

# City – Mass Communication Space – Access to Information in Relation to the Composition of the City

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**Abstract.** Streets and squares in the cities were created so that they could constitute public space – space of a social integration. Important social binding agent is a common, direct access to information, ability of passing it on and undertaking actions appropriate to its response. In an era of information revolution, new information and communication technologies enriched social contacts. Access to information no longer requires direct interpersonal contact due to which the contact became less related to city space. The subject of the article is the evolution of city space with relation to the access to information. The cotemporary closing of which is the phase of multimedia mass communication and city spaces designed for information society.

**Keywords:** City, mass - communication space, access to information, urban composition.

## 1 Introduction

Stepping into the center of the Roman Capitol Hill leading from via Sacra, the visitor of the city will find himself standing in front of a prow of the antique Rostra. A site of paramount meaning, the heart of the Roman Republic, the heart of the Roman Empire, from which decisions of the governing bodies and news were announced and spread throughout the then world. It was located in the most significant place in the layout of the Roman Forum. In truth, the gravity of the place and the prominence of its function were emphasized by prows of conquered ships – both via Sacra as well as the Rostra were raised to a rank of a symbol – the heart of the ancient Empire.

Spaces of streets and squares in the cities, from the very beginning of settlements' development documented history was demarcated so that they could create public space – social integration space. The primary role of, task and reason for the existence of common spaces in the city is the necessity of creating society – the reason behind which is to improve political organization of its residents [1]. The common bond of the society is joint access to information, possibility of easy dissemination thereof and undertaking actions based on the received feedback. The building and maintain close ties between the city's inhabitants is the basic factor enabling social, economic, political and cultural development of the city environment. Absence of social integration

would eliminate the chance of acting as a collective body – there never would come to existence complex social ties characteristic of modern relations.

## 2 City as a Mass Communication Space

In ancient time, access to information was interpersonal, direct and contributed to stabilizing one of the basic human qualities – man as a social being together with all the psychological and behavioral consequences. In our nature lies the need to live in a community. Technological inventions: printing (XV century), telegraph (XVII century), telephone (XIX century), radio (XX century), television (XX century), internet network (XX century) made access to information both global as well as local ceased to be based on interpersonal contact. The nature of social contacts changed and enriched with new tools. During centuries, access to information was becoming increasingly less bound with direct contact between people. In this context, the next step being the building of information society, in a certain sense is a critical moment in history: work, relaxation and enjoyment, functioning in society and even building a relationship with another person – with quite a significant limitation of direct personal contact. Questions on the role of direct contacts in a social organization are justified. To what degree will progress its self-limitation? How far will we go to replace meeting with another person using other forms of communication including the use of mass media communication? Will participation in mass communication fulfill human social needs?

Pondering the subject of space in an information society a question should be posed, what future awaits the city? What will happen with its public spaces? Will there be a necessity of designing public spaces in new projects?

The temptation of closing oneself off in virtual contacts exists; there also exist possibilities of work, free time exclusively through the internet. At the same time, attention should be turned to the value of direct interpersonal contacts as a factor building human ties and relations and as a therapeutic element. Therefore, it is most probable that in order to achieve satisfaction and happiness in live, personal contact with others is vital. Carrying this postulate over to spatial design a need and mission appears to build social integration space – also for the information society. Yet, while conversing, it is the non-verbal communication that outweighs the impact of verbal message, and it is this that is most difficult to pass on through digital communication sources (even when using image transmission).

In „Life between buildings”, Jan Gehl writes about three categories of activities of city dwellers in public spaces: necessary activities, optional activities, and social activities [2]. Necessary activities in public space are those, which are required to carry out. Optional activities are those that users of public space pursue only in certain optimal conditions, most frequently in places having high space layout and viewing attributes.

Social activities are all activities that depend on the presence of others in public spaces. (...) Social activities occur spontaneously, as a direct consequence of people moving about and being in the same spaces. This implies that social activities

(indirectly supported) whenever necessary and optional activities are given better conditions in public spaces (Gehl, 2009).

Public and semi-public spaces have a basic leading meaning for creating neighborhood societies: within them, the flow of information has local characteristics. This fact directly reflects on building a relation with a specific place, creating a bond with the surrounding environment as it pertains to its joint usage, management and maintenance.

Mass media communication has a different effect on a completely different scale. It plays an important role in social integration, despite the fact that it pertains to phenomena on a larger scale and higher organization levels: national, ethnic groups, religion and cultural. It is associated with creating and building collective identity of nations and even inhabitants of an entire continent. Mass communication as opposed to direct communication does not contribute to creating a bond between the user with his work or living space<sup>1</sup>. Quite the contrary, mass communication is associated with the disintegration of traditional neighborhood communities [3] (neglecting public spaces), as it is viewed as a competition with traditional direct contacts. The natural need to function in society, the feeling of being a part of a community is satiated by participation in mass media. Social integration always takes place on many levels: neighborhood and even family integration may lose its meaning to belonging to a much wider group [4]. Propagating various models of behavior, bringing geographically distant places closer, mass communication eliminates fear and anxiety ensuing from the idea of migration. This loosens a person's attachment to a known environment and intensifies his mobility.

The historical, increased percentile of society's participation in the circulation of mass information is presented by the curve of social reach of information (diagram no. 1). With time, access to information encompassed increasingly wider range circles. The social reach of information curve includes four (4) main development phases of mass communication processes: the elite phase, popularization phase, specialization phase and multimedia phase [5]. As much as the elite phase is communicating within the circle of the highest social classes, the multi-media phase signifies an unlimited access to mass communication report.

The placement of the curve with typical layout of cities in different historic periods may suggest the occurrence of the following dependencies: with the growing access to mass information, a gradual polycentrism and loosening of city structure. Simultaneously, architecture is losing communication properties: individualized detail, codification using symbols and allegories expressed in sculptures and frescos.

There is no doubt that the access to information issue is only one of many factors affecting the evolution of city and architectural space. Additionally, the basic issue was increase in population, function specialization, political issues, espoused culture and many others. However, attention should be turned to consolidating meaning of access to information in historical cities. Architecture was a very important information medium about a place, about social and economic relations. It may be said that

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<sup>1</sup> An exception being multi-million metropolises, in which the issuers of local mass media: regional television programs, radio stations, internet portals and printed press.

what once was communicated through architectural form and its hierarchy as well as layout in a city, today it can be passed on using other communication sources. The primary aim of the created graphs is the observation of the direction of this transformation and a diagnosis of modern space tendencies. Characteristic of space urbanization taking place in the era of information society is quite significant, that is at a multimedia phase of mass communication.

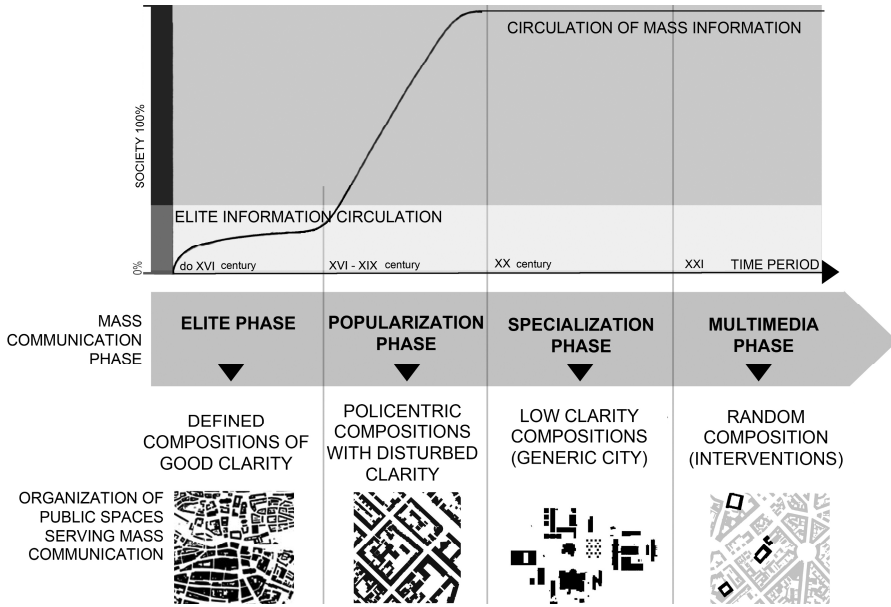


Fig. 1. The diagram illustrates relations between legibility of city space and phases of mass communication

### 2.1 Elite Phase – Cohesive and Clear City Composition

In the first, elitist phase of access to information, participation of a mass user was minimal. The time periods here are fluid due to non-uniform development of common education in Europe – which was the condition for receiving mass information in a printed form (XVI – XVII centuries). Prior to this, illiteracy of a considerable part of society constituted barriers in information circulation and general access to global and local information took place in public city spaces. Social and political order expressed through city’s urban composition as well as architecture of buildings was understood to the recipients. Legibility of city space was based on a basic, common to all people level of recognition that is on associations and emotions: impressive, tall buildings were important (church, city hall); detail on the facades of tenement houses indicated the source of fortunes of wealthy merchants. The expression of artistic, decorative, sculptural elements in architecture was literal, and the scale of individual objects in the city tissue reflected its rank.

Public places: stages for rituals and interaction<sup>2</sup> are deserving of special attention among public spaces. They were consciously created with thought given to particularly meaningful activities related to culture and ritual.

As the effect on associations and emotions is the most basic method of influencing the collective, the historic city tissue, to this day is very positively perceived by general public of inhabitants. Referring to simple reflexes and associations is the most communicative method of designing city composition. Popularity of historic city centers as its prestigious trade districts, entertainment, and tourism centers fully supports this theory. These spaces also favorably contribute to traditional and direct social integration.

## 2.2 Popularization Phase

In the popularization phase of mass communication, mass communication and access to information commenced to be differentiated and better organized. This related to a development in the XVIII century of technologies such as telecommunication, print and transportation network, and prior to that with a better access to education. On the market began to appear subject magazines, catalogues, books and daily newspapers. Access to information, admittedly in a small degree, but started to cease being the direct consequence of participation in public and social life: through the postal service, it independently reaches a growing number of people.

The demographic and spatial development of European cities caused partial decentralization and the establishment of mutually competing local central points. Societies accumulated around local city squares, gardens and parks – access to local information was tied with exiting the indoors in the outdoor space of the nearest neighborhood. In this phase, public and social integration spaces became even more diversified and hierarchized. A significant time period for general access to information in city space is the XIX century, when the voice of social organizations educating also the most poverty-stricken society classes was heard. These organizations funded reading rooms and libraries (e.g. People's Education Society and People's Reading Rooms Society in the Wielkopolska region of Poland).

Specialization phase in industrial cities of the XX century – specialized systems and the loss of legibility of city structures.

The specialization phase of mass communication development process marks the period of increased social awareness of citizen rights, educations and facilitation of initiating mass social movements. Education of the society, increase of personal wealth, possibility of free disposal of time off from work, knowledge of the right to rest and recreation had an effect on the city space layout. It is therefore, natural, that the specialization phase of mass communication is linked with industrial city concepts and segregation of functions within its boundaries. As a result, areas and city districts are created with the same uniform functionality – specialized. Industrial terrains, recreation, residential areas and trade and administration centers are being allotted their own space and thus separated in urban design.

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<sup>2</sup> Especially significant areas: squares, city centers as opposed to streets, ports and other specifically utilization spaces have additional cultural meaning (Kostof, S. 1992).

In shopping and administration centers, transmission of information is of great importance as it relates to the proper function of sales and services as well as government administration. Organization in the specialized phase of mass communication is based on simple telecommunication tools (telephone, telefax) – and thus the quantity of remote data transfers between businesses and administrations is limited. Establishing a business in a good location (city center) is conditioned by access to clients, government administration and in that sense, also a condition of operation. Limited information and communication technologies up to the 1990's of the XX century were a factor in consolidating new investments and agglomeration of building development.

A significant factor in social reception and clarity of the city in the industrial age was the fact of their tie to the intellectual culture of the European elite. Renowned urbanists and architects were commissioned with city planning, and this related to the advanced specialization of business management groups and project designers of new communities as well as with urban designing development theory. The consequence of expanding a theoretical, research and scientific database is acceptance of spatial solution, the justification of which has scientific, intellectual character or expressing ideological contexts. The source of information about the designation of a building was neither a clear form nor significance placement of it in the city tissue. Knowledge is the condition for comprehension of intellectual layer – for people lacking knowledge, space loses its communicative properties (so well developed in the elitist phase of mass communication).

### **3 Multimedia Phase of Mass Communication – Urban Spaces of Information Society**

In the last, multimedia phase of mass communication, attention should be turned to the fact of “pulling away” the relay of mass information as well as of economic development from factual space. The internet network, expansively developed data communication infrastructure, technical infrastructure, hardware equipment enable considerably large capacities of information reach the recipient outside the city space. Therefore, the relay of information ceases to be, in this phase, a central creative element consolidating building development, the meaning of real spaces lessens for social and political organization, as this organization becomes possible through information and communication technologies. In a hypothetical situation, in which the only city composition shaping parameter would be information flow, the city urban composition in the multimedia phase may be defined as a “cloud” of project intervention: unorganized collection of architectural objects. However, in reality, the appearance of new project designing plans may depend on factors unrelated to information access and signify expansion of creative freedom:

- may be a representation of abstract elements with artistic meaning,
- may concentrate on relations with the context of nature,

- may constitute a group of new functions “place on” the historic city space – using it without significant integration into the existing city tissue,
- may be inspired by personal interests and beliefs of the city’s residents.

The last, multimedia phase of mass communication takes place under conditions of considerable breaking up of the city structure, in part as a consequence of the development of cities of the industrial era but also as a consequence of decentralization deepened by the general access to information and communication technologies.

Development of a European city at the multimedia mass communication phase may be described as a “cloud” of interventions taking place in an existing, relaxed structure. It is based on revitalization, reclassification of the designation of city terrains, repair activities that result from moving away from traditional production of goods and replacing it with creative activity based on access to information. The dominating problematic issue in the plans of newly design projects of residential communities and suburban city districts are the widely understood environmental issues. The said projects frequently exhibit the natural conditions of the location.

In intensely urbanized Europe and America, interest in utilizing historic structures, investing in costly renovation and revitalization of architectural objects having material culture of past generations is a testimony to the maturity of societies and access to knowledge, which enables appreciation and enjoyment of this heritage. Together with the longing for human scale architecture and urban planning, returns the desire to use space subjected to adaptation or renewal – as unique, the only and the original. In this cultural change can be seen the popularity of lofts and every kind of non-standard living spaces.

Many parameters and many variables are the decisive factors in location intervention. Many to the degree that the map of city newly designed projects or objects appear to be unorganized and accidental. The deciding factors about the investment site are the following: technical state of the existing building development, issues of ownership, accessibility of non-developed lot, social premises, and political interests. Moreover, the financial and spatial scale of interventions may be greatly diversified. They may be a social, public or private undertaking. Characteristics of these activities have much in common with the notion of acupuncture of the city, the author of which is Brazilian urban planner, Jaime Lerner [6], which is expressed as a group of activities aimed at activation and improvement of city space in the smallest scale. The effects of interventions both when they pertain to the scale of urban planning (planning of communities but also development of a city square or greenery square) as well as architectural interventions have a common positive quality: new and old elements in urban structure are not standing in opposition to each other, on the contrary, they may base on a good, neighboring relations and the existing natural and cultural environment. Here dominates holistic approach and agreement to multi-motif approach to the composition of the city. The described above position of acceptance and drawing from resources is valuable. The opinion of the author is that in differentiation to the concept of industrial cities, in partially valid postulates in the Athens Charter, the city

spaces of an information society may be directed at emphasized exhibition of cultural and social resources [7].

Monumental conceptual projects, for example Le Corbusier's plan for Paris was a manifest of the coming revolution – a new order. The tool to achieve the goal – tearing down and cutting off from the situation found. The revolution was a voice of discord on the subject of future order, emotionally packed concept full of rebellion against the low living standards in historic cities. City space project concepts for the information society are not based on revolution. Their basis is standard improvement, urban and architectural interventions. Also, the leading principle behind them is a collective diversification giving the users a choice of how and where to live. This allows some residents to realize their fascination with the past, hence the numerous adaptation and renewals of the historic building tissue. For other users, it enables closeness with nature – in projects geared at widely understood ecological values. The significance of the economic cost in a world living in the shadow of fuel crisis does not go unnoticed as well as awareness of the meaning of power-saving solutions for the natural environment. In comparing both assumptions, an industrial city treated the user of city spaces in a more object-like manner, not providing them with the above said choice. This approach tied to the rest, to the social order ensuing precisely from industrialization: collective work in the industry or office work.

A wide range of possibilities opens to the project designers based on the following foundations: ecology, respect of nature, reference to traditional and historic architecture (expansion of the vernacular movement definition) as well as application of advanced computational<sup>3</sup> project designing methods. When the boundaries of a single city or metropolis we find and appreciate the multiple motifs building development: from architecture of advanced solutions of traditional and even archaic concepts. From environments fully controlled electronically, all the way to ground building projects created by hands of future users. Thanks to this, the city structure is becoming multithreaded and rich. The user of city space, “creative class” representative will understand this order and will enjoy the multithreaded city tissue. It is vital to keep in mind, that it is dynamics and ability to innovate, which are the greatest positive value in information society. The multithreaded city space may either draw it out or become its final result.

Using the existing buildings city tissue ties with the necessity of improving the quality of public space, which surrounds it. It may lead to tearing down buildings or intensification of the building development. The goal is to achieve an acceptable, high standard of architectural and city spaces. One of the best improvement methods is introducing attractive recreation areas and greenery into the urbanized space.

An example of celebrating the city lifestyle thanks to city greenery project is High Line Park in New York. The subject of the project is adapting the unused industrial seaport railway remaining in Manhattan into atypical park of elongated shape: with high quality greenery, small architecture as well as artistic installations tied thematically to the surroundings. Historic city structure elements, during the renewal process

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<sup>3</sup> Computational project designing enables generating an architectural form using a digital optimization method, in which the architect controls the form using a software program code.



may become valuable space attracting and concentrating members of the creative class.

Simultaneously with the New York project, in London, a park was created having much greater natural character and much larger space. It was built on post-industrial areas, torn down and destroyed still during WWII. Attention should be drawn to the pro-social characteristic of this city investment – directed at raising the living condition standards in a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and not wealthy city district of Mile End Park. Both investments constitute an intervention into city space, the aim of which is not to allow its degradation while at the same time creating and maintaining social public space. Singular, scattered changes in the city tissue have a limited impact radius and do not disturb the fragmentation level of city space<sup>4</sup>. A significant improvement in how the city is perceived, its functional integration can be obtained through appropriate investment coordination. This type of planning is a frequent practice. The aim is to mark a meaningful to the city location, create corridors or activation axis, which will enable the impression of space integration.

## 4 Conclusions

The essences of the scientific achievement presented in the publication is based on the formulating and analysis of a relation between mass media communication, information society, spatial behavior of people and city composition. The direction of spatial transformations in the city is becoming a medium visualizing cultural, economic and social changes. The establishment of a society based on access to information shapes and changes spatial behavior. Due to this, taking on the subject combining the phenomenon of knowledgeable society as well as spatial development is substantiated.

The analysis this of scientific problem has been performed in the context of cultural, social and technical conditions. The accessibility to information and communication technologies influences the directions for spatial transformation the characteristics of which are following:

- Possibility of using information and communication technologies in resource management, a better and more complete use of architectural space. The ongoing internet communication constitutes a tool, thanks to which setting up a group meeting or establishing the order of space usage is possible [9].
- Building spaces supporting creativity and innovative activities through raising the quality of the surroundings, the level of individualization, and openness to the cultural and nature context of architectural solutions.
- Building society integrating spaces in physical space and not only in virtual reality. An open attitude towards neighborhood activities – in an era of distance work, era of “*freelancers*”, it is the quality of interaction with others and quality of space is a

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<sup>4</sup> The issue of city fragmentation is related to the growing tendency of spatial, social, economic, cultural and political divisions in the cities. A socially harmful phenomenon, as it emphasizes the differences between the residents – generating conflicts and also, usually, increase of crime [8].

deciding factor where people will settle – distance from the place of employment is becoming a second rate factor.

- Positive perception of diversity, multithreaded tissue and motif both in the area of city culture as well as spatial area.

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