

Public space – opportunity or threat of the city

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Abstract

This paper deals with the city public space and its management dimension. Public space is taken as a product of the city, product which is limited in the final amount, product which is used by the people, product which facilitate social connection and its development as well as it helps the local businesses (services).

Key words: activity, public spaces, local government.

JEL Classification: R00

1 Introduction

There is a growing interest amongst academics and politicians including the role of public spaces in a urban life. Public space is a partial unit of the city and it is quite important for the social life of people living, working - or just hanging around in their leisure time - in the city. Field which is this paper focused on is the question of importance of the public space management from the local authorities in the city.

2 Perception of the public space

It is possible to interpret a term such as *public space* in many different ways. In the Czech Republic there is the binding definition published in the Act No. 128/2000 Coll., on Municipalities (municipal establishments), in Section 34. This Act says what exactly the public space means: “The term ‘public places’ shall mean all squares, streets, marketplaces, pavements, public green areas, parks and other places publicly accessible without restriction, i.e. places serving for public use regardless of the ownership of such places.” This interpretation brings disadvantages to public space management, because it touches the private owner sovereignty. So regardless of the ownership of such place the management should be in charge of keeping the concepts, plans and policies and following the long term development ideas.

Carmona [2] (2008:4-5) and his colleagues defined in their work public space in two ways; broadly and narrowly. The wider¹ explanation included parts of the built and natural environment, public and private, internal and external, urban and rural, where the public have

¹ It encompasses: all the streets, squares and other rights of way, whether predominantly in residential, commercial or community/civil uses; the open spaces and parks; the open countryside; the ‘public/private’ spaces both internal and external where public access is welcomed – if controlled – such as private shopping centres or rail and bus stations; and the interiors of key public and civic buildings such as libraries, churches, or town halls.

free access. Second definition was established with the care of the problems (some examples are privately owned and managed and connected to private property rights – the right to exclude; shopping centre is internal rather than external and is closed at certain times of the day or night; intensity of activity in the open countryside is highly small) produced by the wide concept of the term. Narrowly² defined public space relates to all those parts of the built and natural environment where the public has free access. It includes the interfaces with key internal and external and private spaces to which the public normally has free access.

As early as we can start to hunt the true meaning of this words we will find out it seems to be impossible to find the only one specific meaning which would be used by authorities all over the world. Works from many disciplines such as geography, cultural studies, politics, criminology, sociology or planning and architecture work with this field and have tried to define the role of public space as well as understand current changes and their consequences. Carmona (2008:3) This paper will base on the definition presented in Act on Municipalities. Some municipalities partially modified (increased) cited meaning in their regulations in the Czech Republic.

It is already written above, that places serving for public use regardless of the ownership of such places are called public spaces. Public space management is closely connected with use and changing nature of contemporary public space; coessential is the quality of the space. Helpful in this case are words of the Act on Municipalities. There, in Section 10, gives the Act to a municipality the right to bestow obligations within the scope of independent competence by adopting a generally binding regulation:

a) in order to ensure local matters of public order; a municipality may, in particular, specify which activities that might disturb public order in the municipality or contradict good morals or the protection of safety, health or property may be carried out exclusively in locations and a time determined by the generally binding regulation; or a municipality may specify that these activities shall be prohibited in certain public places;

b) with respect to the organisation, course and ending of sports and cultural events open to the general public, including dances and discotheques, by appointing binding provisions in the scope necessary for ensuring the public order;

c) in order to ensure the cleanliness of streets and other public places, to protect the environment, greenery in developed areas and other public greenery³) (hereinafter referred to as 'public greenery') and to use the facilities of the municipality serving for the needs of the public. Public space matters can be more detailed, if we would like to target the types – street, square, greenery, other - or elements/subtypes (e.g. street: riverbank, passage/arcade) of the places. About this writes more Šilhánková [3] (2003:10).

² It encompasses: all the streets, squares and other rights of way, whether predominantly in residential, commercial or community/civic uses; the open spaces and parks; and the 'public/private' spaces where public access is unrestricted (at least during daylight hours).

³ Section 3 of Decree No 190/1996 Coll., implementing Act No 265/1992 Coll., on entries of property and other material rights related to real property, as amended by Act No 210/1993 Coll. and Act No 90/1996 Coll., and Act No 344/1992 Coll., on the Property Register of the Czech Republic (the Cadastral Act), as amended by Act No 89/1996 Coll.

3 Quality of the public space

Quality task of local environment is highly required by members of the municipality (inhabitants, visitors). Public space is component of the city which mainly influences the quality of the local environment. Author Jan Gehl [4] (2008: 13) writes in his *Life Between Buildings* about connection between activities and quality (or low class quality) of the public space and deals mainly with the activities in the areas and factors which influence the activities in the theoretic concept amended by the live examples.

Another of the researches was made in London by the Ipsos MORI's Social Research Institute and was dedicated to satisfaction with the local area (see Illustration 1). In this illustration are answers on the most important questions close linked to human's feelings which wilfully or unknowingly decide about human activity in area (there is standard that more and longer positive – not criminal - activities are welcomed).

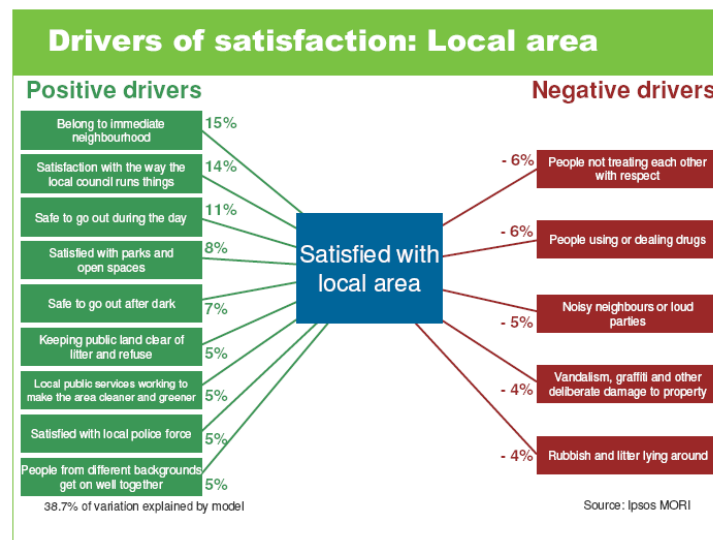


Illustration 1 Local area satisfaction⁴

Organisation Project for Public Spaces, inc.⁵ settled in New York defined answer on the question “What makes a successful place?” – it is Sociability Uses & Activities; Access & Linkages and Comfort & Image. All these factors affect the key outcomes such as satisfaction with the quality of life, community cohesion, feelings and rating of local services (local management).

“One of the most positive findings from our analysis is an increase in ratings of local quality of life, with 80% now saying they are satisfied with their area compared with 75% in 2006. This still tends to be lower in urban and more deprived areas.” Duffy and Lee Chan [5] (2009:5)

4 Public space as a product

Land as an economic good is limited. The restricting factor is the final amount of the land in one region, country or on the Earth (in the universe). Land is not the product of the human activity (not included for example: sea desiccation in the Netherlands or man-made islands in Dubai) but it is utilized in the production process. Increasing the amount of the accessible plot is more and

⁴ Source: [5] (Duffy and Lee Chan, 2009:24)

⁵ More about PPS organisation [on-line] URL: <<http://www.pps.org/>>.

more expensive with the lower supply (owners don't want to sell their land or they already sold all).

Land is untypical good so its characteristics have some specialities. The land supply is fixed in a short-term, in longer time is gets non-elastic. (See Illustration 2).

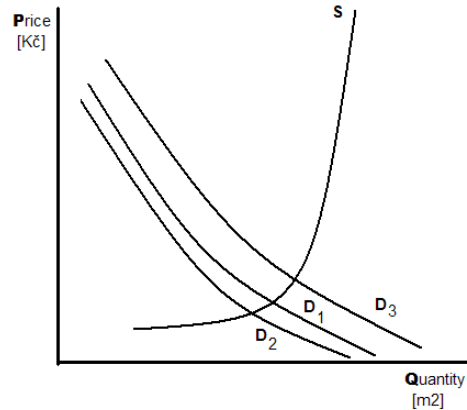


Illustration 2 Non elastic land supply⁶

Each land (plot) is unique by its location, physical characteristic, impact of the former use. There is range amount of methods how to judge the quality of the plot and specify the price for the land market, but the final price is result of the negotiation between seller and buyer.

Back to the public space. Each public space is connected with the area where it is situated. Difficulties are mainly two, a question of the ownership and the quantity (at this time the costs for foundation or daily care are not calculated). At this moment imagine public space as a product of the city, product which is offered to be used. The demand side acceptance brings the activities to the area, the outcome required by the management side.

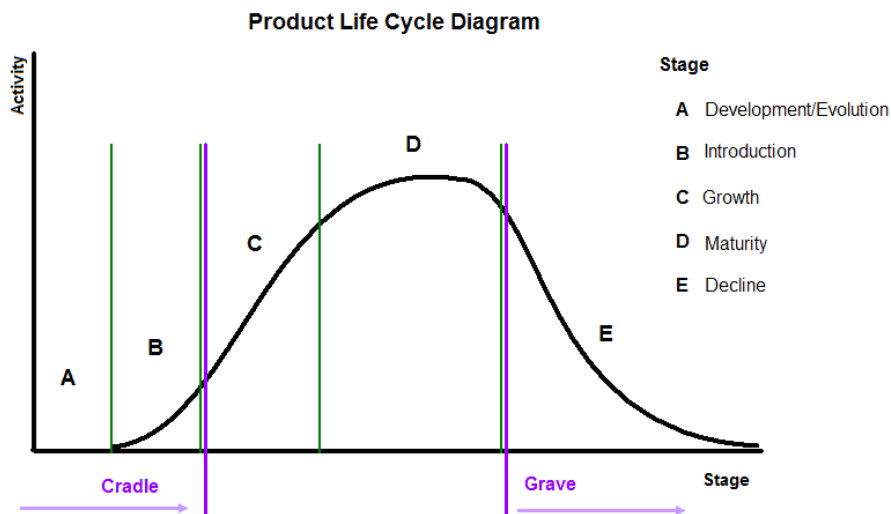


Illustration 3 Product Life Cycle Diagram

⁶ Source: [6] MAIER, K., ŘEZÁČ, V. (1994:16)

See Illustration 3 and focus on the space between cradle and grave. This part of the product life cycle diagram is the most important for the public space management. At this period are activities in the area growing and at the same time the costs paid for the everyday care are not higher than the “value” of the activities. Big question (still not answered) is how to quantify the activities to compare them with the expenses. This question is quite similar to the problem of the life quality and how to express it in money.

5 Management of the public space

Quality of the public space is clearly showed by the activities made by people as well as the activities made by people show the level of the public space quality. On the other hand place which worked some time ago doesn't have to work at this time too. “Public space reflects the impact (positive or negative) of the many different activities that constantly define and redefine the characteristics and quality of that space.” (Carmona 2008:3) For this ability it's impossible to let public space become stunted and it is important to work on progress.

The Czech Republic, there is the Czech Environmental Partnership Foundation (Nadace Partnerství) which drives the Public Spaces Program for improving quality of public space that is an integral part of our environment. The Program focuses at creation and revitalization of public spaces in villages and towns that are used as places for every day life and meeting places. Incorporating users of public space into planning and developing process is our key working principal.⁷ This organisation can help to local initiative who discovered some gaps in the range or quality of the public space and decided to active participate in the process.

But the main liability belongs to the local management. In the municipality view has to be good working public spaces with wide range of activities and other positive effects. Local manament lead the firm (city) and look for well being environment (product, servis). Illustration 4 demonstrate the wished (favourable) parts of the life cycle. Why is it so important? Because the source of the places is limited, so the efficient use should be high.

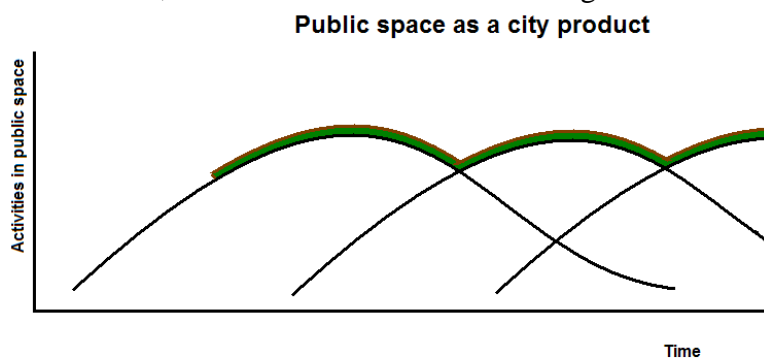


Illustration 4 Public space as a city product

As it is mentioned above, public space reflects the impact (positive or negative) of the many different activities. The local authorities affect behaviour of the people. Negative manners influence mostly by regulations, where define the restrictions and penalties, or positive behaviour influence by attractions and invitations.

⁷ More information is on Nadace Partnerství websites. [on-line] URL: <<http://www.nadacepartnerstvi.cz/p-13379>>.

6 Conclusion

Title of this paper, public space – opportunity or threat of the city, is not chosen causeless. Place opened for public brings the opportunities as well as problems, depends what kind of activities take place there.

On the other hand solution made in the area of blocks of flats where the management cleaned the public space so well that in that area didn't remain any possibilities where to sit and relax is not proper. Explanation of the local authorities was that the benches were used by teenagers as a meeting point and this way they solved the problem with noise, destruction and other negative effects. That's true, but they destroyed the potential for meetings other people too as well as they could open the opportunity for criminals now.

Importance and necessity of the public space in the city is clear. What is not so clear is the management of this area, because it is highly difficult to quantify the benefit (special the social one) which brings good/bad working public spaces.

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