

FRAGMENTATION AND IDENTITY OF A CITY

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O TOŻSAMOŚCI MIASTA W KONTEKŚCIE JEGO FRAGMENTACJI

Abstract

The objective of the article is to foster understanding complex relations underlying the issues of identity of contemporary cities. Dynamics of globalization has launched a process of fragmentation in all fields of human activity leaving visible traces in space. Fragmentation is often defined as an instrument of spatial and the social exclusion, associated with the processes of disintegration, homogenization and segregation. The contemporary fragmented city is observed as “a produced object” that Rem Koolhaas explains as The Generic City – the world of loneliness, individuality, ephemerality and transiency, which reject the significance of genius loci causing disappearance of identity and production of non-places, resulting degradation of public space.

Streszczenie

Celem pracy, zawierającej interpretacyjny wywód autorski inspirowany między innymi rozważaniami Rema Koolhaasa i Henry Lefebvra, pogłębiający rozumienie współczesnych procesów urbanizacyjnych (dotyczący symbolicznej i wizualnej tożsamości współczesnych miast na tle procesów dezintegracyjnych), jest pokazanie, jak owe procesy wpływają na funkcjonowanie miasta i jego strukturę, indukując fragmentację miasta (paradoksalnie, współistniejącą z homogenizacją jego struktury), która z kolei prowadzi do społecznej segregacji, alienacji, a nawet wykluczenia. Za punkt wyjścia do rozważań przyjęto zaprezentowaną przed kilku dekadami przez Rema Koolhaasa koncepcję Miasta generycznego, to jest interpretację współczesnego organizmu miejskiego jako przestrzeni indukującej samotność, charakteryzującej się efemerycznością struktur społecznych i ulotnością wartości, a przy tym odrzucającej tożsamość opartą na duchu miejsca, genius loci, co ostatecznie prowadzi do zaniku przestrzeni publicznych w ich dawnym znaczeniu, zastępowanych przez anonimowe nie-miejsca. Niniejsze rozważania stanowią zarazem próbę ponownej oceny Koolhasowskich i Lefebvre'owskich refleksji i też z perspektywy czasu (w przypadku Koolhaasa są to już ponad dwie dekady), z finalnym wnioskiem zaskakującej ich zbieżności z obserwowanymi zjawiskami urbanistycznymi i społecznymi.

Keywords: urban identity; urban semantics; generic city; fragmented city

Słowa kluczowe: tożsamość miasta; semantyka miasta; miasto generyczne; fragmentacja struktury miasta

*Looking at cities can give a special pleasure,
however commonplace the sight may be.*

Kevin Lynch¹

INTRODUCTION

Looking at cities initiates a variety of feelings, experiences and thoughts. This sphere of urban semantic, either direct or hidden, implies a number of queries. For example, which urban forms, their arrangements

or their changes influence our minds? Which offer us special pleasure, draw deep experience or inspire to subtle reflection? The questions of that kind refer to identity of a city.

THE ISSUE OF IDENTITY

According to Kevin Lynch², the image of a city consists of three key components that should be analyzed: (1) *identity*, (2) *structure* and (3) *meaning*. In fact, they always appear together. Among these components, there is a reciprocal causal relation: the identity determines the structure and meaning and *vice versa*.

These three components of a city are generated through the different layers of city structure; namely, of social, economic, political, cultural, historical, and all other relevant layers which are essential for the implementation of urban functions of the city. On the opposite, the fragmentation of an individual layer causes fragmentation of physical structure of urban space. The process is in progress, so the fragmented structure (the second component of the triad) inevitably changes the identity and meaning. Therefore, if fragmentation of any layer is accelerating, the city becomes fragmented as a whole.

Within this context of the semantic or physical connection between identity and fragmented city, this research is related to the issue of the existence and position of identity in contemporary urban distortions.

HYPOTHESIS AND QUESTIONS

The formal hypothesis is drawn as follows: *The modern technocratic society is looking for its identity, which is captured in the physical structure of a city.*

But, whilst this thesis seems intuitive and logic, is the second part of this statement true even in case of 'fragmented city'? Besides, the consecutive relevant questions relate to analysis of fragmentation on morphological and sociological levels: How can we find the identity of a city through the structure and meaning? Is the identity changed or completely lost, in terms of evolving understanding and changing functions of the city? Does the modern technocratic society really requires 'identity' captured in the physical 'fragmented' structure of a city? Or, should new urban identity be formed? Or maybe, this process is already in progress... If yes, is it comprehensible and does it seem acceptable for us?

The objective of the paper is to foster understanding the above-mentioned interrelations and dependencies underlying the issue of the identity of a city

RESEARCH METHODS

The research method includes inductive reasoning with parallel analysis of *The Generic City* (as a paradigm of the fragmented modern city) by Rem Koolhaas and dialectics of Henri Lefebvre who considered fragmentation in the socio-historical context.

1. THE DYNAMICS OF FRAGMENTATION

1.1. The origin and development of fragmentation

To understand the transformation of modern cities and the causes of their permanent fragmentation it is necessary to look at cities through a longer time perspective, considering the fact that Modernism underlined the multiplication and discontinuity, and Post-modernism emphasized the isolation of fragments. In the 60's, radical movements emphasized the disintegration of traditional urban spaces and glorified separate worlds of new facilities: shopping centers, gas stations, monotonous apartment buildings, etc. Have they, the *avant-garde* and radical spirit of the modern era, launched a massive fragmentation of existential sphere? Where are the sources of fragmentation?

Because of his dialectical approach in urban sociology, Henri Lefebvre finds the source of dynamic development of urbanization in the changes of the socio-historical context. He explains a linear flow of urbanization in terms of (dis)continuity from the zero point to the stage of complete urbanization. In that permanent process, there appear the phase transitions representing the production of space³. Apparently, this can be explained as the result of social changes in the structure of power among social groups through the transformation of ideological paradigms; so according to Lefebvre, urban space is inevitably a material and symbolic reflection of society. But on the other hand, if the industrial revolution marked the way towards the *commodification* of everything, and if according to Lefebvre, space has become a commodity like everything else, spacious fragmentation is expected. Lefebvre confirms that in such processes, namely, homogenization, fragmentation and *hierarchization* of space have been developed⁴. That triad of processes (as stated by Lefebvre) causes deconstruction of the triad of components (as noticed by Lynch).

Lefebvre explains, that homogenization is the initiator of production of *commodified area* in the city,

¹ K. Lynch (1990), *The Image of the City*, The M.I.T. Press, London, p. 1.

² *Ibidem*, p. 10.

³ M. Grbin (2013), *Lefebvrova misao u savremenju urbanoj sociologiji*, "Sociologija" 55.3, p. 476.

where space is reduced to equivalency. In common sense, homogenization results in production of the same or similar cities (generic), which do not glorify the strong identity of historic cities. The process of fragmentation, which is associated with homogenization of the fragments, results in the division of space through urban functions, producing: consumption spaces, production spaces, work spaces, residential spaces, tourist spaces, etc., and eventually, empty spaces. *Hierarchization* of space is accomplished through the segregation of society, which causes problems of *ghettoization*⁵.

Today, the contemporary city is observed as a produced object rather than a process. The city as an object or product can be reproduced, something that Rem Koolhaas explains as *The Generic city* in one of his essays⁶. In such generic structure, the identity in ideology that reflects the aspirations of individuals, classes and cultures, that produce space, has been visibly changed. Eventually, it implies the fundamental questions related to the ontology of architecture, such as the one asked by Radivoje Dinulović: "*How can architecture function in society whose essence is mercantile?*"⁷.

The answer can admit the following scenario: the functioning of architecture through fragmented ideology and fragmented identity. But in such context the functioning of society is questionable. Another alternative is as follows: functioning of architecture through ideology which doesn't need identity. Rem Koolhaas writes:

*"What if we are witnessing
a global liberation movement:
'Down with character!'*

What is left after identity is stripped? The Generic?"⁸

1.2. The Generic City

Generic City is the post-city, evolved at the site of the former city. It is fractal, formed of the infinite repetition of the same fragments, becoming same as infrastructure system, built by the users of consumer culture. This city is associated with *ephemerality*, speed, compression of time and space, differentiation and fragmentation. Rem Koolhaas links generic processes of the city to the phenomenon of mobility and he argues that the con-

vergence of the modern city and the modern airport is possible, but at the price of rejection of identity. Through the concept of a generic city Rem Koolhaas examines the lack of identity and advantages of emptiness.

In real *post-cities*, the lack of urban identity is accompanied by the loss of human-friendly proportions, but only an old city achieves the capability of regeneration. Nevertheless, the morphology is changeable: it is a city without certain forms and bounds, spreading in the horizontal and vertical plane. It has neither a center nor a suburb, which have been disappeared in the process of implosion and explosion of urban tissue. The oldest parts of the city (if there is something historical) necessary must become modern. Generic City abandons all that is outlived its use and accept all that is developing a new one. "*This city had a past, once*"⁹.

Eventually, Rem Koolhaas convinces that *Generic city* made the correct path, being the one that liberates of the historical identity and evolves towards "*...a new identity every Monday morning*"¹⁰.

2. LAYERS OF FRAGMENTATION

2.1. Morphological aspects: Disintegration and homogenization

Spatial fragmentation requires the previous disintegration (morphological) of the existing units, being the result of social, economic, cultural, ethnic, ideological and political fragmentation, caused by the avalanche of global social and economic trends. Generator of such processes is the dynamics of globalization that affects the city at the same time destructively and positively. On the one hand economic productivity of society becomes stronger, but on the other hand a coherence of traditional cities and social interaction within them are distorted. According to Jasenka Čakarić, fragmentation is not a contemporary process; it has always existed, but today receives immeasurable proportions in the urban space, society and culture.¹¹

Spacious fragments are changing views of the city, causing deformation of the linear perspective. In urban images some fragments take autonomy and some become isolated. Skyscrapers are definitive typology of fragmentation in the Generic city and Kool-

⁴ H. Lefebvre (2009), *State, Space, World: Selected Essays*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis + London, p. 212.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 210-222.

⁶ R. Koolhaas (1995), *Generic city*, in: *S,M,L,XL*, The Monacelli Press.

⁷ R. Dinulović (2012), *Ideološka funkcija arhitekture u društvu spektakla*, International Conference Architecture and Ideology (ULUPUDS), Beograd, *op.cit.*, p.5.

⁸ R. Koolhaas (1995), *Generic city...*, *op. cit.*, p. 1248.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 1249.

¹⁰ "*It is superficial like a Hollywood studio lot, it can produce a new identity every Monday morning*" (*ibidem*, p. 1260).

¹¹ J. Čakarić (2012), *Social and spatial fragmentation of the modern city*, [in] "Media Dialogues-journal for research of the media and society", Podgorica, pp. 490-491.

haas describes: „*The towers no longer stand together, they are spaced so that they don't interact.*”¹² Fragmentation, thus creates a discontinuity that may result in morphological chaos in which there are no differences between the city, suburbs and unbuilt parts. In the Generic City, a distance between the center and the periphery is increased to the breaking point. The consequences are the following:

1. The processes of gentrification are changing the main role of the central zone (traditional space as the largest urban diversity). Centers are becoming single-function zones: business zone, commercial and tourist center or the neighborhood for rich people. It is characteristic for the cities of Europe, to transform (in favor of mass tourism) historical sites into museums, negating all the diversity of urban space.¹³ As Koolhaas explains that avalanche of tourists, who, whilst researching history, „*grind successful identities down to a meaningless dust*”¹⁴. Traditional centers become weak in power and authority and it can be seen (according to Lefebvre) only as a reflection of the current social needs.

2. The peripherals (place of urban pathology) achieve positive effects, recognized as a zone of potential value.

3. Infinite variety of shopping centers, supermarkets, car workshops, fast food restaurants, parking lots are fragments of modern life. These spaces create an urban version of Lefebvre definitions of everyday process as „*...trivial, obvious or invisible everywhere and nowhere*”¹⁵. This means that everyday modern life has caused splitting, fragmentation and chaos in urban planning.

4. Trivial and empty spaces of sidewalks, yards, parks, parking lots etc. become a place for the existence of poor people, those who have emigrated and homeless. These are the places of conflict and disordered relations between private and public.

In this way the sociological aspect in fragmented city is questionable, so if it is direct social image we can set an issue of concern: what kind of world we strive for and what kind of society are we creating? Well, fragmentation is defined as an instrument of spatial and social exclusion. The result is often a mosaic structure that is not articulated and which has no recognizable centrality. Therefore, it can be concluded that fragmentation leads to sort of spatial chaos because of the spe-

cific problems, including drastic changes of city structure, identity and meaning.

2.2. Fragmentation = fragments + empty spaces

The process of fragmentation can be also viewed as creation of not fragments but gaps between them. A city can be then perceived as *a system of pauses in space*. In the historic town empty spaces are places for communication and social interaction, while in a fragmented city, production of those without any function, is much greater. Do these space gaps become spaces of everyday life (according to Lefebvre) or useless vacuum, voids? According to French anthropologist Marc Augé, fragmentation produced non-places, as undefined and unknown locations where people were just passers-by and where we can not recognize identity and social relationships:

*“If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place.”*¹⁶

According to this statement, the gaps between fragments can be called *non-places*. But if the fragment in the Generic City has no identity and there are no relations with history, does the fragmentation produces only *non-places*? The question of concern is whether the Generic City (according to Augé) will be a huge *non-place* in some futuristic supra-urban system like Ecumenopolis which is predicted by Greek planner Constantinos Apostolou Doxiadis in the 70s? Identities will be irreversibly lost in this scenario, about unique network of connected megalopolises, and as Bogdan Bogdanović argues that process of mechanical connections of cities is already going on.¹⁷

2.3. Sociological aspects: Homogenization and segregation

*“The identity of the city bears on the identity of those living in it, and vice versa”*¹⁸

The city is a place of constant exchanges of identity between the individuals and the community. Arto Haapala in his text *“The urban Identity: The City as a Place to Dwell”* examines the question of the identity of individuals relying on the theory of Martin Heidegger, explaining that the urban identity of the person and the urban identity of the city are interrelated. It is necessary

¹² R. Koolhaas (1995), *Generic city...*, *op. cit.*, p. 1250.

¹³ Ž. Gospavić (2012), *Fragmentovani prostor*, master project at The faculty of architecture, University of Belgrade.

¹⁴ R. Koolhaas (1995), *Generic city...*, *op. cit.*, p. 1249.

¹⁵ Ž. Gospavić (2012), *Fragmentovani prostor*, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

¹⁶ M. Ože (2005), *Ne-mesta: uvod u antropologiju nadmodernosti*, Kug, Beograd, *op. cit.* p. 75.

¹⁷ B. Bogdanović (2008), *Tri ratne knjige*, Mediterran publishing, Novi Sad, p. 114.

¹⁸ A. Haapala (2003), *The urban identity: The City as a Place to Dwell*, *op. cit.* p. 13.

to continue with his key question: “*Is it possible to generalize the concept of urban identity?*”¹⁹. In the Generic City, that is really possible.

Lefebvre insists on consideration of space not as a set of physical elements but as a product of human labor. Contemporary cities imply separation of parts that have their physical limits, but also social profile. Their separation and the establishment of internal borders imply the creation of limited and socially closed specialized places. Contemporary image of the city is joined by outcomes of stratification: *ghetto* as a form of ethnic neighborhoods such as China Town – i.e. places that are opposite traditional culture of the city, but accepted; they have autonomy, but there other residents are still visitors only. Fragmentation gives importance to each fragment and that multiplicity of functions produces some “*surplus of meaning*”²⁰ - a diversity that becomes endless and unreachable for one man, overcoming his potential in temporal, spatial and interest meanings.

Influenced by globalization, the urban population is socially polarized. Groups are concentrated in separate urban locations initiating fragmentation of urban space and discontinuity of urban development. It is common that elite residential units are separated as non-accessible fragments and justification lies in the fear of crime and violence, which are products of intolerance among different social groups. It is clear that the antagonism, crime and insecurity stimulate simultaneously fear and development of spatial fragmentation. Thus, the space is divided into a zone of security and huge areas of insecurity and potential dangers.²¹ Closed and isolated communities have provided a safe living environment with many advantages achieved in surrounding of equal people. In these fragments, freedom, security and equality are guaranteed. Outside of these fragments the “*world of violence and crime*”, or the world of heterogeneity, take place. Fragmentation creates spaces of difference and non-neighborhood instead places of fellowship. The privatization of public space is one of the elements of fragmented city. At this level, where capital occurs, fragmentation leads to connection with segregation.

Analyzing sociological standpoint, we can conclude that the fragmentation is a production of space initiated by the social phenomena, where contempo-

rary processes of segregation of society on a class and economic basis define the shape of the modern city. Lefebvre confirms that urbanism and architecture are manifested as the projections of social groups desires that establishes authority over space, so he claims that urban planning is a mixture of ideology and practice under the control of the market, which makes instrumentalization of space easier.²²

This erases all the characteristics of city, his identity, all those social, cultural, and architectural value which were produced in the previous centuries. As Rem Koolhaas claims, “*the identity is derived from physical substance from the historical, from context, from the real, we somehow cannot imagine that anything contemporary-made by us-contributes to it*”²³. That identity is losing its significance due to rising population which shares nothing with a history. The exponential growth of the population implies that everything that makes the past, at one point of exhaustion, it will become very small to accepts and shares the space with the actual. “*The current quantity of the human will inevitably erupt and spend the previous substance*”²⁴.

Bogdan Bogdanović says: “*Ahead of us there is a world of febrile cities, one irreversibly contaminated building magma in constant disintegration and sporadic renewing*”²⁵, thus explaining that implosion of the population destroys cities or supports their self-destruction. But the self-destruction of his city is not the end but the beginning of new process of bursting of physical tissue and expansion of urban territory. That decadent and fatally inevitable flow that follows the spatial decomposition of city is based on the more obvious termination of links between the man and the environment. Bogdanović states: “*Ideal cities must have an ideal citizen and it cannot be otherwise – but how to find them and where to find them?*”²⁶

2.4. The ideological aspect: *Private vs. public*

If, according to Norberg-Schulz, we require identification with the space, what does identification mean in the city today? Public spaces (in terms of morphological and sociological structure) are the most important mediums of identity. Urban structure with its essence, public space system, reflects and accumulates culture, customs, social, political and economic processes and everything else that builds the identity

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ J. Čakarić (2012), *op. cit.*, pp. 490-491.

²² See M. Grbin (2013), *Lefevrova misao u savremenoj urbanoj sociologiji*, “*Sociologija*” 55.3, p. 477.

²³ R. Koolhaas (1995), *Generic city...*, *op. cit.*, p. 1248.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 1249.

²⁵ B. Bogdanović (2008), *Tri ratne knjige...*, *op. cit.* p. 26.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 27.

of a city. Public spaces allow reading of all narrative layers of social life and the image of the city. The initial purpose of the public space is openness and availability to users, regardless of their social status, age, tendency, etc. However, the public space has never fulfilled this role, especially not in the contemporary city, which is characterized by social segregation and spatial fragmentation. The question is how much public space in its current form is actually public?

Aldo Rossi observes the city as an incarnation of power and states, so the history of architecture is in fact the history of the ruling class.²⁷ Today the ruling class through isolated fragments distance themselves from the urban tissue and its public domain. The processes of social homogenization and separation create fragments as introverted private worlds, hidden from negative external influences, which avoid communication with the public life of the city that surrounds them, making their internal personalized public places.

The privileged people appropriate open public spaces of the city, so fragmentation impairs the possibility of creating unique system of open public spaces. Social interactions are reduced inside the related groups and related spaces, while the public space is left to marginalized groups. Fragmentation refuses public space as the property of all citizens, divorcing completely socio-territorial integration.

Eventually, we should accept the idea that the city, in the classic sense of the meaning, slowly disappears from our field of clear vision and goes to the world of mythical shadows.²⁸ And the society builds fragmented cities, which with or without identity became a collective consciousness. "The only thing that is not clear, whether this would be a step forward or a step backward"²⁹, says Bogdanović.

COGITATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The city has always been a symbolic scenario of life and cultural accumulation of specific collective meaning within the physical form. Bogdan Bogdanović says that the city has always been an unmatched deposit of memories that go beyond the memory of a nation, race, language.³⁰ Nevertheless, modern trends of globalization deny all these meanings, structure and

identity while the processes of production of space defined by Henri Lefebvre become more dominant not only in urban level but also globally. The modern city is faced with the loss of authenticity and identity, while Rem Koolhaas as a solution offers The Generic City. We should accept the conclusion by Jasenka Čakarić who stated that "the dynamics of contemporary society are dynamics of globalization, enshrined in the phenomenon of fragmented urban context and society".³¹

Fragmented city is a place of diversity and inaccessibility, while fragmentation as an instrument of exclusion causes discontinuity of the urban tissue and social interactions, encouraging social inequality and erosion of traditional public space. The Generic City as a paradigm of fragmentation reflects the ephemerality from identity to the consumption of space. Fragmentation, disintegration, homogenization and segregation make the Generic City as city of spectacle, in which the inhabitants are passive users but not protagonists. Social stratification produces introverted spatial fragments, which rejecting ideology of openness, togetherness and involvement in urban space, where socially polarized groups minimal communicate with each other, inhabiting separate spaces. Homogenization of the fragments deletes features of the city, preserved in its identity and produces individual identities of the fragments. The city is transformed into a kaleidoscope of fragmented functions and activity without meanings. Fragmented city is a place of struggle of interests of multitude identities, which in this fight will eventually disappear.

The following Rem Koolhaas statement was prophetic: "The identity becomes like a lighthouse-fixed, overdetermined: it can change its position or the pattern it emits only at the cost of destabilizing navigation."³²

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²⁸ B. Bogdanović (2008), *Tri ratne knjige...*, op. cit., p. 115.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 116.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ J. Čakarić (2012), *Social and spatial fragmentation of the modern city...*, op. cit., p. 11.

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