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THE NEW URBANISM PRINCIPLE OF QUALITY ARCHITECTURE AND URBAN DESIGN VERSUS PLACE IDENTITY. A CASE STUDY OF VAL D'EUROPE AND THE MANUFAKTURA COMPLEX

Abstract. This article contributes to the New Urbanism debate by considering the relationship between the identity of a place and quality in architecture and urban design. It combines a general theoretical discussion and an operational analysis with a comparative study of two commercial centres: Manufaktura in Łódź (Poland) and Val d'Europe in Marne-la-Vallée (France). It concludes that while the guidelines of New Urbanism can help both private investors and public stakeholders make better strategic decisions, according to the concept of quality architecture and urban design, its framework should be applied with care for community needs and the historical character of the city.

Keywords: New Urbanism, architectural and urban design quality, identity of a place, Val d'Europe, Manufaktura.

1. INTRODUCTION

New Urbanism, which has developed over recent decades as a critique of modernism (Mycielski, 1999; Santelli, 2000), codifies the formulas for human-adapted design (Marshall, 2003; Plaut and Boarnet, 2003, Duany, 2013; Talen, 2013). Those relate mainly to urban patterns and are not restricted to neo-traditional architecture (Trudeau, 2013). Recently, New Urbanism has become associated not only with the construction of completely new cities and districts, such as new suburbs and neighbourhoods in America, but also with the renewal of existing

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structures and supplementary buildings (Stangel, 2013). The movement provides guidelines for the sustainable development of modern cities. Its vision of compact, heterogeneous cities offers an alternative to an uncontrolled urban sprawl and anonymous architectural expression.

Building on previous theoretical discussions (Fainstein, 2000), this study examines the role of place identity in determining architectural and urban design quality, one of the basic principles of New Urbanism. Initially, we conducted a desk research and a review of the existing research on New Urbanism, especially that focussed on the principle of quality architecture, and urban design. Quality can be defined in terms of physical characteristics already identified in classic urban design literature (e.g. Alexander *et al.*, 1977; Hedman, 1984; Gehl, 1987; Krier, 2009). Several quantitative and qualitative methods are available for evaluating design quality variables (Nase *et al.*, 2015; Johansson, Sternudd and Kärrholm, 2016). This article combines a general theoretical discussion with an operational analysis of two important urban complexes, created around commercial centres: Manufaktura in Łódź (Poland) and Val d'Europe in Marne-la-Vallée, located around 35 km east of Paris (France). Those were selected to contrast a project built on a previously undeveloped greenfield site (Val d'Europe) with one embedded in an already existing urban fabric (Manufaktura). Both cases were developed around commercial centres which determined their urban structures. The focus on those spaces is justified by the strategic importance of commercial space in contemporary urban fabric while the selection of those two examples enabled an examination of the role of place identity in quality architecture. One is a renewed industrial area while the other is an urban project on a greenfield site, both with different features relating to New Urbanism criteria for quality architecture and urban design (summarized in Tab. 1). The study those differences through the lens of the New Urbanism principles enables an assessment of their practical validity, with particular regard to creating or maintaining a sense of place identity.

The method of source analysis, followed by criticism, was developed on the perception of the commercial space within the context of contemporary public spaces. As noted above, there are extensive theoretical discussions in the literature on the notion of place identity. However, to achieve a comprehensive assessment, empirical observations were also made through an analysis of two case studies.

The urban regeneration of a historical structure requires not only the re-adaptation of old buildings, but also a re-animation of the space between them. The same dependencies exist in new projects. The success of a transformation process often depends on the possibility of preserving or creating a new image of the place, especially as a public realm (Lorens, 2006). Therefore the study set out to test the following hypotheses: (1) that place identity can have an important influence on the perceived quality of architecture and urban design; (2) that public spaces,

even when they are an element of commercial projects, can play a catalysing role in both new and regenerated projects, and (3) that the New Urbanism framework provides useful guidelines for the development of contemporary cities, including with regard to the identity of a place.

Table 1. Reference criteria

Criteria	Manufaktura (Poland)	Val d'Europe (France)
Location of the project within the urban fabric	within the existing city, on a brownfield site, in the heart of the agglomeration	within the new town, on a Greenfield site, outside the main agglomeration
Place identity	adaptation of existing buildings, referencing local history	new constructions, referencing common popular styles
Cooperation with the authorities	introduced slowly, e.g. tram stop	present from the beginning, e.g. highway exit or train stops
Scale of investment	significant, including retail and various services. There is a hotel, and no normal housing within the Manufaktura complex	very important, including retail, various services but also different types of housing
Modes of transport	tram stop and planned trained stop (part of the underground train project in Łódź)	train stop, motorway
Public space	one main square within the complex structuring the space around it	two squares within the complex, functioning as starting and closing elements of the urban composition
Parking policy	huge parking area, which separates the complex form the surrounding urban fabric	huge parking area, which constitutes the perimeter of the complex and the limit of urbanisation (green space beyond it)

Source: own work.

2. COMMERCIAL SPACE AS CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC SPACE

The issues of place identity become particularly acute – and complex – in the case of the development or regeneration of spaces within the public realm. New Urbanism emphasizes the important role of the *res publica,* including public buildings and open spaces, in the reinforcement of community identity (Duany, 2013; Krier, 2009; Gehl, 1987). Other important principles are mixed use and diversity

(Trudeau *et al.*, 2015; Cysek-Pawlak, 2018). One of the goals of the guidelines of New Urbanism is to ensure the incorporation in a project mixed-use facilities, catering to the needs of socially diverse groups and in keeping with the original historical background.

The notions of the public realm and public space have attracted considerable attention from academics over the years, including, prominently, C. Sitte (1980), K. Lynch (1960, 1972), J. Gehl (1987), and C. Alexander (1977). That study focused on case studies in France, where F. Choay (1996), T. Paquot (2015), and S. Dufoulon (2014) discussed issues related to the *res publica*, and in Poland where T. Tołwiński (1948), W. Ostrowski (1975), H. Skibniewska (1979), K. Wejchert (1993), A. Gawlikowski (1992), C. Bielecki (1996) and more recently M. Kochanowski (2001), J.M. Chmielewski (2001, 2004), S. Gzell (2005), A. Böhm (2016), J. Gyurkovich (2015), W. Seruga (2016), Z. Zuziak (1998), Z. Paszkowski (2003), and A. Franta (2004) have contributed to the debate. Initially, the designation of the public realm was limited to space belonging to the community. Today, as the role of private initiatives in city development has increased, the issue of ownership has been subsumed into questions regarding the functions of spaces, which can fulfil a variety of community needs.

Urban spaces are diverse (Wejchert, 1993), and can serve various demographic groups (Amin *et al.*, 2002). This study focused on semi-public spaces (Chmielewski, 2001, 2004), specifically private spaces open to the public. It compares two commercial and entertainment centres. Such complexes are often designed intentionally to draw people away from external public spaces, by offering multiple functions. In that sense they can be considered 'centripetal' (Sadafie *et al.*, 1997). The popularity of commercialised spaces can also be understood as a response to a lack of genuinely public urban space (Santelli, 2000).

Shopping malls and vast leisure centres have become common features of the urban landscape. That raises important issues in both city centres and suburbs of spatial thematisation, as defined by M. Sokin (1992) and developed by P. Lorens (2006). Thematisation of urban space implies strict adherence to a single style. Stylistically consistent urban complexes are often profitable investments and popular with the public. However, thematisation can lead to artificially created spaces, having false histories and traditions. The question, then, is whether the principles of New Urbanism can help make sense of and avoid such inauthenticity, or whether the principle of stylistic homogeneity, leading to a harmony of a place, may also lead to thematisation – and even to the sort of artificiality and hyper-reality as exemplified by Disneyland complexes (Leach, 1999; Baudrillard, 2005). Might an overly rigid or extreme adherence to the principles of New Urbanism not risk tipping over into artificial scenography, with potentially negative consequences for the architectural and urban design quality?

3. PLACE IDENTITY

In relation to urban space, place identity signifies a physical reflection of the history and traditions of a site and its inhabitants, which distinguish it from other places and communities (Lorens, 2006, p. 31). This physical and mental conjuncture is what connects the inhabitants and the space. The *genius loci* can help solidify social narratives (Lynch, 1972; Larco, 2015). Place identity is thus perceived as essential for the inner consolidation of a society (Wiedmann *et al.*, 2014). The components of identity comprise local history and traditions, and the specific architectural forms and features of a place (Kochanowski, 2001; Myczkowski, 2003, 2004). K. Lynch (1960) used the term 'imageability' to describe the quality of a physical object that gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in the mind of a given observer. He identified five physical attributes that give places such imageability, namely paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks. It is important that those elements not be neglected, but rather used in harmony with other strategic elements if the attempt to give a new identity to commercial areas and semi-public spaces is to be successful (Zukin, 1995).

The New Urbanism approach to history has been strongly influenced by C. Alexander (1977). His pattern languages (architectural and urban rules for built environments that aim not for morphological homogeneity but for continuity with urban typology and character) were one of the original inspirations for the New Urbanism philosophy of sustainable design (Calthorpe, 1993; Kunsteler, 1993). The re-use of historical elements in new projects helps create an image of a place in keeping with its identity. Preserving the patina of time maintains the original character of a site.

Therefore, New Urbanism emphasizes the adaptation of key historic buildings, the use of local materials, and matching existing urban typology. The project will thus be authentic, i.e. coherent with the time and the place of its origin, and in harmony with itself (Giddens, 1991; Pound, 2001; Zarębska, 2002).

New Urbanism, then, seeks to integrate earlier urbanisms, so that the old and the new complement each other (Hebbert, 2003). The appropriate image of a heterogeneous urban space can be achieved through detailed design (Krier *et al.*, 1997). Yet, it is also important to maintain the historical identity of a place, if the success of a project is to survive changing economic conditions and passing trends.

4. CREATION OF AN URBAN ACTIVITY CENTRE – VAL D'EUROPE

Val d'Europe was conceived as a response to the post-Second World War need to unclog Paris and improve the territorial equilibrium of Ile-de-France. The project was also initiated in the context of the oil crises of the 1970s (Culo

et al., 2017). The state decided to create a series of New Towns – *Villes nouvelles* – the most important of which was Marne-la-Vallée (Schéma directeur de la région Île-de-France de 1965). Marne-la-Vallée was built on a previously undeveloped greenfield site, located 35 km east of Paris (Fig. 1). There were three main construction phases:

– 1987–1997: construction of infrastructure, including the road and railway networks (regional express-RER, high-speed rail TGV); construction of the Disneyland Paris leisure park (opened in 1992); construction of hotel and conference facilities;

– 1998–2003: construction of the urban centre, with retail facilities, residential areas, office buildings, and a university; creation of a second leisure park, Walt Disney Studios (opened in 2002); opening of the Arlington business park; development of hotel infrastructure;

– 2003–2017: creation of public spaces, including *Toscane* square and its service and utility surroundings; expansion of the leisure, office, housing and university facilities.

Val d'Europe, which is the western part of the new town of Marne-la-Vallée, was established in a partnership framework between a private company Disney, and local and state authorities (PIG, 1987). The cooperation's objective was to create a major European tourist destination with urban surroundings. Paris had competed with Barcelona to host Euro Disney. Disney chose the French location, particularly because of the promised infrastructure: a motorway, RER, and TGV.

In France, partnerships are usually established at the operational level, and various private enterprises may be responsible for the construction of one or several buildings, but not for the majority of spatial development (Chabard, 2006). However, in that case Disney held an unusually dominant position. Despite that the company had to negotiate specific design solutions with different public actors, which enabled strategic issues to be resolved favourably for the city. Although Disney imagined a city very residential in the American style, public officials successfully fought to create multiple public buildings and obtained a real city centre (Hachache, 2004). There was also a disagreement concerning the location of the shopping mall. Although Disney preferred a position closer to the motorway, public officials were able to negotiate for it to be in the heart of Marne-la-Vallée. Public officials shared Disney's opinion that the style and scale of the architecture, in particular the public spaces, should not be too imposing or monumental. The difficult process of negotiations and coordination brought clear financial success. Thirty years after the signing of the original agreement (Convention, 1987), the city structure has produced ten times more profit from the private investment than it was paid from public funds for the infrastructure (Culo *et al.*, 2017).
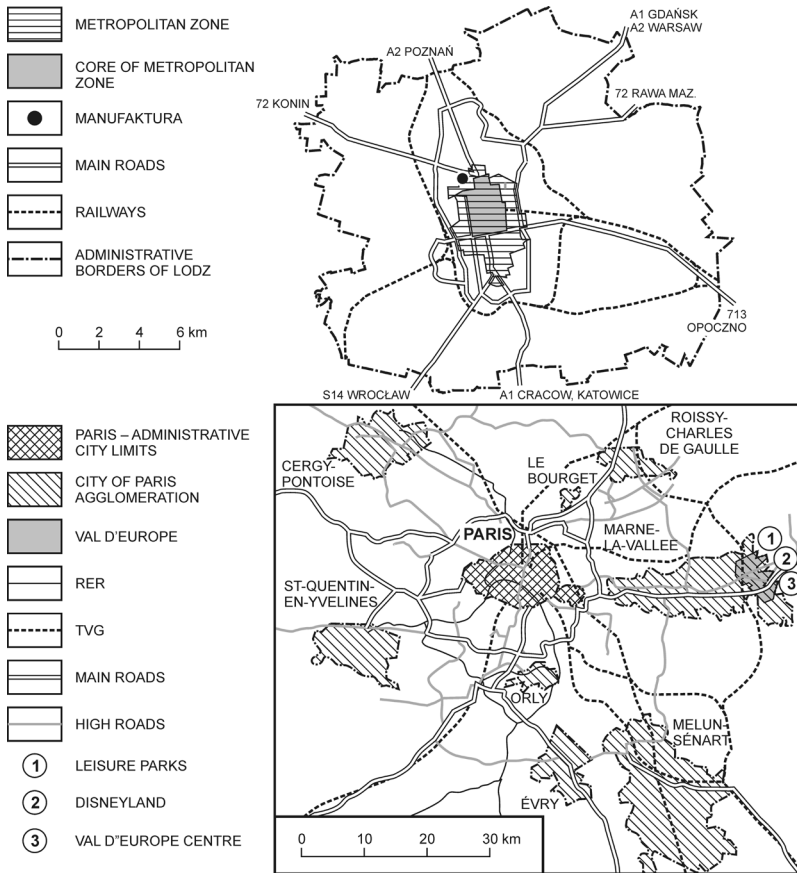
Fig. 1. Val d'Europe and Manufaktura – urban context

Source: author's own work on the basis of: Territorial Coherence Scheme of Grand Paris and
Study of the Conditions and Directions of the Area Development of the City of Łódź.

The harmonious design of the public spaces in Val d'Europe was inspired by historic European city centres. Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque architectural styles were the principle inspirations for L. Kriera and P. C. Bontempi in their work on Val'Europe (Bontempi *et al.*, 2006). The general urban plan, conceived by the architects R. A. M. Stern and J. T. Robertson, is model post-modern American urbanism, and it is strongly associated with the principles of New Urbanism. It employs a vast range of urban and architectural styles, including eclecticism, historicism and Art Nouveau, synchronised within neoclassicism. Coherence was sought through the creation of an overall visual atmosphere (PIG, 1987). As P. Chabard observed, the facades, ornamental motifs, colours, street furniture, and other elements of the visual space converge towards a single theme: the Paris of the nineteenth century, Haussmannian or neoclassical (2006).

It is planned that the whole area with amusement parks will eventually cover over 2,000 ha, of which the city centre itself, including the commercial centre and the adjoining station district, will comprise 3%. In contrast to the closed leisure zones, the urban activity centre is a publicly accessible area. The urban structure around the shopping centre (Fig. 2) offers typical public facilities: RER and bus stations, libraries, hotels, cafes, and restaurants, all designed according to the principles of social diversity and mixed use (Léger, 2017). The area located directly next to the train station has been constructed around a major public square, *Place d'Ariane*, and includes various services. The space is visually dominated by the belfry of a brewery designed by L. Krier. That atypical construction echoes Renaissance and Baroque aesthetics (Culo *et al.*, 2017). The station district (25 ha) leads to a purely commercial area (40 ha), composed of a shopping mall and a designer goods outlet (Fig. 3), *Vallée Village* (Arnaud, 2009). The urban structure is completed by a second public square, *Place de Toscane* (Fig. 4), which has an elliptical shape inspired by *Piazza dell'Anfiteatro* in Lucca, Italy (Bontempi *et al.*, 2006).
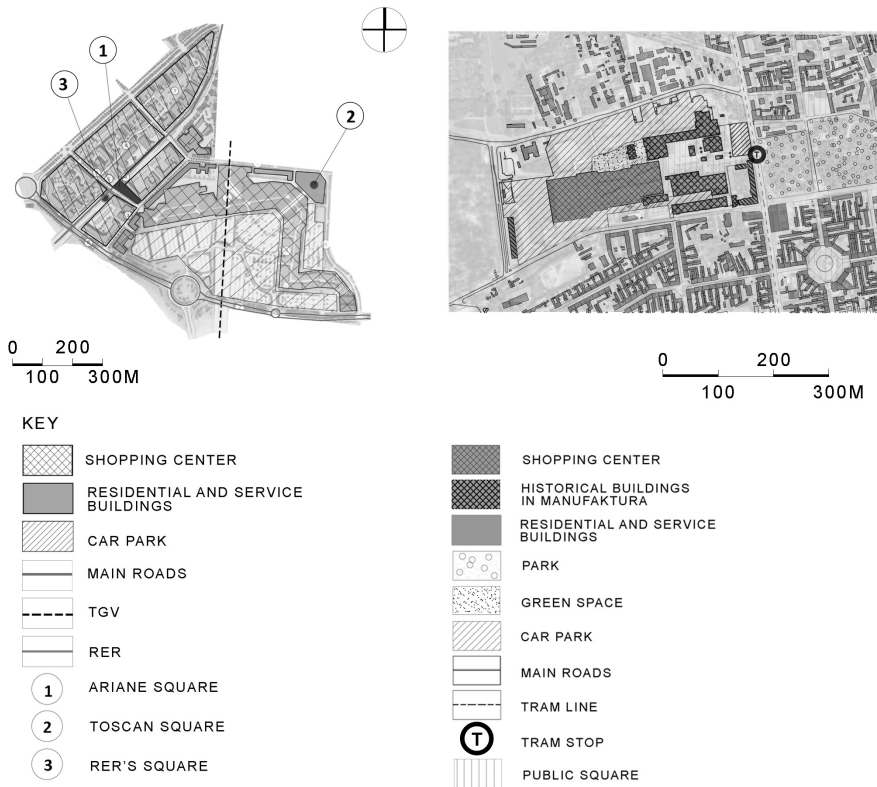

Fig. 2. Val d'Europe and Manufaktura – urban composition
Source: author's own work on the basis of Geoportail and Intersit.

The two main squares in Val d'Europe are clearly identifiable, and constitute vital hubs of activity. In order to counter the division created by the railway, *Place d'Ariane* was constructed on a concrete slab. However, a new barrier in the form of a vast open area car park was later introduced, isolating the site from the south. That reality undermines the official vision of a village without cars (Hachache, 2004). Even so, the main urban spaces give priority to pedestrian traffic, a strategy that helps create a unique atmosphere outside the 750 meter gallery of the shopping mall.

Fig. 3. Val d'Europe – *Vallée Village*
Source: M. M. Cysek-Pawlak.

The goal of Val d'Europe was to provide a "counterpoint to the imaginary city, an identity sufficiently durable that it would give the feeling that it could last forever" (Culo and Durand-Rival, 2017, p. 16). The co-author of the project, D. Coquet (Director of General Development and External Relations of Euro Disney), sought to avoid thematisation (interview Moutarde, 1999, p. 11). Synergy with the amusement parks was achieved by creating architecture in the city centre using popular historical styles, which, however, had not been used before in that area. For some, that was sufficient to embed the development in a specific context, rooted in European culture (Hachache, 2004). Others, though, argued that Val d'Europe is not a real part of Paris, rather a sort of architectural pastiche, plagiarism even (Arnaud, 2009). The columns, pilasters, and cornices appeal to the collective memory of common places (*topoi*, or commonplaces), and do not

reflect the real identity of the particular location. Perhaps, the fact that Val d'Europe was developed in a previously empty greenfield site placed certain limits on what could be achieved, in terms of creating place identity, with consequences for design quality. We now turn, to Manufaktura, a shopping and leisure complex which, in contrast to Val d'Europe, is embedded in the heart of the existing urban fabric of a brownfield site.

Fig. 4. Val d'Europe – *Place de Toscane*
Source: M. M. Cysek-Pawlak.

5. RECREATING AN URBAN ACTIVITY CENTRE – MANUFAKTURA

Manufaktura, one of the largest commercial centres in central Europe, is located in Łódź, the third-largest city of Poland, 130 km from Poland's capital: Warsaw. Similarly to Val d'Europe, the project was conceived as a response to the need for economic renewal and a new special dynamics following de-industrialisation. In the Polish case, the immediate historical background was de-communisation and the closing of Eastern markets, which, for the huge textile factory that Manufaktura had been, meant bankruptcy. Built at the end of the nineteenth century, Poznański's Empire (named after its founder)

was a working textile plant before and after the Second World War. From the 1990s, it was abandoned, and finally reopened in 2006, following its purchase by a French company Apsys and three years of redevelopment work. Today, 12 years later, Manufaktura is a recognisable landmark in the city, and its urban activity centre.

The contemporary composition of Manufaktura (Fig. 2) combines historical brick buildings, conceived mainly by H. Majewski and redesigned by Sud Architects, with a new shopping mall (Fig. 5).

Fig. 5. Manufaktura – Composition of new and historic buildings
Source: City Council of Łódź.

The reuse of original buildings is core to the Manufaktura brand. The importance of that project derived from its embeddedness in place identity. According to research, visitors are aware of the local history (Wójcik, 2009) if only because of the association of bricks with industry and the obvious significance of the Manufaktura name. The approach is thus in line with the guidelines of New Urbanism, which emphasise a respect for local history and the character of existing architecture, by researching local history, identifying the characteristics of traditional architecture, and incorporating typical, valuable elements of past compositions in a new development (Mycielski, 2005).

The buildings of Manufaktura are distributed inwards, creating a square (Fig. 6).

Fig. 6. Manufaktura – Square
Source: City Council of Łódź.

That centripetal type of public space is not traditional for Łódź, where the centre historically took the form of a long thoroughfare (one of the longest commercial high streets in Europe), i.e. Piotrkowska Street. Existing squares had not been used as common meeting points for decades. In contrast, the square in Manufaktura, which was not part of the historical complex, has become a popular area for inhabitants and visitors. This safe and well-designed space is widely considered among locals and visitors to be a positive addition to the city (Wójcik, 2009).

Most of the Manufaktura complex is dedicated to retail (27 ha). However, there are also many restaurants and entertainment facilities, including a theatre and a bowling alley. Its users consider the mixed use of the area the greatest advantage of Manufaktura (Wójcik, 2009). It extends to the use of the public square, where (among other events) concerts are held, seasonal markets take place, and an ice rink is set up in winter. The diversity of the facilities in and around the square has contributed to the creation of a public space accessible to everyone. Within a relatively small area, visitors can shop, go to the cinema, eat in a restaurant or visit the museum. Functions unrelated to commerce have been treated as secondary, which seems rational from the economic point of view.

A large area in Manufaktura has been designated for vehicle parking (Fig. 2). That constitutes a significant barrier that separates the complex in the north from the surrounding developed environment. The decision is understandable, given that it was not until four years after the opening of the complex that a tram stop was created, and that only now there is a project for a railway stop underway, as part of the underground metro project. There is still no direct connection between Manufaktura and the historical city centre, i.e. Piotrkowska Street.

Of course, the Manufaktura development has had its critics. For instance, G. Piątek (2006) stressed its fasadism, and the radical changes that were introduced to the original composition of the complex. According to M. Hanzl (2008), that led to Disneyfication of the post-industrial landscape. One could also ask whether the catalytic effect of Manufaktura's square has extended to the surrounding area. Doubts are raised by the industrial-residential *Famuły* buildings opposite, which still have not been renovated (although the renewal process has been started). Those questions are supported by research in property prices in the vicinity of the Manufaktura complex, which appear not to have been affected by the development (Olbińska, 2014). Only recently has the real estate market become more dynamic, with the construction of a new office complex opposite Manufaktura.

Nonetheless, it seems natural that in a redevelopment project of this scale not all of the old buildings can be employed, and significant changes related to the adaptation are inevitable within the buildings remaining on the site. The aim for the designers was to preserve the atmosphere and the identity of the place, and in fact the new image of Manufaktura was readily accepted by the population, a fact reflected by its popularity: the complex has become the main meeting point in the city and a trademark of Łódź nationally (Wójcik, 2009). Certainly, the authenticity of the space helped to achieve commercial success within its limits. Clear evidence is that, six years after its opening, the value of the investment increased from an initial 200 million euros to 390 million euros (the price for which the commercial property was sold by Apsys in 2012). It is to be hoped that a similar approach to preserving the city's identity and cultural heritage will be used to build the brands of other strategic developments in Łódź, area regeneration projects in particular (Krzysztofik *et al.*, 2017).

6. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the theoretical reflections and comparative case studies presented here, the importance in terms of architectural and urban design quality of maintaining a strong identity of a place has been confirmed (hypothesis 1). The focus of New

Urbanism today is the development of locations embedded in the existing urban fabric (the case of Manufaktura), rather than of empty greenfield sites (as in the case of Val d'Europe). The revival of existing brownfield sites in the heart of agglomerations is more rational than the development of new towns outside a main city agglomeration. The creation from scratch of a coherent architectural and urban design has its advantages, but as in the case of Val d'Europe, the attempt to create an identity of a place that had not previously existed can tip easily into thematisation and be perceived as shallow and inauthentic. In contrast, and perhaps inevitably (given its renovation and adaptation of existing buildings), Manufaktura may be considered more historically authentic.

We also indicated that public spaces, even if they are elements of commercialisation projects, can play a role as catalysts for the development of both new and regeneration projects (hypothesis 2). Different forms of public space can clearly structure the composition: centripetally (the square of Manufaktura) or longitudinally (the link between *Place de Toscane* and *Place d'Ariane*). Therefore, they are particularly important for architects and urban designers who must try to make them attractive to diverse social groups. We have seen how the developers of Manufaktura and Val d'Europe sought to create publicly accessible areas with a strong sense of authentic identity. If their success was partial or debatable, what is beyond any doubt are their commercial successes. Nevertheless, as proven by the regeneration of industrial residences in front of Manufaktura, that effect of economic invigoration can stretch beyond the confines of the commercial properties themselves in the long term. When planning an urban operation, the scale and the diversity of use should be deeply analysed. Learning form the examples examined here, in order to create or recreate an urban activity centre, a balance between services, retail and housing is needed, where possible inside a development or nearby, within a close timeframe.

Finally, as this article shows, New Urbanism provides a useful framework for planning and evaluating the development of contemporary cities (hypothesis 3). For private investors the priority is, of course, financial success; yet, a city can also benefit considerably from commercial projects. Public authorities can play an important strategic role in defining the priorities of projects, and can negotiate important elements of urban space development. The case of Val d'Europe provides an instructive example where public actors influenced the development of urban surroundings by private investors. City authorities also have a responsibility to ensure the quality and success of a project. In the case of Manufaktura, insufficient public transport led to the expansion of open parking areas. And the parking policy is also not satisfactory in the case of Val'Europe, in terms of sustainability. In both cases, the parking areas remain a real barrier separating the urban or natural surroundings. That is why the development of public transport through projects such as the new underground train connection in Łódź is so crucial. The guidelines of New Urbanism can help both private investors and public stakeholders to

make better strategic decisions, according to the principle of quality architecture and urban design. However, the New Urbanism framework should be applied with sensitivity to the social needs and the historical character of a city. Care should be taken not to create an artificial urban set. If a project does not offer a sufficiently authentic sense of a place, it is likely to be treated as a commodity, which today is popular but tomorrow may fall out of fashion, be abandoned, and demolished.

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