

A Space of Choice: Exploring New Patterns of Common Student Spaces

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Abstract: The paper describes a project conducted by a group of architecture students at the Cracow University of Technology. The research problem focused on common spaces in the learning environment, employing the theoretical framework of the sociology of architecture and the participatory design methodology. The project aimed to propose current design model solutions for inclusive and universally-accessible student places, reflecting on the initial studies and the design workshop experiences. The socio-spatial patterns proposed in this study were inspired by the concept of a pattern language developed by the team led by Christopher Alexander in the 1970s. In contrast to the original patterns, the new proposals for patterns of common student spaces are not statements, but questions. The answers to these questions involve different relationships between individuals (users) and the built environment, including those connecting users to the architectural work, the natural environment, other individuals, or user groups.

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Introduction

This paper confronts the experiences gained during the inquiry project “Synchronization: Together or Apart in Urban Space?” (“Synchronizacja – razem czy osobno w przestrzeni miasta?”) with reflections summarizing this undertaking. The project’s theme was communal and pro-social places in public or semi-public spaces in the city, with a special focus on common spaces in the learning environment. The project aimed to define some innovative socio-spatial patterns of communal space for learning environments based on the preliminary studies and the design process, in which students of the Faculty of Architecture of the Cracow University of Technology participated between 2021–2023. The principle of this inquiry based on qualitative sociology was the appropriateness of theory and methodology to solve specific practical problems (Becker, 1967), as well as a focus on the point of view

of the study participants, their daily practices, and manufacturing their knowledge of the situation (Knorr-Cetina, 1981). The location of the inquiry – a particular learning environment of the home university – was viewed as a space for a potential redefinition of one's team (users of the space) and audience (other potential users, including students from another faculty, another university, and city residents) in the spirit of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Strauss, 1993; Goffman, 2000).

The problem that constituted the research challenge of this project was inspired by the sociology of architecture that views architecture as a medium of social communication, and a space for community. What triggered the project was the multi-layered meaning of the synchronicity of common spaces and communities, and the design of such spaces for the community, especially the community of learners. At the most general level, this kind of community is always “a place of intersection where political and social discourses that are completely incompatible with each other meet” (Sowa, 2014: 45). The contemporary community is not linked by “mechanical” unity, but relies on “organic” solidarity (Durkheim, 1999), “presence”, and “coexistence” (Sowa, 2014: 48), as well as on “local, open, and grassroots cooperation” (Sennet, 2013: 349). However, the idea of such a community of “equals” seems quite far removed from the reality of university, where “strict rules of vertical dependencies and gradations” apply (Sowa, 2014: 45). This perspective may be often seen in planning strategies. Much contemporary design “for people”, similar to the early progressive design of the 1950s, focuses on usability and ergonomics, and uses “a reductionist view of people as one element in a mechanistic system of inputs and outputs” (Hanington, 2018: 195). The term “user”, introduced into the language of modern architecture to replace earlier terms (e.g., “occupant”, “client”, and “inhabitant”) refers to the practicality and functionality of the built environment (Fortry, 2000: 312). However, unlike earlier terms, it takes into account the anonymity and abstraction of the people for whom architecture is intended. The term has had a tremendous impact on spatial planning in terms of thinking about “users” and producing an “abstract space of experts” rather than a “concrete” and “subjective” space “of everyday activities of users” (Lefebvre, 1993: 145). Such a perspective ignores the importance of architectural spaces in holding individual and collective memories and contributing to the development of personal and group identities (Fine, 2004). Indeed, a common problem in mainstream contemporary architecture is to treat the people for whom space is created not as a sum of individualities, including also hybrid subjects such as “marginal men” (see Park, 1928), but, rather, as a unified group of users. Thus, contemporary urban life – also shaped by modern, functionalist architecture – “instead of mingling people with divergent backgrounds [...], more often separates and segregates them” (Paetzold, 2000: 66).

The purpose of the project described in this study was to develop alternative design proposals for an inclusive space offered to the community of learners. It was conceived as a space within the university campus, but open both to the university community and people from the city. The project aimed to define a community of users following the idea of “multiplicity” rather than “limitation” as traditionally defined communities (Nancy, 2010). The multiplicity of the project approach was then seen in terms of the community definitions, the place meanings, and design methods inspired by the participatory design leading to the production of a space of choice. The social configuration of the group of users was analyzed within the dominant group of users (students) and at the intersection

with other space users (university staff and people from the city). During the project, the group was also self-defined based on the user representatives' engagements; the project participants and co-designers were at the same time the space users. What has added multiplicity to the study was the space itself. The context area of the project (a space in front of the building of the Faculty of Architecture), although somewhat neglected and not living up to its potential, has absorbed meanings from many "ontological" layers (Yaneva, 2017). Its heritage, infrastructure, information, and social and cultural nature create the potential for different variants of the city and public space. As for design methods, the project vision aligns with the concept of participation in user-centered design and place-making, which consider the diverse goals of the users, place attributes, and socio-spatial patterns (Alexander et al., 1977; 2008; Łukasiuk, 2017; Hanington, 2018).

Architectural and social space – the sociology of architecture

The concept of space is central to architecture and the sociology of architecture. In architecture, it is an essential material for creating form and enclosure, enabling the kinetic bodily experience of the subject and esthetic perception, but also a tool for organizing social connectivity. It gains new recognition in modern "anti-monumental architecture", which, as Aaron Betsky notes, is primarily concerned with "spatial planning, engineering and codification" (Betsky, 1990: 28). Importantly, architectural space is also an idea and a value, as well as a reflection of the distribution of power. For all these reasons, however, "space is the most luxurious thing anybody can give anybody in the name of architecture" (Lasdun as cited in Fortry, 2000: 256). On the other hand, architectural and urban space is a "*sui generis* humanistic" reality, which is not only limited to "productive efficiency, the functionality of spatial forms, and economy of time and space" (Rewers, 2005: 83). It is a space that also responds "to the historically and culturally diverse needs of people, arranged in irreducible dichotomies: security and freedom, certainty and adventure, work and play, predictable and unpredictable, similarity and difference, isolation and encounter, exchange and investment, independence and commitment, the immediacy of goals and long-term planning" (Rewers, 2005: 86). Such a space is not created once and for all. It is often "supplemented, enriched or changed by users", so in this sense architectural objects are ambiguous (Jałowiecki, 2005: 21). Architectural and urban forms, "as 'aggregates' of built form, both reflect and contain social forms" (King, 2003: 24). The discrete logic of architectural space affects the specific behavioral patterns or configurations such as "encountering, congregating, avoiding, interacting, dwelling" formed by groups or collections of people (Hillier, 1996: 20). However, the elaboration of architectural space into socially-sanctioned patterns is primarily influenced by the culturally-significant elaboration of physical forms during the design and construction phase. Some of the ideas incorporated into built forms may be used "as an instrument of social control" (King, 2003: 31) and as a tool to impose alien cultural values on the subject. The architectural space is not only "a decoration in which social life takes place" – but a factor that constitutes a special kind of "heavy" communication medium (Fisher as cited in Łukasiuk, 2011: 95). The important and relevant question then is: "*whose* ideas, *whose* beliefs, *whose* values, or *whose* view of the world are decisions based?" (King, 2003: 31).

So far, the mainstream research in the sociology of architecture has tended to focus on the study of larger-scale formations – urbanism and urban life. Classical accounts of this problem focused primarily on the dominance of the cultural and intellectual life of the metropolis and its “functional magnitude” laying “beyond its actual physical boundaries” (Simmel, 1999: 76), and being rather a “state of mind” (Park as cited in Łukasiuk, 2017: 45) filtered from all materiality. However, as Łukasiuk notes, the underestimation of the importance of the “tangible side of the city” and – more broadly – of “space” has triggered a counter-movement within sociology more or less since the 1970s (Łukasiuk, 2017: 45). This trend includes Guy Ankerl’s (1981) extensive work devoted to the “experimental sociology of architecture” and an attempt to describe social phenomena in architectural space based on objective, physical variables of the interpersonal communication of a visual, acoustic, olfactory, or tactile nature, among others. Referring to Simmel’s work on the study of “space and the spatial order of the social”, Ankerl indicates the key parameters of architectural space for social face-to-face communication, including the “exclusivity of space”, “partitioning”, “spatial fixation”, “distances” between people, “communication” and “traffic”, as well as “territorial sovereignty” or “empty space” (Simmel, 1921 as cited in Ankerl, 1981: 13). This commonality encompasses different types of communication, ranging from the traditional, close “door-to-door” neighborly relationship, through the “place-to-place community”, to the contemporary changes initiated by the development of the latest media in the “person-to-person connectivity” model (Brzozowska, 2017: 13–14).

The newest inquiry in the sociology of architecture, but also the theory of architecture, demonstrates a tendency to focus on issues so far peripheral to the conventional research topics of these fields. As for sociology, the focus is shifting from the human to the material and non-human. The originator of the Actor-Network Theory, Bruno Latour (2010) notes that the term “social” has come to refer less to the characteristics of a statistically emergent collective and more to how people, things, and ideas are intertwined. This in some ways undermines the idea of group constancy, but also certainty about the source and causes of events, as well as the characteristics of social agencies (such as society, culture, field, or individual). It leads to the idea that the source may not be “someone” but “something” – objects or animals, for example (Latour, 2010). This theory also has a reference in the sociology of architecture, e.g., in the work of Albena Yaneva (2009), who believes that some “artifacts are deliberately designed to shape or even replace human action. They can mold the decisions we make, influence the effects of our actions and change the way we move through the world” (Yaneva, 2009: 277). The field of architecture is changing, too: from exclusively static buildings to transformable spaces between and within buildings, involving people, objects, natural elements, as well as virtual information. A clear manifestation of this was the 11th International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, entitled *Out There. Architecture Beyond Building* (curated by Aaron Betsky in 2008). It displayed immaterial architecture and spaces constructed by technical infrastructure and information that changes over time (such as the processing of stimuli registered in real-time from the environment) and, above all, through the impressions of the spectators. Such experiments reinforce the importance of the concept of “‘atmosphere’ in architecture that defines a state of resonance and identification (sensorimotor, emotive, and cognitive) between an individual and their surrounding built space” (Canepa et al., 2019: 7). When thinking about the social impact of architecture, it is, therefore, important

to remember that the audience of architecture is influenced not only by the structure of the built space and its cultural and esthetic codes, but also by that ephemeral, atmospheric quality produced at the interface between architecture and user experience. Because this quality is ephemeral, though intensely perceived, it can be also used in a targeted way in the process of “managing the atmosphere of places, the effects of which are manifested, among other things, in the self-selective choices of potential users” (Łukasiuk, 2017: 46).

The “Synchronization” project – preliminary studies and the local context

We started our project with a group of students affiliated with a student science team (“Percepcja”) in the fall of 2021 by the organization of the seminar, open to students, faculty staff, and guests, and dedicated to the word of the year – *loneliness* – and its various meanings in architecture. Topics presented in that session included: loneliness in the crowd, and conversely – in the empty public space of the city (during the lock-down caused by the COVID-19 pandemic), loneliness perceived as a product of a foreign culture (the case of foreign students), individual differences in the perception of being together and being apart (loneliness and privacy issues), and loneliness of people who feel stress and discomfort in common places in public space. The next open seminar organized a few months later involved topics of a city for people, a city not only for people (the issue of wilderness and post-industrial nature in the city), and the role of local activists in shaping urban public space. In May 2022, our group went on a three-day trip to Łódź to confront some of the problems discussed before in a real urban environment. During this research trip, the group visited places in the public space that are characteristic of the transformation of modern Łódź, such as Włókiennicza Street, the Jaracz Market, OFF Piotrkowska, Manufaktura, and EC1, as well as some parks, parklets, and murals. We were interested in how these transformations enliven or not the city’s public space and how they depend on the grassroots energy of the residents. As an example of a community space for students, we were able to see the transformed post-industrial common space of the Base Camp dormitory. An important part of our trip was also to meet people from Łódź who are experts in local architecture, urban public space, and street art¹, with whom we discussed the changes taking place in the city and their perception by the public.

The group’s initial studies and experiences of community spaces were then used to analyze local conditions and to choose a suitable location within the Cracow University of Technology campus for the design studies. After considering several locations, the group decided on a site around the main headquarters of the Faculty of Architecture on Podchorążych Street. This site seemed the most challenging place; for both its strengths and weaknesses. The former included the impressive history, dating back to the Middle Ages, its specific location in relation both to the contemporary city and to its eco-system (former Młynówka River), and certainly the special meaning for students of the Faculty of Architecture – as the current headquarters of the Faculty. The weaknesses of the place included

1 Architectural critic Błażej Ciarkowski and activists of Urban Form Foundation Teresa Latuszewska-Syrda and Aleksandra Dudek.

the distance from the main campus of the University, the neglected character of the site lacking decent campus infrastructure, and disconnection from nearby city life. In turn, the proximity to the contemporary city center and other universities provides an opportunity to create an interesting space for the integration of the university and city spheres.

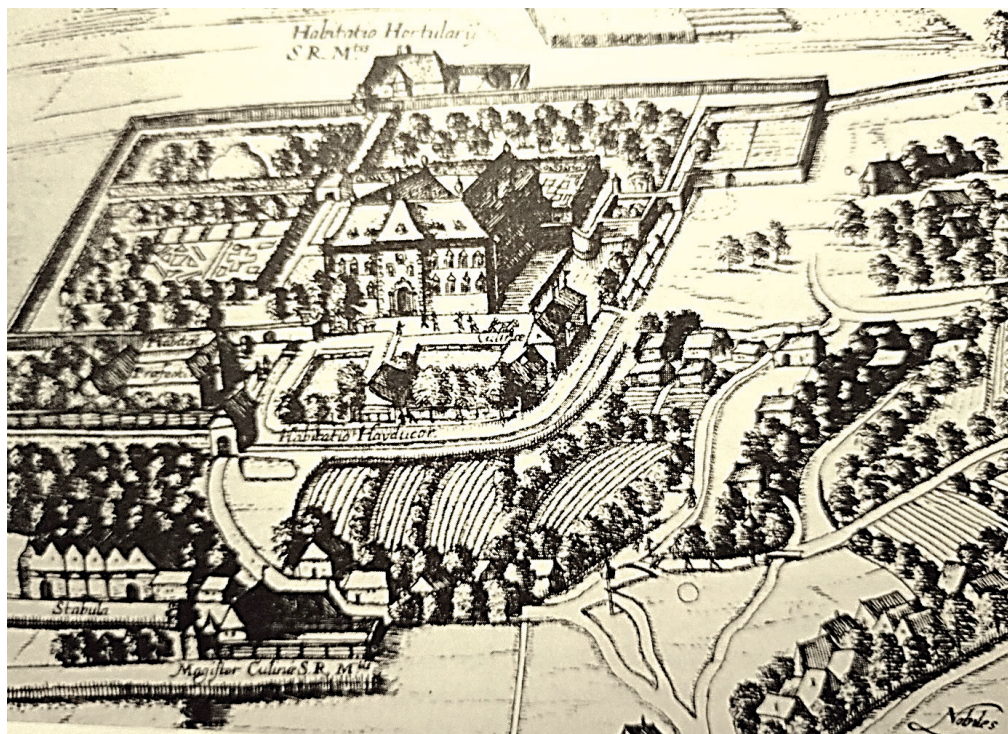
A few words need to be said here about the site's heritage. The place dates back to 1357 when the royal residence (Łobzów) – a hunting lodge in a forested setting – was constructed here. It was probably a favorite place of Casimir the Great, who built it where “in the shade of the trees of his garden he began great thoughts aimed at the happiness of the country” (Grabowski, 1822: 177). Since then up to the end of the 18th century, the place was a royal residential building (Illustration 1) developed by subsequent Polish kings and their Italian architects. Its style and function changed from a hunting lodge to a mannerist villa (Batory with Santi Gucci) and an austere Baroque palace (Sigismund III and Giovano Trevano). After the palace's grandeur was largely destroyed by the Swedish Deluge (1655–1657), it gradually deteriorated until, in 1787, King Stanislaw August Poniatowski gave the village of Łobzów and its ruined palace to the Cracow Academy, which started to restore the building, but left unfinished (Szpyt, Pikulski, 2016). Since then up to the mid-19th century, the relics of the palace served as a café in the park, a romantic ruin, a hospital, and a warehouse, before it was reconstructed again (1852, architect: Feliks Księżarski) as a military school (*Kadeten Institut*), which continued its function as Podchorążówka after Poland regained its independence, and later after World War II. In the 1990s, the heavily damaged building and its surroundings abandoned by the military was given to the Cracow University of Technology. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the building – renovated and adapted for the university function – has been the main seat of the Faculty of Architecture and the Faculty of Physics.

In addition to its history, another important feature of the site is its direct connection to the green belt of the city, formed by the Młynówka Królewska river, which was once the source of life for the gardens of the residence, but also for the neighboring horticultural villages. The river, now transformed into an underground canal, marks the route of the city's longest linear park, named after it. The former royal garden has been replaced by a parking lot and a green space devoid of any expression or engagement. Too much of the area remains biologically dead, covered with asphalt or concrete slabs. There are no remnants of its former landscape grandeur or historical significance. The only cultural elements in the area outside the building are the central monument to Józef Piłsudski, a reminder of the military past of the place, and the 3D sculptural installation built by the students of the Faculty of Architecture, which stands in the green space to the right of the main axis. This element is the only one that evokes contemporary architectural spirit of the place. In general, the site exudes a rather unwelcoming atmosphere. It is a fenced and mostly empty space, scattered in front of the building and its backyard, which are visually and functionally disconnected from each other.

According to our observations, the space does not meet the needs of the users other than people parking their cars here (including some university employees, but also commercial users);

unfortunately, even though the parking lot is usually quite empty, students cannot park here. The area outside the parking lot remains even more empty; the only users are sometimes students occupying a few worn-out benches on warm, sunny days. University employees practically never stay in the outdoor area. People from the city are not welcome here, animals are not allowed. The main entrance to the area is a car road, and there is also one-side pedestrian entrance leading through the vicinity of the gas station adjacent to the area. The technical quality of the sidewalks hinders navigation and presents accessibility challenges for disabled individuals. Additionally, the seating options for students are inadequate, consisting solely of benches that are in a state of disrepair (Illustration 2A). The bike racks also require maintenance, lacking both protective canopies and easy access. The information about the site is not very clear and is poorly placed. Inscriptions visible from the street (on the gate) inform only about the owner of the site and the access restrictions in force; the name of the institution and the commemorative plaque appear only on the building (around 100 meters from the public footpath along the street). In recent years, information about the building for the blind has also been placed in the area in front of the building, although access to this information – as well as to the building, especially for people with disabilities – is dangerous due to the technical condition of the sidewalk (Illustration 2B). The area's only positive attribute is its many trees, which provide ample shade and enhance the overall esthetic of the site, evoking its garden past (Illustration 3).

Illustration 1. Royal residence in Łobzów (c. 1605), a fragment of a copperplate depicting a view of Cracow from the northwest



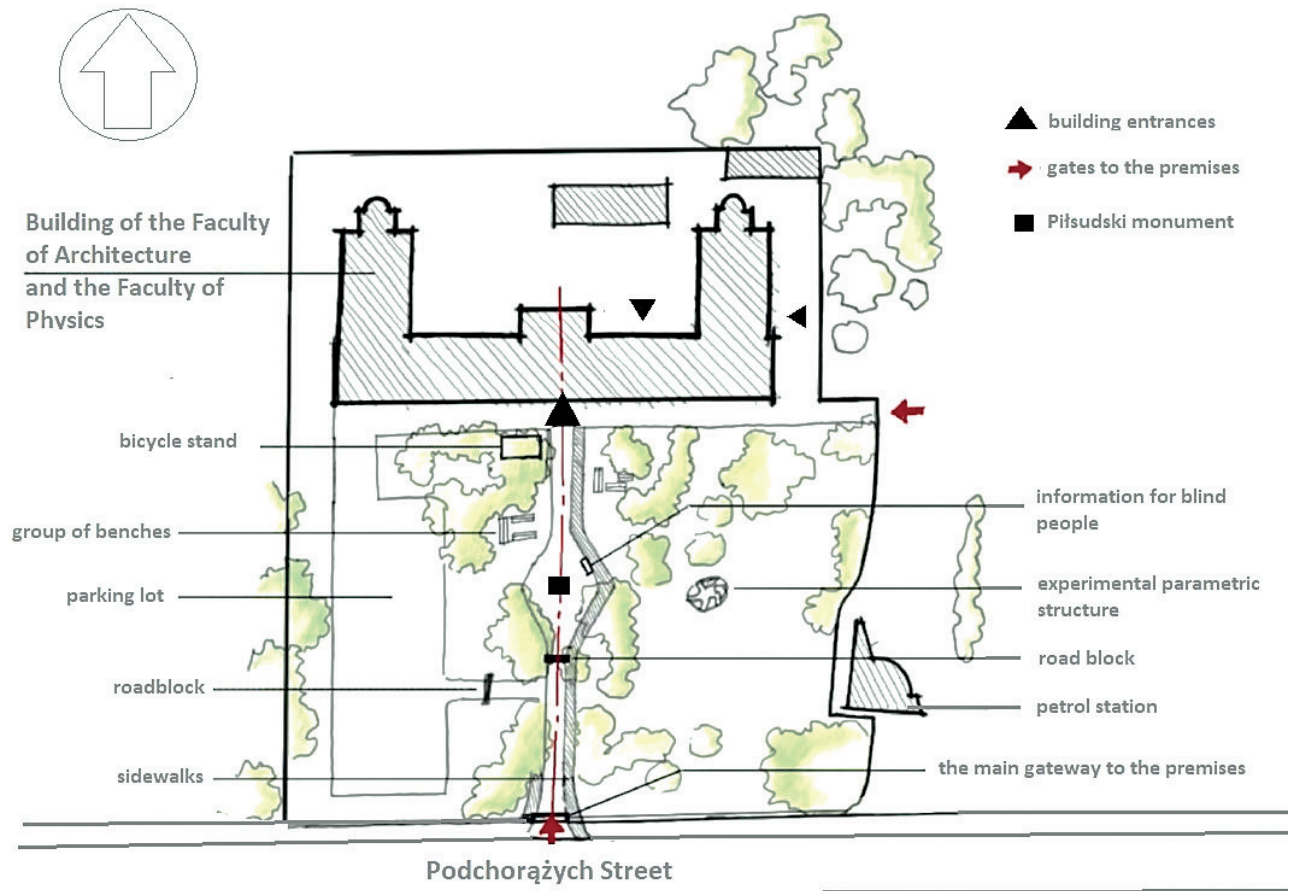
Source: Banach, 1983.

Illustration 2. The current appearance of the site: A – the seating area in front of the entrance to the building (left), B – view of the main road leading to the entrance to the building from Podchorążych Street (right)



Source: Photos by Kamil Federyga.

As part of our preliminary studies, an online survey with the participation of the Faculty of Architecture students ($N = 96$), was conducted in June 2022 with the aim of analyzing their opinions and expectations regarding the chosen place. Participants in this poll included 57 students of M.A. studies and 36 students of B.A. studies. The majority of the participants (90.6%) stated that the current space on the Podchorążych campus (Illustration 3) is either somewhat or completely insufficient. Furthermore, it was identified that both indoor (72.9%) and outdoor (81.3%) relax areas here are in high demand, followed by individual study and workspaces (66.7%) as well as group workspaces (69.8%). More than half of the participants (58.3%) assumed that the Faculty building and its surroundings provide sufficient space for students, but they suggested that the area needs better arrangement. In contrast, 41.7% of the respondents found the quantity and quality of both indoor and outdoor student spaces to be inadequate. The primary concerns with outdoor areas were the absence of seating (92.7%), technical facilities (77.1%), and decent landscaping (68.8%). The majority of the students participating in this poll (61.5%) believed that a specific space for students outside the faculty building should be located on the front-right side. Additionally, 64.6% of the students prefer the area to be more closely integrated into the city. Concerns (threads) that could arise when implementing such a space, as noted by the participants, include noise from the street (42.7%), poor connectivity to the building (20.8%), and insufficient privacy (26%).

Illustration 3. Site plan of the existing surroundings of the Faculty of Architecture building

Source: Drawing by Dzmityr Nikitsin.

The “Synchronization” workshops – working on alternative design proposals

The preliminary studies focused on understanding the problem of communal spaces and practical preparation for the designing (including the place analysis and the poll), aimed at organizing the student design workshops in July 2022. The workshop base was one of the classrooms on the first floor of the building on Podchorążych Street, which provided a good view of the site and the inner space of the building (it was the only room in this building that had a glass wall connection with the circulation space). We wanted the workshop participants to have contact with the space that the project was about while they were working. Twenty students from the Cracow University of Technology participated in the workshops; about half of them had participated in all previous activities related to the project; all but one of them were architecture students. The group included graduates from the second, third, fourth, and fifth years; most participants were women (17); the group included two students from Belarus and one from Ukraine.

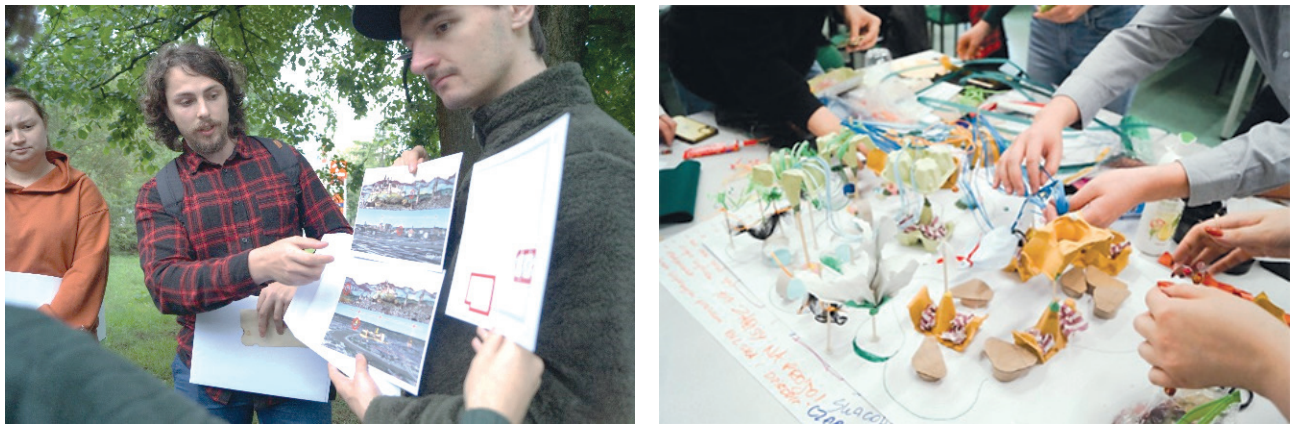
The focus of the workshops was on inquiring when designing (see Zeisel, 1984), but it also worked the other way, i.e., designing when inquiring. We wanted to produce some knowledge that can be seen as local social constructs (Knorr-Cetina, 1981), formed from the practical lived experiences of the group members and some contextual factors (including the history of the place). The designing process was inspired by the *Pattern language* as a tool for communicating the goals of the project within the group (Alexander et al., 1977; 2008), whereas the Design Thinking method was used as a practical tool for enabling the creative process. In our workshops, we followed the five steps of the Design Thinking method: “empathizing”, “defining the problem”, “generating ideas”, “building prototypes”, and “testing” (Wolniak, 2017: 249). The Persona technique, a narrative activity that characterizes target users for product design, served as an idea generation tool. The *personas* created by the four emergent design groups became an emanation of the negotiated needs of the users gathered in each design group. While exercising this technique, students envisioned the designed space, integrating personal knowledge of the location (including their experiences as daily users of the space as well as reflections of the field game played on the first day of the workshops), and user-specific requirements, while incorporating data from an earlier conducted survey.

The workshops started with some lectures provided by experts from the faculty and university as well as guests². The lectures focused on three topics: the analysis of the project site (history of the site, urban issues), the analysis of the methodology of the design work (issues related to design theory and creativity), and the analysis of the needs and expectations of the project users. The first day was dedicated to the place. It was spent mostly listening to the lectures on place history, the building, and the university community; the students participated in long discussions on the presented issues. The day ended with a field game (Illustration 4A) prepared by the students participating in the project, which was a form of historical and landscape research walk around and outside the building. The second day of our workshops was dedicated to the creativity issues. It started with the Design Thinking exercises and the first spontaneous visions produced by the students utilizing the Persona technique. The third day was dedicated to the problem of individual differences and sensibility in the perception of the space; the students listened to the lecture on neuroatypical persons in architectural space, developed their concept design, and discussed their ideas with the invited expert. The fourth day was dedicated to the development of form; the students working on their designs met with the opinions of the invited artist sculptor and art teacher. The fifth day was the day of finalizing the designs and presenting them and the ideas involved to the workshop guests. Starting on the second day of the workshops, when the designing process began, the students were divided into four working groups of five, chosen by a democratic draw process, and operated independently. The creative work took place in two phases using mock-ups. First, working mock-ups were made from recycled materials (Illustration 4B), and then the refined spatial visualizations in the form of 3D objects were placed on previously prepared, identical

2 The lectures and presentations were given by the Faculty of Architecture members: Maciej Motak, Ph.D., D.Sc., Assoc. Prof. (history of the site); Piotr Winskowski, Ph.D., D.Sc., Assoc. Prof. (theory of design); Angelika Lasiewicz-Sych, Ph.D. (learning environment); university staff: Anna Nowak, M.A. (Design Thinking); and guests: artist and educator: Joanna Musiał, M.A. (neuroatypical persons' perception of space) and Jan Kuka, Ph.D. (the Fine Art Academy, Cracow).

for each group, monochromatic mock-ups representing the faculty building and its immediate surroundings. Hand-drawn sketches and concept boards were utilized, whereas computer tools were not employed. Each group received individual feedback and criticism daily from guests, including faculty members who were not involved in the project as well as guest artists. The projects were analyzed from various angles, such as the psychophysiological requirements of neuroatypical persons and the esthetics and multifaceted effects of spatial design. On the concluding day of the workshop, the four groups presented their ideas and mock-ups at a 1:200 scale. The following is a summary description of each group, their goals, and design solutions.

Illustration 4. Students' activities during the design workshops: A – a field game on the first day (left), B – a preliminary phase (brainstorming) of the visualization of project concepts on the second day (right)



Source: Photos by Dominika Cieplak.

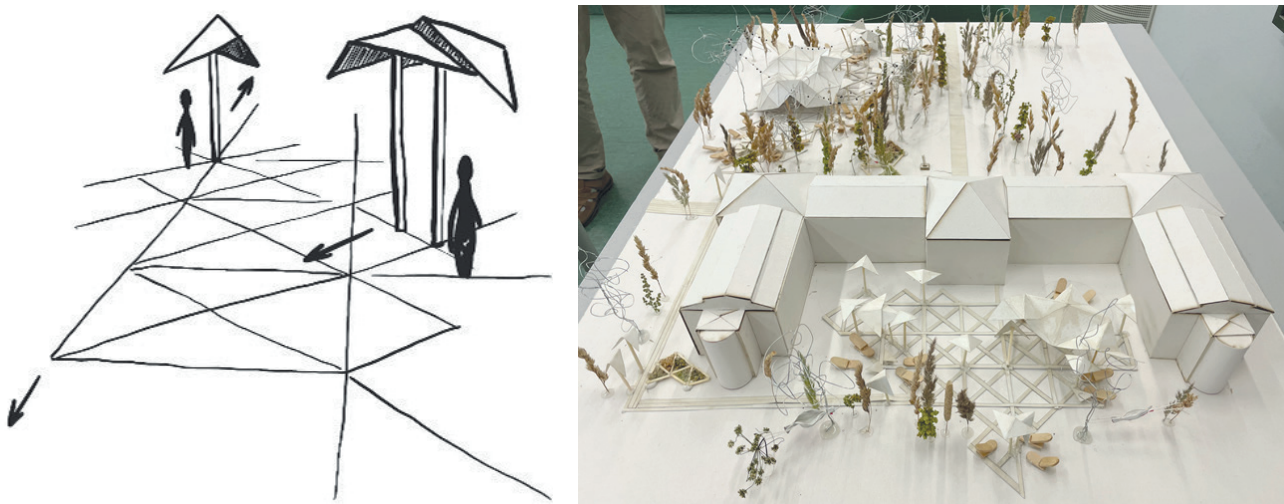
Group 1: “Base Renewal”

The first group consisted of three persons (including one male) who completed the 4th year and two graduates from the 2nd year of studies. The three people in the group worked from morning to evening, but the other two often came later than the others, with one of them kept trying to take over the group. This gave the work of this group the most turbulent character, in which a male-female co-leadership couple provided a constant dynamic. However, despite the ongoing discussions and opposing arguments, the group managed to find a way to make decisions together.

The group's project began with a definition of *persona* as an individual “in need of relaxation and calm”. In the initial brainstorming phase, the group used recycled materials (egg pressings, paper, and sticks) to create a vision of a “paradise oasis”: comfortable chairs and umbrellas with strings of hanging lights between them. Taking this vision to the architectural phase, the group came up with the idea of modular and foldable furniture that could be configured as desired on the plan, owing to a network of rails installed on the floor. The idea for folding and moving umbrellas came from playing with a paper umbrella, from which a plane emerged as a result of subsequent transformations.

Someone came up with the idea of using cold coffee left on the table as an ecological paint. This, in turn, sparked the idea of natural colors and materials. The color was associated by those working in the group with “linen, and canvas, it was more organic and more pleasant”. This gave a way of thinking about the overall form. The roof over the cafe was created similarly, from triangular modules, glued together in a rather random, free-form shape, folded along lines that corresponded to the lines of the rails on the ground. The whole thing was finished with coffee-colored paint in a pleasant beige. An element of the design that appeared at the very beginning of the creation was the upward lighting, which went straight from the prototype phase to the final version of the project, where they no longer hung from palm trees, but from the existing trees in front of the faculty building (Illustration 5).

Illustration 5. The “Base Renewal” design concept of transformative and interactive students’ space: A – a scheme of the movable umbrellas (top left), B – aerial view of the 3D mock-up (right)



Source: Drawing by Kamil Federyga, photo by Krzysztof Lenartowicz.

Group 2: “Wild Architect’s Reserve”

The second group was composed of five women: two of them completed the 5th year, one the 4th year (a student from Ukraine), and two the 2nd year of the studies. The group had two poles of leadership: one was the 5th-year student and the other was one of the 2nd-year student. All the group members turned out to be animal lovers, cheerful and spontaneous, or quiet and cooperative. The work in this group was harmonious, without rivalry, and was accompanied by a mood of fun.

The group defined its persona as “a human being with a great imagination, who loves wild nature and longs for the time of childhood and free play”. Therefore, the group intended to create a space for active recreation amid nature. The group’s idea was to suspend a light structure of “tree houses” between the existing trees to create students’ refuge: a place to relax or do individual work. The design also envisioned houses standing on the ground, surrounded by garden plots where fruits and vegetables could be grown, and scented herbs and flowers to enhance the mood. The animals would be

welcome in this place, not only dogs or cats but also wild animals invited by the installation of nesting boxes for birds or insect houses. This wild reserve would be fenced off from the nearby gas station by raised canopies where students' work could be displayed, lectures could be held under a clear sky on warm days, and movies could be shown in the evenings. For this purpose, a community space with deck chairs and a pond in front of the stage was designed in the middle of the designed area. On the street side, instead of a fence, there would be a café pavilion, open on two sides, to encourage the integration of people from the city and from the university (Illustration 6).

Illustration 6. The “Wild Architect’s Reserve”: A – sketch drawing of the treehouses (left), B – a fragment of the 3D mock-up of the design concept (right)



Source: Drawing by Dominika Cieplak, photo by Krzysztof Lenartowicz

Group 3: “Mood Space”

The third group was composed of one graduate from the 3rd year and four graduates from the 2nd year (including one male and one industrial design student). This group struggled throughout the workshop: who is the leader of the group, and whose ideas are better? The industrial design student felt most comfortable in this role, but lacked the architectural training that the other members of the group had. Because of the interest in design and the artistic-manual skills of one of the people in this group, the group used various artistic techniques (such as knitting) to work on precise models of various elements of small architecture.

The group defined its *persona* as “an introverted or extroverted person with fluctuating moods who is often sleep-deprived”. Thus, the duality of an “introverted” or “extroverted” person appeared in the very definition of persona, and this unresolvable duality became the inspiration for focusing on solutions that

would provide different atmospheres and places for people with different needs. From the beginning, the group also focused more on the idea of social patterns and common goals than on pursuing a single, coherent spatial concept for the entire project. Thus, it was to be an “atmospheric” space, with the most important goal being a gradation of privacy: from an inclusive zone (café) to various zones of tranquility and solitude. Another important design goal was to allude to the history of the site, including by emphasizing the importance of individual zones of the area, such as the inner courtyard of the former residence (now an empty asphalt square – in the design a flower courtyard). In turn, the elements that would create a special atmosphere in the place would be the bright yellow color – symbolizing happiness, joy, and relaxation – the winding paths, the flowing shapes of architectural objects (the café), seats, and other elements of small architecture (such as a trampoline), water pond and hammocks, and the smells and shapes coming from nature – fruit trees, flower meadows, and herbs (Illustration 7).

Illustration 7. The “Mood Space” design concept: A – sketch drawing of the café pavilion (top left), B – wavy benches (bottom left), C – fragment of the aerial view of the 3D mock-up (right)



Source: Drawing by Anna Kaplita, photo by Krzysztof Lenartowicz.

Group 4: “Sensitive Space”

The fourth group was composed of two graduates from the 4th year, two from the 3rd year (students from Belarus: a male and a female), and one from the 2nd year. The responsibility for design decisions was divided between a group leader (one of the 4th-year students) and a younger male student who was actively involved in conceptual work. There were occasional tensions between the two individuals over different perceptions of project goals or ways of working.

The group defined their *persona* as someone who was “culturally foreign, with different sensitivities, having some difficulties in working with the group”. Expanding on the meaning of the distinctiveness and multiplicity of different needs, the group considered the potential user groups, including: students from the two faculties housed in the building, employees, people from the city, or students from another educational university located nearby. The group’s goal was to create separate, distinguishable spaces for each user group that would be connected by a shared circulation network. The idea focused on a polycentric, fragmented space with separate pavilions. These architectural structures were designed as semi-dome, parametric forms of varying dimensions and construction methods. Some were more sheer and transparent, while others were more closed and impenetrable. Each pavilion was tailored to meet the unique needs of a specific user group. All pavilions represented some ideas, namely “Pride”, “Work”, “Freedom”, and “Silence”. The “Pride” pavilion was to be placed near the street to provide citizens and visitors with easy access. It was designed for the integration with people from the city by providing a space for exhibiting student or university staff members’ works. The “Work” pavilion was designed to be a collaborative space for students with open areas for group work as well as private rooms for individual work. The “Freedom” pavilion was designated for leisure activities and socializing, while the “Silence” pavilion was intended as a private space solely for individual use. Situated among the trees, the “Silence” pavilion seamlessly merged with the surrounding natural environment and aimed to provide a tranquil location for meditation, prayer, or solitary retreats (Illustration 8).

Illustration 8. The “Sensitive Space” design concept: A – a sketch drawing of the dome-shaped pavilions (left), B – fragment of A 3D mock-up of the design seen from the top (right)



Source: Drawing by Dzmitry Nikitsin, photo by Dominika Cieplak.

From design to social innovations – concluding discussion

The four proposed spatial solutions elaborated as 3D mock-ups during the workshops have become the subject of further study. The purpose of this reflection was to find answers to the following questions: (1) what ideas inspired this project and the design solutions proposed during the workshops?; (2) how do these ideas relate to the practices (e.g., planning or architectural design)?; and (3) what are the possible theoretical implications related to the delivery of the project?

Ideas

The presented study incorporates certain ideas that prioritize people in the built environment. Despite the assumed connection between architectural design and user needs, this aspect is sometimes overlooked by architectural theorists and the creative mainstream dominated by technology and marketing. However, the problem also arises from the field of architecture; as stated by Bernard Tschumi, “the paradigm of the architect [...] is that of the form-giver” (Tschumi, 1987: 207). Consider, for instance, the theory of “spatial order” (Szmidt, 1981; Kościuk, Sławińska, 2000), a common notion in Polish architectural theory that also propagated to the architectural and planning regulations. According to this concept, spatial order (*ład przestrzenny*) represents a “game” that involves factors derived from the “natural order” (nature), in which a thinking human being is included, and the “geometric order”, an ideal creation of humans (Szmidt, 1981: 75). This idea relates to Florian Znaniecki’s concept, wherein the notion of “order” is a practical, “commonsense reflection preceding philosophy and science” (Znaniecki, 1971: 60). According to Szmidt, an “esthetic order” is at the top of the configurational ladder, while chaos is at the bottom (Szmidt, 1981: 80–83). The project described here grows out of the opposition to the role of architecture and architects thus outlined, and follows the thought of those theorists who, instead of making conclusive judgments, pose questions, such as: What is esthetic order? Who should ultimately decide it? Does chaos always mean disorder? To these questions, we could also add those expanding the meaning of architecture beyond its aesthetic significance, such as: Whose ideas, values, and views of the world are architectural decisions based on?

As an answer to some of the questions raised, the sociology of knowledge must caution us “to distinguish between the truth of a statement and an assessment of the circumstances under which that statement is made” (Becker, 1967: 240). Our viewpoints “are not eternal truths, rather they are subject to change, they can prove to be false” (Welsch, 2005: 164). If this is the case, then the vision of the architect as a self-sufficient creator and of architecture as a discipline that locks itself and operates solely based on its truths seems questionable. This applies not only to architecture as an art form and to its recipients, but also to architecture as a kind of social service that consists in the creation of space for a particular community and its users. As Becker argues, any artistic endeavor, like all forms of human activity, “involves the joint activity of [...] a large number of people” resulting in the creation and continued existence of the final artwork (Becker, 1982: 1); according to this author, “audiences determine the course of an artwork by choosing whether or not they participate” (Becker, 1982: 214). The increasing significance of audiences blurs the lines between them and creators. Similarly, if we look at architecture as a social practice, design becomes “a collective effort by ‘skilled, experienced users and design professionals’” (Ehn as cited in Hanington, 2018: 196). In both cases, it is about the concept of partnership. This quality, along with “transformability”, “authenticity”, “conscious choice”, and “structure”, characterizes, in particular, Oskar Hansen’s idea of Open Form (Hansen, 2005: 30; Lasiewicz-Sych, 2016). This idea, as well as many variations of participatory design, is not about a precisely defined final product (a preconceived solution), but, rather, about equipping future users with the tools necessary to give the work its final, initially unpredictable form. Although designers establish the boundaries and fields of activity for future users or even restrict their decisions to a finite

number of actions, they provide them with a choice, which is a type of participation defined as an “alternative” (Sanoff, 1999). However, creating human places requires also spontaneous, unrestricted social interactions. According to Strauss’ theory (1993), a necessary condition for all actions and interactions is “bodily involvement”. In talking about this, he quotes the words of American dancer and choreographer Martha Graham, who said that “collective acts require bodies but also require “culture”, in the anthropological sense, and traditions, and sometimes ritual and other sociological-anthropological agency” (Strauss, 1993: 110). It also assumes some transformability and sensory perceptions. All of these serve as social communication, “giving meaning to what one feels, sees, hears, smells and touches” (Strauss, 1993: 109). As Goffman elaborates, a state of “co-presence” may be “focused” when individuals are involved in the same space and activity, or “un-focused” when they are simply in the same space (Goffman, 1963: 24). These interactions relate to the space differentiation that consists of such socio-spatial qualities as “the degree of privacy”, “quiet corners”, “shared space”, “promenade”, “mosaic of subcultures”, “common ground”, and “open public spaces”, to name but a few (Alexander et al., 1977; 2008).

Other ideas that inspired our project focus on the relationship between humans and the environment, including the natural environment and architecture. One of them could be defined as “esthetics without esthetics” (Welsch, 2005). This idea proposes to redefine the traditional link between esthetics and art, especially in terms of the appreciation of beauty. In a sense, it questions the aforementioned idea of order and the pairing of nature and culture, which are often juxtaposed as opposites. Nature is both chaotic and true, although, similarly to the world, it is always ordered in some way. The apparent disorder is due to our possibilities of understanding, giving certain names and, therefore, functions (Walter, 1985). This problem is particularly relevant in architecture, where order often means formal and functional reductionism, frequently involving the use of uncomplicated orthogonal arrangements and elementary geometric figures. At the systemic level, characteristic of modern architecture, the “legibility of space and its transparency” serves primarily the struggle to control and regulate social interactions, and can essentially lead to the “invalidation of all other competing maps or other interpretations” (Bauman, 2000: 39). At the individual level, this kind of order often leads to “the uniformization of the human psyche and its disconnection from the multidimensional structures of spirituality” (Chmielowski, 2000: 189) that are provided by the more natural settings. According to contemporary architects-artists – such as the CENTRALA collective – architecture does not exist without nature; “the phenomena that are the building materials of architecture – gravity, light oscillation, water circulation – are the same ones that serve the reproduction of the planet” (Ptak, 2018: 22). In this new view of the symbiotic rather than oppositional relationship between architecture and nature as “nature-culture”, the recognition of nature “as processes rather than landscapes” is also new (Ptak, 2018: 27–28).

Practices

The ideas presented in the student designs demonstrate practical applications of some of the ideas described. The architectural concept of “Base Renewal” introduces the idea of Open Form by allowing users to interpret and transform space: by moving umbrellas and fixed furniture to places

where other people are, or where they are not looking for socialization or seclusion, or simply to change their perspective. The concept of the “Wild Architect’s Reserve” focuses on biodiversity, nature conservation, and the natural cycle of aging, decay, and rejuvenation (by proposing biodegradable treehouses), and introduces some ideas of “esthetics without esthetics” (Welsch, 2005) as well as eco-esthetics. The “Mood Space” proposal experiments with an architecture that reflects some social ideas of “focused” and “unfocused” co-presence (Goffman, 1963) by creating spaces with different “degrees of privacy” (Alexander et al., 1977; 2008) and architectural objects that allow being together or apart, such as wavy benches or pavilions that isolate and connect spaces. The architectural concept of “Sensitive Space”, which creates customized spaces to serve specific social groups and interactions, introduces the idea of “subcultures” as described by one of Alexander’s patterns (1977; 2008), but also in dialog with Gary Alan Fine’s (2004) concept of architecture as preserving history and enhancing the sense of self, as well as the concept of “second nature” as a sociocultural layer of the city (Yaneva, 2017).

The architectural concepts described here, and how they have managed to demonstrate specific social and philosophical ideas, also allude to a certain type of new architecture that is created in social dialog. In a sense, developments such as the OFF Piotrkowska Center or, to a lesser extent, Manufaktura in Łódź, can be counted among them. This is even more evident in the latest, partly unrealized projects of young Polish architects, who combine architectural work with social and research activities. Aleksandra Wasilkowska, for example, in her spatial arrangements, garden projects, and interiors, refers to open form and “architecture as a background capable of evolution” – her “projects are a specific container into which users can pour their content” (Świątkowska, 2018: 108); CENTRALA analyzes relationships between the built environment and nature, taking into account aspects of local ecology: the changing seasons, hydrology, or the importance of vegetation in the city; Maciej Siuda personally engages in interdisciplinary dialog with future users and creates socially-sensitive “spaces for people” (Cymer, 2016), using as his design method simple paper drawings and mock-ups that protrude architectural forms and help communicate the design goals.

Implications

The architectural concepts developed during the student workshops aimed to produce some innovative proposals for the arrangement of common spaces in a particular learning environment. Based on this, an attempt was made to outline a theoretical translation of the design ideas into socially-innovative patterns. The proposed patterns are conceived as an extension of the original set of patterns (Alexander et al., 1977; 2008), which concerned the residential environment, to situations describing the problems of common spaces in the learning environment. The development of the pattern language (the book contains 253 patterns) seems to be in line with the intention of the authors of *A Pattern Language* book; in its introduction, one can read: “if you want to change [or add] any patterns, change them” (Alexander et al., 1977: xxxix). However, in contrast to the original patterns, our patterns do not suggest appropriate spatial designs, but, rather, focus on the imperative of choice. Therefore, the form of the patterns we propose is not a statement but a question for those interested. Our dialogical patterns

relate to four types of relationships between individuals and a particular type of built environment, formed as common spaces, that we found during the project. We have called them: (1) *Reinvention or Renewal?* – a pattern that connects users and the architectural work; (2) *Chaos or Order?* – a pattern that connects users and the natural world; (3) *Together or Apart?* – a pattern that relates users with other users; (4) *For Everyone or All?* – a pattern that defines users as a sum of individuals or different groups (“subcultures”) or, rather, as a unified community.

Finally, some general reflections on the impact of the project on its participants are in order here. During this project, the people who participated in the activities described in this paper came closer to understanding the power of collective activity and, in particular, the synergy that results from joint design work. Initially shy statements and attempts to describe individual ideas in the later stages of the project encouraged the project participants and made them feel satisfied and proud of the ideas developed and presented. The design workshops, as well as earlier studies and shared discoveries, equipped the participants with a new perspective on issues related to the functioning of common spaces, but also, and perhaps most importantly, to their design. The shortest way to describe it is this: creating spaces that are inclusive to all community members is about fostering a sense of belonging and social interaction in a safe and comfortable environment. The environment need not be uniform and the same for all. It does not have to be overly structured or ordered. It does not have to be just a meeting place; it should also provide privacy and seclusion. In addition, it should allow users to change the environment to suit their current needs. Taking responsibility for all of this is essential.

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Ethical concerns

The project did not violate any feelings of the participants (including the survey participants and the project collective). All the participants in the activities described in this paper were informed about the purpose of the study. The project participants expressed their consent to participate in it in writing.

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Cytowanie

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Przestrzeń wyboru: odkrywanie nowych wzorców wspólnych studenckich przestrzeni

Abstrakt: Artykuł opisuje projekt zrealizowany przez grupę studentów architektury Politechniki Krakowskiej. Problemem badawczym stały się przestrzenie wspólne w środowisku uczenia się. W projekcie posłużono się ramą teoretyczną socjologii architektury i metodologią projektowania partycypacyjnego. Celem projektu było stworzenie propozycji aktualnych, modelowych rozwiązań projektowych dla włączających i uniwersalnie dostępnych miejsc studenckich, na bazie wstępnych badań i doświadczeń z warsztatów projektowych. Wzorce społeczno-przestrzenne zaproponowane w tym studium zostały zainspirowane koncepcją języka wzorców, opracowaną przez zespół kierowany przez Christophera Alexandra w latach siedemdziesiątych ubiegłego wieku. W przeciwieństwie do oryginalnych wzorców nowe propozycje wzorców dotyczące wspólnych przestrzeni studenckich nie są stwierdzeniami, ale pytaniami. Odpowiedzi na nie dotyczą różnych rodzajów relacji między jednostkami (użytkownikami) a środowiskiem zbudowanym, w tym tych łączących użytkowników z dziełem architektonicznym, środowiskiem naturalnym, innymi jednostkami lub innymi grupami użytkowników.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura, przestrzeń wspólna, projektowanie partycypacyjne, język wzorców, warsztaty studenckie