

Title	Center for Contemporary art area in Torun - searching for the development model
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PAPER TITLE
CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ART AREA IN TORUN
- SEARCHING FOR THE DEVELOPMENT MODEL

Abstract:

The privatization of the Center of Contemporary Art (CCA) area in Torun allows observing relatively new processes in Polish urban reality. The case shows how private-public partnership is constructed and how partners combine spheres of culture and commerce to realize the investment. Private investor, using the cultural arguments, tries to create a shopping mall in the recreation area located next to the historical center of the city. The aim of the paper is to analyze the dynamics of the process of privatization and strategies used to privatize the public space in an attractive district of Torun.

CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ART AREA IN TORUN - SEARCHING FOR THE DEVELOPMENT MODEL

The aim of this paper is to investigate how the discourse about privatization of the Center for Contemporary Art area is forming, and how it is influenced by social actors, groups of interests, etc. This is done by analyzing the discourses that have taken place in local newspapers and magazines, official sites and documents (strategies, program documents etc.) and in discussions among professionals, including scholars, architects and urban planners. Each of these discursive areas uses its own, distinct style of argumentation and dynamics, which represents the present attitudes to the process of urban redevelopment.

Drawing on the work of Norman Fairclough (Fairclough 1989, 1995), this paper uses critical discourse analysis to understand the new urban reality. The Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has been used to describe urban changes quite frequently, mostly by British critical and human geographers. In my opinion, it is useful in understanding the phenomenon of private-public partnership (Atkinson 1999, Jacobs 2004) and privatization of public space. The analysis of incomplete, ambiguous and even contradictory discourses among different groups of interests show how the redevelopment phenomenon is constructed and how it reflects the structure of social reality. By the discourse I mean “interrelated set of text, and the practices of their production, dissemination and reception that brings an object into being” (Parker 1992). The approach presented here focuses not only on text but also on context as an important part of reality construction.

The privatization of Torun space has led to new processes and new forms of /urban space arrangement. By that I mean new forms of cultural industry and public-private partnership, as a type of cooperation and intervention in the urban environment. As Scott has expressed: capitalism itself is moving into a phase in which the cultural forms and meanings of its outputs are becoming critical if not dominating elements of

productive strategy, and in which the realm of human culture as a whole is increasingly subject to commodification ... the culture we consume is to an ever greater degree supplied through profit-making institutions in decentralized markets. (Scott 2000: 2).

Fusion of culture and consumption in Polish reality is mostly seen in the semantic sphere. Shopping malls on the outskirts of the city used to be called “galleries” or “shopping galleries”. Torun, because of the case analyzed in the paper, came one step further and represents a new stage of development of that kind of industry. The investment is a multifunctional center located in the strict central area of the city which is designed for commercial and cultural purposes. The Investor presumed that the center will become a flagship project which will be able to change the image of the city, just like two best known multifunctional centers in Poland: “Old Brewery” in Poznan and “Manufacture” in Lodz. The case of Torun is different than the other two because the object is planned in the close proximity to a museum building, which is financed in a “classic” way by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, regional authorities and European Union grants and does not represent a classical regeneration of disadvantaged areas. This vicinity is the crucial factor that determines the discourse. The discourse is shaped in the way to blur the difference between those two projects, their purposes and character. The strategy shows them as elements of a more complex, common project of the new cultural city center.

Public-Private partnership as a new form of investment is used as a kind of universal tool, which allows to legitimate different forms of cooperation between public and business sector. Until 2006 there were no regulations about PPP as well as any kind of the definition of such a form of partnership. Lack of regulations and the universal character of such a tool allow to hide different interests, and, as in the case of Torun, allow to privatize public space in the name of cultural development of the city.

The context

Torun is popular mostly because of its architectural heritage. Torun is famous for the biggest number, after Krakow, of authentic works of Gothic art and architecture. The authenticity of the medieval and Gothic skyline of Torun was one of the arguments supporting the decision to add Torun to the UNESCO List of World Heritage Sites in

1997. The strategy of the city is focused on presenting the historic heritage and cultural potential. Thus the official promoting motto: Torun - get gothic.

Other, additional impulse for the establishing of public-private partnership was the idea of joining the competition for European Capital of Culture in 2016. ECC status gives a chance to receive substantial financial help and enables a chosen city to organize prestigious cultural events with money from EU funds. It also offers a chance to realize? new cultural industry investments and accelerate the city development. The inspiration is quite obvious. The changes in Bilbao or Barcelona demonstrate how modern industry transfers to the new economy of services and how cultural industry can be used as a vehicle of change in social, political and economical sphere. By combining spheres of politics, economy and aesthetic, cities like Bilbao and Barcelona are capable to create totally new visions and images of themselves.



Photo 1. Center for Contemporary Art visualisation

Source: Gazeta Wyborcza

Construction of the Center for Contemporary Art (CCA), financed by the European Union grants, is just the first stage of a more complex project. The whole area next to the Center building should offer a concert hall for Torun's Philharmonic Orchestra, a conference center and a shopping center. The city authorities delivered 7 ha of so called Jordanki area (football fields and recreation area) next to the CCA building and, what would be vital for the privatization, next to strict historic city center. To realize this ambitious vision the authorities had to look for potential investors and partners among business and non governmental organizations. Involvement of voluntary sector partner

was crucial to obtain money for the first investment, namely the CCA building. Then the local authorities started to look for potential investors for the second stage of project.

Discourse actors

In analyzing the discourse one can distinguish two main actors: city authorities and French firm Apsys and few less powerful, but still significant groups: voluntary association, business organizations, art historians, the architect of the city, etc. Those actors, even if not constantly present in the discourse, had a potential to change the whole discourse practice in a few crucial moments. Their voices unmasked the idea of partnership and questioned the potential profits of the project for the whole community. Those reactions created new political, economical and aesthetic discourses and broke the dominant one, created by members of partnership. One can see the significant difference in the dominant discourse, too. From the very beginning, the partners called the investment in two different ways. Private investor presented the project as a “multifunctional center” while the local authorities named it more metaphorically as a “new city centre”.

Apsys Group is a company creating and managing multifunctional complexes. The Group has been investing in Poland for ten years and owns sixteen shopping malls in twelve biggest Polish towns. One of them is already located in Torun. In official materials prepared for the inhabitants, the company presents itself as a group “which creates programs which fits to the needs, offers complex attitude to clients and can forecast the consumer’s behaviors”. The Company’s flagship project is “Manufacture” center in Lodz, a shopping and entertainment center created in a XIX century factory building. The scale and success of that regeneration process was a strong argument for establishing the partnership between the city council and the company.

The co-author of the discursive practice is the city authorities, mostly the strategic investment bureau. Jordanki privatization is, as it was mentioned before, a part of a broader discourse about the future and the vision of Torun. The vision proposed in the strategic document from 2001 presents Torun “as a world wide known historic town in which science, culture and economy are developing well, where inhabitants fell well and to which visitors come back with pleasure” (Strategy 2001). Maintaining the cultural center character could be done “ by cultural infrastructure development, creation of new

objects which can be used to present all kinds of cultural production: music, film and by establishing the Art Center - multifunctional object based on the concept of Performing Art Center” (Strategy 2001). The strategy represents a typical model of urban regeneration based on creation of a flagship institution, which, in longer perspective, is able to change the neighborhood and create new cultural industries. As Chris Gibson points out “the cultural flagships can contribute to more confident perception of the city” (Gibson). What is specific about the case of Torun is the fact that Jordanki is not a postindustrial area with some valuable architecture like in Lodz case, but the old green area used by the inhabitants for outdoor activities. This land was given to the city by regional authorities under one condition which was keeping the public character of the property. Jordanki was then an ideal area to locate the Center for Contemporary Art– the common project of town, regional and Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and Signs of Time Association¹.

The Association became the third most important actor of the discourse, after public-private partnership members. “Signs of Time Association”, a crucial city partner in the project, was responsible for preparing the CCA project and buying the art collection, but the members of it actively engaged in the discourse on the whole area future. The President of the NGOs attacked the authorities and the company by unmasking the real, commercial character of the area regeneration. This manifesto was crucial to activating opposition and opening new discourses. Local business federations and cultural elites of the city started the discussion about the concept of the partnership and the area functions.

The discourse organization

In the Jordanki area (photos 2,3) privatization discourse it is possible to identify three basic moments which influenced the whole process, the discourse construction and strategies deployed in the whole action: the inauguration, the manifesto and the exhibition.

In April 2006, after a few months of negotiations, partners signed the formal partnership agreement. The discourse was started by the city authorities. The vision of the partnership and investment presented by local administration officers dominated the

¹ The goal of the Ministerial project is to establish 16 such Centers for Contemporary Art in Poland. The CCA in Torun is the first contemporary art investment since II World War. Institution already received the National Institution of Culture status in whole country.

whole meeting and created the new image of the partnership. This dominant role gave a chance to create an outside vision and, what is important, to revert the relations inside the partnership. The administration, more interested in the investment than the private partner, persuaded the media that it was Apsys group who inspired the whole project and city authorities accepted the proposal. One of the officers gave an explanation of those interests which was also quite significant. In his opinion the crucial factor, from the investor's point of view was not potential profit, but the fact, that "Torun is a pearl of architecture on the European scale". The partnership's aim was not clear, and the whole partnership concept was not defined at all. The partnership was nothing more than a list of uncertain hopes and dreams. The project purpose was to create a shopping and entertainment center with a concert hall, of total value of 100 millions Euros but, public partner representatives preferred to use a more poetic vision of "new city center" and presented the investment as "a unique opportunity to change Jordanki into the new center of Torun" (Giedrys 2006a). At the same time the private investor honestly mentioned the multifunctional object in which "there would be a place for **commerce** [underlining by the author], recreation and for culture" (Giedrys 2006a).



Photos 2, 3 Jordanki area

Source: Jacek Gadecki

The new city center was supposed to be build without any cost, just by giving the land to Apsys group. Only once in whole history of the privatization process – right at the inauguration meeting – representatives of the town explained the nature of transaction and rules of the partnership. The city would sell or give in never ending tenancy the whole area and Apsys group would create the center with the concert hall: "Town, as the representative of authorities presented – won't pay a penny. We will sell the area or give it into tenancy [...] We want tot build the second, new city center for XXI century" (Giedrys 2006a). This vision was presented as an ideal way to change the future of the city. According to the agreement signed by partners, President of Apsys and President

of Torun, the company was responsible for preparing the whole functional and urban schema necessary for the regeneration process.

The beginning of the discourse formation let one to see three universal motifs characteristic for public-private partnerships (Atkinson 1999):

- History and tradition – investor’s interest, according to the authorities, have mostly historical and cultural bases. Both partners proclaim that aesthetical and historical value of Torun’s architecture would play a crucial role in the new investment and that the center is going to be designed by the best architectural offices in Europe with respect to the medieval heritage of the city.
- New chances for everyone – from the official discourse perspective town is creating new city center not a new shopping mall. What is more this partnership project is just a begging of a more ambitious project of regeneration of other neighborhoods localized next to the historical center – so called “Old Town”. This long way perspective is going to be use by both partners mostly when first opposite discourses will emerge.
- Competitiveness as a force of development – the project is assigned to the broader context and is supported by the other European and Polish cases of regeneration made by creation of multifunctional objects. One month before the agreement, a local newspaper had published an article in which this kind of developments was presented as representatives of fashionable “European trend” which came to Poland and successfully worked in many cities”. This kind of presentation helps to look at the partnership and investment first of all as rational and, what is equally important, as an attractive way of resolving town problems and providing city growth.

The next event, crucial for the changes in the official discourse happened after half a year period of the domination of the official vision. The first discussion about the whole concept of partnership and center as an object took place when the investor presented the precise plans of the centre development. The project, proposed by the Apsys, consisted of a 53 000 square meters multifunctional building complex with a concert hall, a hotel, and an entertainment-recreation part. The crucial – commercial function, which was not expressed clearly before, was designed for more than a half of the whole area.

This commercial character was an impulse for the memorandum prepared by the president of the Signs of Time Association in which he appealed for “protest against the intention of the President of the city, who wants to locate a shopping mall at Jordanki next to the building of Center for Contemporary Art “. He pointed out to the public that „explaining that this is the only way to create concert hall and bowling trace is jut a cheap rhetoric which is used to mask the real intentions of the investors. They are realizing nothing but brutal commercial actions“ (Giedrys 2006b). The main reason to criticize the concept was not even the privatization of the land but rather the consequences of it, that is the commercial function of the center. The author asked to keep the balance between the cultural or entertainment goals and the commerce: “It is not allowed to destroy this unique opportunity, which is the creation of a vivid center of culture, science and recreation next to the Old City. The commerce and services should be located on the city outskirts, just like everywhere else in the world“(Giedrys 2006b). The letter was the cause of a dramatic change in the discourse formation. The official, dominant one was replaced by a series of more polemical articles and voices in local newspapers. This event was crucial because of two reasons:

- First of all the new, oppositional discourses emerged – after unmasking of the commercial role of the whole initiative, local organizations and political opponents were able to start the actions against the partners, mostly against the city authorities, responsible for discourse creation.
- Secondly the dominant discourse was disintegrated - the critical voice belonged to the city partner – association responsible for the CCA project. CCA (as a classic cultural institution) was used as an “alibi” for the new investment and the new center was presented as an integral part of the existence of the Center for Contemporary Art. Representatives of the cultural elites, who were suppose to support the project, suddenly started to criticize the idea.

The discourse became immediately more political, economic and aesthetic. Politicization of the discourse took place because one of the candidates for the President of the city, used the letter in the election campaign: It is a barbarian act to locate object with other than cultural functions next to the Old Town” [...] No one builds shopping malls in the city center [...]. It’s a total misunderstanding to sell pants and other things next to the Center of Contemporary Art” (Giedrys 2006b). Commercial character of the investment – not represented until now – activated the representatives of local business.

Presentation of the design concept was the reason of organized protest. In their opinion construction of the multifunctional center was nothing else but a hidden mall in Torun, which already has twice beyond the limits of commercial area per one inhabitant.

The economic discourse was supported by the aesthetic one. The aesthetic was an important element of the partnership strategy which focused on the quality design. Even the invitation of world wide known architecture offices, has not stopped the critique. The City Conservation Officer and the City Architect valued project as too commercial. “This function could be dangerous for the old city – commerce in the Old Town gives us a chance to maintain the heritage. Lack of business could stop the process of conservation of architecture”.

The protest of the local business organizations was ignored by the authorities and the response for the memorandum was unclear. The project was described as an „untypical center of commerce [...]“. It would have a different formula – more diffused. It combines many different functions: commerce, services, recreation, entertainment and culture“. The lack of support from the cultural elites changed the whole strategy.



Photos 4,5,6 Jordanki area visualizations

Source: Jordanki of Tomorrow leaflet

The Competition

In September 2006 the jury chose one of four final architecture projects proposed by the Jean-Paul Viguier office². The architectural vision (photos 4 ,5,6) was strong enough to change opinions and promote official discourse again. Even The City Conservation Officer appreciated the quality of the design; local authorities assured that the commercial spaces would be offered to the local business. The discourse described

² The office realized La Defense tower and philharmony in Marsey.

the whole project mostly as a friendly, really public place – „The core of the winner project, by the Parisian architecture office, is the green market – recreational plaza, which would be used for organizing public events“(Giedrys 2007a).

At this stage the architecture was used to transfer discourse from cultural to public. The public character became the central feature of the new market strategy. The City authorities decided to make the project more public by organizing an exhibition and printing a leaflet. The exhibition called „Jordanki of tomorrow“ (7th-15th of December 2006) was a most spectacular element of the new strategy and the last chance to persuade the undecided... The project was presented once again as a public not cultural one. According to the motif “new chances for all” city representatives assured “that company is planning, according to a broader project, to design public space and green areas functionally connected with investment which is presented now. The intention of the company is to make the existing areas better and to design new recreation areas”. This spectacular vision was supported by examples of similar projects realized all over Europe. The aim of the exhibition was, according to the invitation “ to present to the city inhabitants the newest European trends in architecture of multifunctional objects located in the city centers, often in proximity to historic sites [...] All those examples prove that those kinds of objects, if they are well designed, positively shape new urban lifestyle, make commerce more vivid and change the city image. They make the city more attractive for investment and tourists“³

The leaflet, published for the exhibition was the first public material which has been prepared by the private partner, in which the company explains the idea of the center and presents the plan of the investment development. Printed material is used to resolve all doubts which emerged during the last six months. Investor argued that multifunctional objects:

- are designed for the cities, because their sophisticated architecture, attractiveness, progressive solutions and complexity response to the needs of local communities,

³ According to official leaflet published by Apsys

- attract the visitors interested in culture – culture programs, which are by nature less popular, because of the multifunctional centers become more attractive for the visitors,
- help in development of the local business – multifunctional centers and local commerce have a great chance to coexist and to become complementary”.

Post scriptum

The last breaking point for the Jordanki area came in April 2007. The new investor – Irish Investment Group became an owner of the property located on the opposite side of the road. The chief of the City Investment Office, who had supported Apsys until that moment suddenly decided to change his mind and started to favour the new investor. Apsys was not the land owner and local regulations prohibited commercial function at the Jordanki area, which, until then, was not a problem for the local authorities. The new investor offered to build the concert hall which was the key argument for creation of the shopping center at Jordanki. Members of the City Council strongly supported the IIG concept explaining that Jordanki area “should preserve its recreation function and form” and idea of localizing two centers next to each other is irrational. Apsys company still fights for the project - the Communication Director declares that company is ready to make changes in the project. “Our proposal is a broader project which is going to change the whole urban landscape; it is located in a specific district, next to the Old Town, that is why we do not see the IIG project as a competitive one [...]. I want to assure that we are working on the project, which is going to be a flagship investment for Torun and will give a chance for dynamic development of the city, combining old architecture with the dynamic development of the town, its ambitions and social and cultural life” (Giedrys 2007 b).

Conclusions

The case of Jordanki distinctly demonstrates that privatization of public spaces in Poland is a new and difficult notion. Nowadays, the wave of the first stage of privatization of public spaces represented by suburban shopping malls is replaced by the second wave. Those new privatization projects are treated as an embarrassing process and are hidden away from the public. The culture instead of inspiring is used in instrumental way just to justify the process of privatization.

The attitude of the main discourse actors proves the absence of any common vision of the city future. Different interests are not totally presented, mostly in case of town authorities and city elites. The authorities present the broad, optimistic vision of the cultural (in the first stage of the discourse) or truly public (after the previous strategy turned into fiasco) character of the investment and hide its commercial function. Local elites, inactive at the beginning are against the fusion of culture and commerce. They seem to be afraid of losing prestige of CCA project and themselves as a group.

Finally the form of collaboration - public-private partnership turned out to be a problematic form of shaping relations among partners from different sectors. This new tool needs to be replaced by classic relations of negotiating another investment between public authorities and the private land owner.

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