires to develop some metropolis features. The Museum of Toys and Play, with its new seat in a historic building is one of such buildings in the Kielce urban area. It provides an attractive environment and urban landscape for the city inhabitants as this space has a great cultural value. Kielce's urban architecture is filled with history: the buildings are permanent elements of tradition and modern urban space.



Figure 1. Location of the city of Kielce



Figure 2. Museum of Toys and Play

The *ludus* space of a given city stays on its inhabitants' memory only when it is closely connected with their personal experiences and feelings. Play is always accompanied by emotions: usually feelings of happiness, content or celebration. When in their memories people return to places which used to be the arena of certain *ludus* events, they closely identify themselves with a given space. The future place of play in the Museum and its location in the main square (Freedom Square) will permanently stay in the collective memory of Kielce inhabitants, will be experienced by the entire city community and will become a part of local tradition. People feel free in play because play always takes place in the area of freedom, equality and voluntariness. According to Roger Caillois, play creates a certain area of freedom which exists among rigorous rules and, what is more, it makes those rules more effective [1]. All people, children, teenagers, adults, participate in plays. Grzegorz Odoj claims that when they do it together, a genuine *ludus* community is formed [2]. It is this *ludus* community that we shall attempt to create in the Museum of Toys and Play in Kielce, and in the neighbouring Freedom Square which will become the Museum's integral part.

Currently, the forms of *ludus* activity based on free and direct use of public space are becoming extinct. The space of play for children and adults

has become limited, which is a pity because, as Grzegorz Odoj suggests, *ludus* behaviour testifies to the presence of certain values and it also indicates changes taking place within culture, the approach towards culture and adopted cultural patterns [3].

According to recent research on land management in various cities, it is particularly advantageous if a city has the so-called space for celebration. Most often, it is the main city square which fulfills this function. In Kielce, apart from the main square, there is another large square situated in the neighbourhood of the Palace Hill, the main street and the oldest part of the city. This square may become a special space – a space for celebration. Play understood as an important cultural category is being researched in the Museum of Toys and Play in order to effectively deal with the problem of pathologization of play and autonomization of toys and play, i.e. separation from their natural environment. Passive entertainment and cultural crisis are being observed. In this context, the need for education connected with culture of free time seems pressing.



Figure 3. 2nd European Olympiad of Ancient and Forgotten Plays, Kielce, June 2008

In Kielce, the capital of the region and the city of metropolitan ambitions, there is no proper *agora* – Main Square. In ancient Greece, the *agora* was a place with numerous public utility buildings where citizens would gather. The Museum together with the square as an institution of public trust with its original nature and significant social functions, is to shape regional identity. Initial modernization plans for this place focus on play in its broad sense, including plays and games based on competition and generally known as *agon* (competitions,

tournaments, games). This is one of many ways of spending free time, when positive emotions are generated by the spirit of competition and by the use of one's own power, agility, strength and persistence. This type of *ludus* activities was presented during the European Olympiad of Ancient and Forgotten Plays (organized twice in the Freedom Square). In 2008, children and teenagers competed in such games as cricket, "Black Man", skittles, stilts, hoop roll, target throw and other team games.

Toy making and toy trade have been associated with many places in Kielce. Toys manufactured at home were sold directly in schools, at sports stadiums, from the stalls in Sienkiewicza Street, at markets and church fairs. At some point in the past, those toys were even exported to France and the Czech Republic.

The tradition of making folk toys from clay and wood in the south of Poland dates back to the late 19th century. Based on craftsmanship, local indoor production developed in the region in the 20th century. After World War II, the production was carried out in toy manufacturing co-operatives. The National Association of Toy Manufacturing Co-operatives had its headquarters in Kielce. The association comprised more than 80% of all toy production enterprises that operated in Poland. The establishment of the Museum of Toys came as a sort of necessity when the domestic toy market became dominated by products from South East Asia. The Museum is therefore historically conditioned. After moving to its new seat, the Museum extended its scope of activities to include play. One of the reasons for such an expansion was the location of the Museum near a large square, which is to fulfill recreation and leisure functions after it is rebuilt and modernized.

The Museum in the Freedom Square fits the context of the place. The square, which was built at the end of the 19th century as the central part of the modern quarter of the city, was to assume the functions of the new city square. It was connected with the new land management plan, according to which the centre of the city was to be moved from Rynek to this new square situated between Hipoteczna, Słowackiego, Ewangelicka and Śniadeczkiego streets. At the beginning, it was called Bazarowy Square (Market Square). In 1918, it was officially renamed Freedom Square, in the wake of national euphoria connected with Poland's regaining independence.

It is important for Kielce to become a good place to live in. According to Wiesław Baryła, social sociologist from the University of Gdańsk, in order to create such a place, numerous conditions, more or less significant, have to be fulfilled. The most important issues are compatibility of past, present and future as well as the existence of history and ... magic. (...) Every kind of place can be created, but not everything can be achieved in a given place. According to Baryła, the past and present measures and future aims have to be coherent. The influence of myths on people's behaviour is of crucial importance (...). Positive myths and local elites are more important than money [4].

The Museum of Toys and Play together with the Freedom Square as a *ludus* space in Kielce constitute a part of the project of revitalization of the city centre. In brief, the role of the Museum following the current changes will be that of a centre which influences people to become more than just the city's "users". In other words, it is to create a society of people with close bonds to their place of residence. In Kielce, the urbanization process is still taking place and its measurable results, especially those connected with the popularization of urban lifestyle, still remain to be seen. The creation of attractive buildings of historic, artistic and cultural nature in the oldest part of Kielce will have and, in fact, already has a symbolic importance. Attachment to urban space, which is strongly linked with historical tradition, testifies to the wealth of cultural heritage. This natural phenomenon is already taking place, but the outcome of revitalization will depend on the quality of cultural capital (mentality of Kielce inhabitants, their state of mind, manners, etc.).

Renovation and modernization of the building called "Pod Zegarem" at Freedom Square 2 for the Museum's needs revealed a high level of social acceptance for this kind of revitalization activities. Before revitalization, the building of the former 19th-century Municipal Fair Halls was in very bad condition. The emphasis on its cultural value, both now and in the future, enhances the aesthetic value of public space and fulfills important social functions, which facilitate the development of trade and services. What is more, a properly managed historic public space increases the quality of life of the city inhabitants, offering for them places for walks, recreation and intensive social communication.

The Museum in Kielce also plays an important marketing role through protection and exhibition of outstanding cultural values as a part of tourist development.

Numerous researchers of revitalization and renovation of urban spaces point to various benefits of revitalization, such as strengthening the place's identity, stimulating inhabitants' activity, developing tourism, decreasing social pathologies or raising the prestige of hitherto neglected places. In the case of the Museum building, a particular historic value has been restored.

The renovation of individual buildings situated in the walking areas of Kielce is a part of development of a multi-function tourist centre. The renovation of the Museum building as one part selected from a larger entity, will lead to considerable economic and social growth of the city.

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