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Space, Intergenerational Ties and Intergenerational Learning

Following a long history of division of work, territory, people, and generations and after a long tradition of fragmentation of the development as a result of administrative divisions and opposing local interests, the unity of the spatial development within social development is to be recreated. One should keep in mind that *space is one and entire, all spatial developmental orientations being indivisible, continuous an interdependent and constituting a whole.*

In the remote past, space had practically no limits. It could be occupied without constraints, being often used and misused, spoiled, degraded what led to degraded living conditions it offered. But in the past, the exploitation was limited since it did not go beyond a given space (i.e. piling up of blocks of flats, leading to the alienation of the inhabitants, or the density of the traffic polluting the air, etc.). The consequences of these phenomena could be understood and predicted, merely limiting the development. Now these exploited spaces have become numerous and the consequences have become unpredictable.

In the present times, however, the number of those who are using or misusing space has been increasing rapidly, each of the users requiring ever more space (blocks of flats, crowded housing estates, widened roads, huge bank and office buildings, huge administrative buildings, crowded and extended towns, etc.) In the present conditions meeting the needs of some, more often than in the past opposes meeting the needs of the others. (Krstić, p. 17). *Meeting the needs of younger generations might oppose meeting the needs of other generations*. To prevent this situation, everything has to be done as *to analyze the needs of generations, to understand why, where and how generations could meet in a given urban, built space. What they could do together in the context of given spatial conditions, or to be more specific in the context of a local community*.

Younger adolescent generations require being autonomous and claim to be treated as individuals even to the extent where they become marginalized without their families supervising in the absence of the supervision of their families. When in a community there are no intermediate structures for young people, no organized information points, no employment possibilities or recreational possibilities for them, there are more possibilities for young generations to experience marginalization and delinquency. When these generations require their own space in the community they become actors shaping their own urban socialization. (Verpraet, p.9).

Streets and squares are public spaces that have always been considered as marginal spaces for the socialization of younger people, looked down by older generations, but nevertheless enabling younger generations to meet, exchange values, experience peer learning and peer teaching without being exposed to the supervision of adult generations. Ideally also streets and squares should be a meeting place for *all* generations like in the past in smaller towns town promenades were a meeting place for all generations. A public space where all generations were meeting, exchanging ideas, learning from each other, making plans, having fun too. There are new town spaces now where generations meet, mostly around scheduled repetitive events (flee market, open air museums, parks, etc.). *Such places within a local community should be identified and build up into places of intergenerational learning.*

Over the last decades Eastern European countries have been exposed to major social interruptions. Typically each interruption produces important inequalities: economic, educational, cultural but also urban and generational inequalities. To illustrate urban inequalities, let me say, that those belonging to the lower income classes are being slowly squeezed out of the center of the town to the suburbs. The center of the town is being less used by public buildings of general utility and much more by private office building satisfying the needs of limited population groups. Coffee shops and bars have grown to become public spaces where people meet, do businesses together, learn from each other etc. Since different generations perform different activities and have different needs, there is an increasing generational segregation in this field. The majority of new coffee shops, bars and pubs in the center of the towns were set up by younger generations, according to their representations and are being occupied by younger people, older generations meeting

elsewhere. *It can be said that generational spatial divisions are getting greater mirroring and producing generational divisions in society and communities.*

How to make local communities belong to to all generations.

One of the possibilities is to start by asking the inhabitants about their hopes, fears, and joys. Asking respondents about their emotions highlights their needs without conditioning their answers. Only some of the generation specific needs can be predicted (i.e. when a new housing estate with less expensive flats in the suburbs is being set up, one can predict that younger families will rent them or buy them. The specific needs of younger families differ from the needs of other generations. They need to meet, to exchange experience among young parents, they need kindergartens and schools, children theatres, collective baby-sitting, collective laundries, playgrounds for children, libraries, etc. When the inhabitants of the hosing estate are older they also have age specific needs like a being in contact with other generations, having access to culture, feeling secure, living in an barriers free environment, having access to internal transport within the housing estate, etc.). *Specific generational material and psychological needs should be taken into account*. Also, since today up to five generations may live together they constitute a treasure of knowledge, experience and a valuable basis for intergenerational learning) intergenerational learning needs in a community are to be taken into account, public spaces and structures are to be set up, combining specific generational and above all analyzed common generational needs. *A community, an intergenerational learning community can be created on the basis of what is common to all generations and not on the basis of what makes them different*. Thus, the role of those who would like to set up intergenerational learning in a community is first to find out what common needs are, what creates bonds and ties and connections among generations and then to use the space or shape the space accordingly.

Literature and references
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