

THE INNER EDGE OF LANDSCAPE

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Key words: cultural expression, public space

Abstract

This paper attempts to describe the specific urban-architectural forms that emerge in the space between the traces of the urban fabric, disintegrating into a chaotic, dispersed and deteriorating structures and landscape. The unregulated expansion of civilization into nature is not only a planning and structural problem, but also an economic and social one. While discussing the possibility of halting urbanization on open areas (in reality, when planning is the object and not the subject of the economy), the author focuses on the phenomenon of the domestic sprawl. In Poland, this problem equally affects large cities (which is widely described in the literature as urban sprawl) as well as small towns and villages, which is defined by the author as the *rural sprawl*. The paper uses the term *inner edge of the landscape* understood as a virtual boundary between the areas with dominant forms of human activity from the space defined by the elements of the natural landscape. The concept of the inner edge of the landscape is formulated as a structure of typological units (point / trail / region) that allow you to *indirectly* limit the development by exposing cultural values. While many researchers searching for the new forms of centrality (for the construction of identity - in areas where urbanization steps in or the concentration of activities on greenfield sites), the objective of this paper is to define the rules of maintaining the remoteness. It is hypothesized that urbanly and architecturally defined peripheral spaces (edges), can be a stimulus for the emergence of public places in the landscape, which can limit its urbanization.

Introduction

The profound social, economic and technological transformations that have taken place in the last few decades, have led to a change of the ways of building up space, as a consequence of which, one talks of the birth of new, characteristic forms. Concepts such as *suburbanization*, *sprawling urbanization* or *multi-centricity* have become key terms in the urban analysis. One of the effects of the above-mentioned changes is the concentration of the researchers' attention on

cities, that is forms of spatial organization that are economically efficient and whose population is on the rise. It is often assumed and proved that the contemporary city has lost its “sense”; in other words, it has ceased to be normal, to have its proper – chiefly political and social significance.

Nawratek (2008) contrasts the contemporary city with *polis*, emphasizing that the greatest deficiency of the present-day city is its lack of conditions for creating informed communities which would be able to manage themselves. According to Nawratek, in order for these communities to become reborn, it necessary for the enclaves (socially uniform spaces) to become united by joining each other with the “link” places – spaces of interaction with the “external” space. Baum (2008) on the other hand, raises the issue of a lack of and need for creating “urban places” – that is areas that would be functionally and socially varied and also characteristics – possessing their own *atmosphere*. A remedy for this state of things is to be found in the organization of space by analyzing the process of creation of central and significant places – in the form of public spaces (e.g. Gyurkovich, 2007). The latter trend is represented by numerous projects whose goal is to improve the quality of the latter spaces. The majority of researchers turn to the historical, condensed forms of the city which had been shaped over centuries; it is there that they look for answers to contemporary problems. Public spaces, including the newly-created ones, arising within the historical complexes, are being carefully analyzed and evaluated. Yet the issue of public spaces which are situated within recently urbanized areas, on territories which have only just been incorporated into city organisms, on the peripheries of cities, between urban and rural areas, is still taken up relatively rarely. Taking a closer look at the contemporary form of the city, and in particular at those peripheral places, may lead to the conclusion that the idea of building public spaces on the basis of historical patterns, is extremely close to the notion of *thematization*, i.e. that it constitutes a conscious process of endowing space with forms associated with the past as well as different cultural spheres¹ (Lorens, 2006); and there are still very few conceptions which would shed the light on how the new public spaces on these territories are to restore sense to the modern day city.

In both cases, on the territories shaped within the historical complexes and those which constitute a part of the modern-day urban spaces, the newly-designed and reshaped public spaces have become an arena for the ongoing changes and a tangible proof of the efforts undertaken by the authorities and local communities struggling with the “loss of sense”. What is more, the success or failure of space (or to put it differently, of the process of looking for sense – i.e. the urban character of a city) is associated with the creation or restoration of central places: that is ones that are popular and frequented by the society; places that are of interest to different stakeholders. Sieverts (2008) observes that in the contemporary “in-between city”, every point in space has a chance to become transformed into a center, independently of the historically shaped urban layout and it is in such planning activity that he perceives a chance for an improvement of the quality of the sprawling urbanization.

¹ I am specifically referring here to *thematization* into „local culture”, which is *de facto* borrowed from the historical city center.

Apart from the lack of public spaces or else their low quality, another equally important problem which undermines the sense of the city is the phenomenon of the urban sprawl of typical urban tissue onto areas which it would seem more sensible for a number of reasons to leave untouched as an undeveloped (for ecological, economic and social reasons). In spite of the fact that the need to counteract this phenomenon had been diagnosed a long time ago and that methods of doing so had been devised (supporting the notion of creating new, close-knit, satellite urban complexes in problem areas, protection of green areas (Gzell, 2012, 12-14), yet difficulties in implementing them continue to persist, inclining one to look for new solutions. Thus, in accordance with the recommendations of Ildefons Cerda, and concentrating his activity on green areas as public spaces, Gzell (2012, 72) propagates the idea of simultaneous urbanization of the country and a ruralization of the city. In the article, the topic taken up which is both similar and diametrically different at the same time. It is similar in that it combines two trails in the search for the sense of the city: a limitation of the negative consequences of the urban sprawl through the creation of public spaces. And it is different as it looks for solutions in the culturally expressive architectural tissue creating public space, and not in the public spaces “constructed from plant material”.

Moreover, the main objective of the article is to prove that valuable clues concerning how to plan and design public spaces in order to restore sense to the contemporary cities, may be found far away from their historically shaped structures² - namely in rural areas. The above assumption is of particular significance from the point of view of the selection of objects which are subject to analysis; it should be in this case the objects in question are not traditional buildings, but architectural structures that noted that organize public space which are referred to as *objects of cultural expression*. The number of such objects – meeting places which emphasize local cultural narratives – realized in peripheral areas, is continually growing; among flagship examples of such objects, one finds among others, the realizations encountered on the *National Tourist Trails* of Norway. This article focuses on a presentation of a Polish realization of this type – namely, the complex in Wola Krogulecka, which had been designed by the author of the present article. Information regarding the above realization had been gathered in the course of structured interviews³, conducted with the representatives of the local authorities and the local community between the years 2008 and 2015 as well as in the course of the observation of this place throughout that period during the design, erection and post-realization phases of the project. The author of the article checked how the various actors understood the sense of the construction and to what extent the realization of the project has fulfilled the objectives which had been set up during the design process. In the majority of cases, public space is created with a view to promoting a place that builds up local identity. It is rarely described in the context of economic or spatial expectations which, *nota bene*, are strongly articulated by the local communities. The present article seems to bridge this gap by emphasizing the tension between social and economic expectations which a well-managed space may, and even should,

² This also differentiates the present paper from the research of Gzell (2012) who tends to look for his model solutions in however small, but nevertheless, towns.

³ Subdivided into questions concerning the localization, function and perception of context.

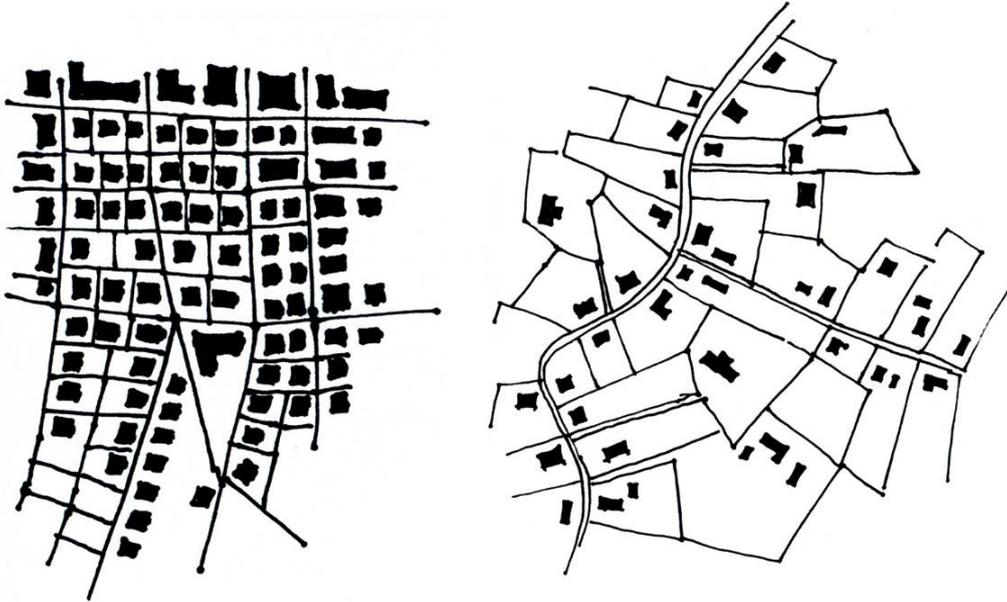
relieve. In the next section, the author presents briefly the political context which accompanies the creation of public spaces in landscape and its spatial consequences. Subsequently, he discusses the theoretical assumptions behind the design conception which attempts to realize political needs while at the same time controlling their consequences in space. The author then presents the case of the realized project in Wola Krogulecka which had been designed in accordance with the above-presented guidelines. He also briefly describes the social attitudes and the relationship of the local authorities towards the project – before and after its realization. Finally, he points to the role of *public space in landscape* and describes the various possibilities of taking advantage of the results of the research in other realizations of this type.

Rural sprawl and the need to restore rural and suburban areas

The rural areas in Poland are characterized by a specific type of rural sprawl. It is not uncommon to come across long and extensive villages and places such as Ochotnica or Zawoja, have become notorious due to these very parameters. What is particularly characteristic of the present-day rural areas is the lack of public spaces and the ever-increasing number of landless farms. In spite of this, attempts are still being made today to preserve the character of rural development through the Local Development Plan, among others, by defining larger minimal surface areas of building plots than in the suburban areas characterized by urban sprawl, restricting the dimensions of buildings and imposing the obligation to adjust the form of buildings to the local traditions (e.g. by determining the shape of the roofs). Such solutions lead to the phenomenon of rural sprawl which is more characteristic of the urban land use. At the same time, the population of rural areas has remained almost on the same level since the period immediately after the war [Main Statistical Office, 2013, 2]. One may, therefore, conclude that an acceptance of *rural sprawl* constitutes a Polish model of urbanization (understood – to use the words of Cerda quoted above – as an activity aimed at ensuring better housing and services for the working classes). While the historically shaped cities have ousted the production and manufacturing industry outside their borders, and the contemporary work methods allow one to work from home, the urbanization of rural areas should be perceived as a city-forming process – the process forming the contemporary *in-between cities*⁴. Finally, it is worth emphasizing one more characteristic feature of the Polish *rural sprawl* which sets it apart from the widely diagnosed *urban sprawl*, namely the individualization of the objects that are erected by investors who are personally involved in their realization. This individual approach leads to the construction of individual buildings, rather than single-family housing estates (Fig. 1).

⁴ In light of the research on the phenomenon of *urban sprawl*, it is worth drawing attention to the rather paradoxical figures denoting the levels of the more balanced population flows in the sub-regions surrounding the capitals of the Polish provinces (Main Statistical Office, 2015, 148). In spite of the fact that the inhabitants of Polish villages commute to the cities on a large scale (it is estimated that around 1/5 of the inhabitants of rural areas work outside their place of habitation), in areas surrounding big cities, the number of commuters is on the whole more balanced than in areas which are more distant from them. Research devoted to the phenomenon of urban sprawl assumes that rural areas situated near the cities are inhabited by inhabitants who commute to work in the cities, while research indicates that this direction of migration is in fact less obvious than on territories which are situated further away from the cities.

Figure 1. Urban vs. rural sprawl



Source: Drawing by author

When assessed from the perspective of the above-described phenomena, the rural area transformation policy, seems to be insufficiently nuanced. After reading the Rural Areas Development Programs (RADP), we can conclude that a systemic change of approach to rural areas has recently taken place, as the latter ones are no longer perceived as agricultural land. Yet, the above programs refer to morphologically and socially varied areas; there is little chance of finding in them any detailed solutions to the problem that is raised in the present article. A change in the policy regarding rural areas, should involve, above all, a greater number of regulations expressing an interest in the improvement of the quality of life on these territories and in the preservation of cultural heritage – and – what is particularly important in the context of the present article – in *supporting investments in objects of cultural program and shaping of public space* (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 2014, 15). Within the pattern a aforementioned programs, new local planning documents have been drafted, including: The Place Renew Plans, indispensable for obtaining financial aid and cognizing the local needs and possibilities within a given community and locality. It is also worth emphasizing that granting public aid is associated with expectations of effects within the realm of economic development. At the same time, it should be stressed that the above funding cannot be granted to investments which are to be made available to the public for a fee. Experience shows that such an assumption arouses much controversy among local communities – particularly with regard to the *cultural functions and public spaces*, whose creation is supported by the RADP but which have no direct impact on economic indicators. This discord between the idea of strengthening the local identity and profitability constitutes the main background of the conflict which enfolds in space and whose main actors are the local inhabitants and the local mayors and community leaders.

Public space as an *inner edge of landscape*

Creating public spaces in rural areas is to contribute to economic growth. The above guideline is fulfilled by those investments which adapt places to the needs of mass recreation; in Kowicki's opinion (2010, 11), the above requirement often *results in directing investment initiatives onto the peripheral areas of villages*. The effect of this trend is the creation of public spaces on the edges of settlement areas – in the open landscape.

If the problem of public space in villages, within the boundaries of village building alignment seems to be rather widely discussed (among others Górką, 2012), the issue of shifting the boundaries of village building alignment onto open ground, through building new places, does not appear to be sufficiently analyzed. In the light of rather sketchily presented documents and regulations, leading, as it seems, unintentionally to the phenomenon of rural sprawl onto open territory, it appears necessary to discuss the issue in more detail, particularly that due to the investment pressure – both individual (being an expression of a search for a better life environment), and public, aiming at the rejuvenation of rural areas (or rather, as is postulated in the present article, the creation of characteristic *in-between city* places), there are no signs that this pressure is likely to stall or decrease in the near future.

In non-urbanized areas, a public space, as an area which is important for the local identity, fulfills quite a different role than in cities, where it is perceived above all a generally accessible place of direct personal contacts. Szewczyk-Świątek (2015) maintains that public spaces in peripheral areas are perceived by their users as useful, but not because of the opportunity of social encounters with others⁵. What then should be the role of a public space which is situated outside the built-up area? The different functions of public spaces, induces one to look for new typological forms. Without a doubt, such places should emphasize the local natural and cultural values, but from the point of view of spatial planning, they should create conditions favorable towards limiting the phenomenon of urban sprawl and its expansion onto green areas. Bearing in mind this very goal, one needs a diametrically different approach than the one expected to produce the effect in the form of a central public space, which is to attract successive investments.

In the course of his search for suitable design solutions, the concept of *inner edge of landscape* has been formulated which describes the conception of a geometrical form of the newly-designed object. The open space, where the object is situated (in this case, the *in-between city* landscape), which requires protection against investment, is initially recognized as valuable and worthy both of being exposed and protected. An attempt to counterbalance these two opposing needs results in searching for forms that harmoniously merge in with the surroundings and “disappear” against its background. The above goal is realized in the majority of cases through the use of transparent or light-reflecting materials, or else materials that can be found in the surroundings. Such solutions may lead to satisfactory results, yet it is also worth exploring the

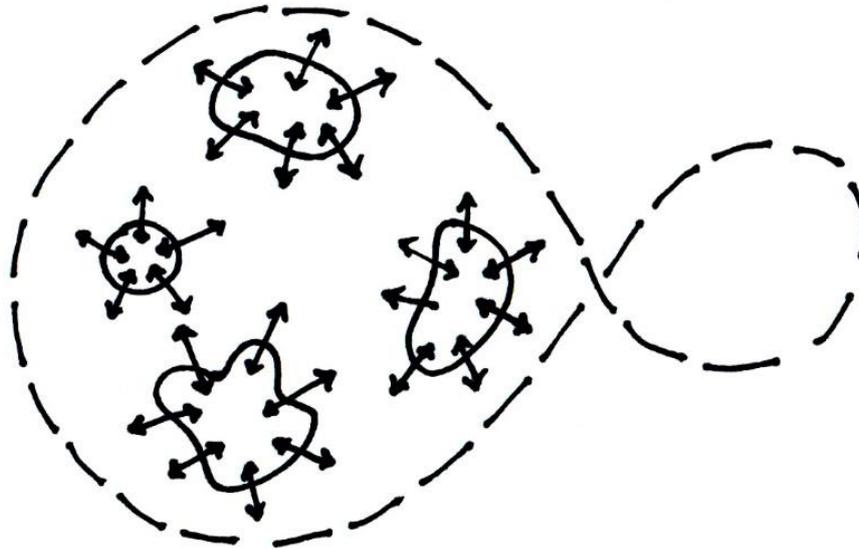
⁵ A sample survey conducted among 100 visitors (every 3 visitor to the venue took part in the survey), in 4 different localities, resulted in 0 replies confirming that the reason of the visit to the particular venue was the encounter or possibility of meeting someone.

very structure of the architectural form as the latter makes the attainment of the desired effects more likely. The above analysis has led the author of the article to an attempt at finding an application – to use the geometrical terminology – for a one-sided surface⁶, that is a form whose use is not limited by a boundary-line between the object (structure) and the surrounding landscape. In other words, the aim of this research was to try and find a geometrical figure which would allow one to freely explore space, directing the user's attention beyond the coordinates of form, or object constituting a part of the trail, so as to permit an unhampered exploration of the landscape. Unlike in three-dimensional forms that encompass a collection of points, combined into a single entity within its interior, the essence of a form that is embedded in a trail, is its failure to connect the points contained within an urban interior, ultimately giving rise to a linear and open construction. In order to preserve the clarity of architectural form creating the *inner edge of landscape*, whose all surrounding points constitute a part of landscape, rather than an urban interior – it becomes necessary to retain the so-called protective field. The latter one is generated by the “edge” and creates a chance for limiting the expansion of the sprawl. The objects which direct our attention towards the surroundings create a chance for proper exposure of cultural values, which require a preservation of the foreground that constitutes at the same time a protective field for the object and a sphere which stalls urbanization efforts in its immediate vicinity. The range of this foreground is mapped out by the virtual boundary of the protective field.

Public space created in the landscape, outside the built-up areas, is used in most cases to expose the public to the beauty of nature and is associated with certain natural features that are due to the topographical properties of the terrain that constitute a natural barrier to the process of urbanization. Therefore, the investment pressure on its immediate surroundings is even stronger than elsewhere. The attempts aimed at limiting the extent of this phenomenon, preceded by the above-mentioned analyses of the *inner edge of landscape* lead to the conclusion that there is a strong need for finding and shaping open forms directed towards the exterior and different from those which focus one's attention on landscape *interiors* (Fig. 2).

⁶ An example of such a surface is Möbius strip.

Figure 2. The inner edge of landscape



Source: Drawing by author

The case of Wola Krogulecka – creating public space through *objects of cultural expression*

The Peripherality of the Center in Wola Krogulecka – a location consensus

Before discussing a specific case of an architectural realization which may serve as an example of an *inner edge of landscape*, it is worth describing the site of this particular realization. Wola Krogulecka is a traditional agricultural village situated in the province of Lesser Poland /Małopolska/, in the Stary Sącz district in a little more detail. It is located on an open slope, within the Nature 2000 area, at the height of 450 m above sea level; the village is located on the territory of the Poprad Landscape Park, due to which nearly the entire place constitutes an attractive viewing and sightseeing area. Yet, the village itself lacks a central space and its houses are scattered along the main district highway. The immense natural and cultural assets are not taken advantage of; there is no tourist infrastructure to speak of, in spite of the fact that as many as four different tourist trails cut across the village and the head office of the Complex of National Parks in the Province of Lesser Poland is situated precisely here. It was once the local leaders had noticed this fact that they finally admitted that there is an urgent need “to create better housing conditions for the local residents and more tourist attractions for the visitors”; having passed this resolution, they also accepted it as the number one priority in the Village Rejuvenation Plan (RMSS, 2013). In the context of the present article, it is also important to emphasize that in accordance with the above-mentioned Rejuvenation Plan, the plot selected for the construction of the viewing-platform had been recognized by the local authorities as a fragment of the village central area of special significance, in spite of the fact

that in reality it is situated on the peripheries of the village and lacks any obvious features that would distinguish it from the surroundings⁷ (Fig. 3). The selection of this particular localization was the result of a consensus reached between the local community (expressed through its leaders) and the local district authorities (granting the financial resources and dealing with these types of investments). Yet, as was revealed by the subsequent research, if the selection of the locality proved to be satisfactory to both sides, the expectations as to the role which the venue was to play within the local community, were quite different.

Figure 3. The “central” plot of viewing platform in “urbanized” structure of Wola Krogulecka



Source: Drawing by author

The debate concerning the need to create public spaces in landscape leads one to another query, which has already been alluded to earlier in the article, namely, the issue of their functionality. In other words, it becomes necessary to answer the question: what role a public space should play in the process of the “rejuvenation” of space; what is the political and social sense, in the name of which it is called to life.

⁷ The plot is indeed very attractive from the scenic point of view, but as has already been mentioned, the majority of plots in this village are characterized by precisely this feature.

The Act⁸ defines public space as an area which is of special significance from the point of view of satisfying the needs of the local inhabitants; it defines its function as a meeting place which improves the quality of the residents' life. At the same time, there is no shortage of studies which present it as an arena of local conflicts and confrontational social practices whose aim is to adjust it to the various conflicting needs (among others, Karwińska, 2009). It is worth remembering that the creation of new attractive public spaces, underscoring the local attractions, is associated with an influx of users from outside who may both satisfy the need for mutual contacts, but may equally well disturb the peace and even pose a threat to the identity of the local community. This conflicting character of public space has been observed by all the concerned parties in the case under investigation: the representatives of the local inhabitants emphasized the threats, while persons from outside the local community – its chances and advantages, tending to ignore its negative impact on everyday life. While the latter group tended to focus on the need to expose the wealth of the tourist attractions in the place, the former one saw a need for limiting the negative consequences of the increased tourist traffic to the local inhabitants, reckoning that the local problems (concerning transport, lack of technical infrastructure, unemployment) may be solved if the space becomes “public”, i.e. open and attractive to outside visitors. The peripheral situation of the venue was perceived as advantageous by both sides; nobody raised any objections as to the localization decision of the venue. But the choice of a rather remote localization which initially liquidated the objections, did not ensure a permanent solution, due to a potential increase of interest in the neighboring areas.

As early as during the first presentations of the design conception, one could observe a variety of different expectations with regards to public space: the local residents emphasized their lack of faith in the possibility of an improvement in their economic situation in the effect of a construction of a non-commercial structure, such as the proposed viewing platform, whereas the representatives of the authorities underscored the significance of the promotion of local attractions and their faith that the investment will exert (an indirect) impact on the increase of entrepreneurship in the area (Zielińska, 2013). In interviews, both groups expressed a conviction that the venue would not be directly beneficial economically⁹.

The object of cultural expression – consensus to form

The scenically attractive localization of the village constituted one of the major factors which influenced the decision concerning the construction of a viewing platform there. Initially there arose a plan to construct a viewing tower on the selected plot; a Zoning Approval (so called ULICP) had been issued, whereby a 20 m high wooden construction, covered with a hip roof, was to be erected in the place. Yet, after a site inspection and a careful analysis of the local conditionings, the above plan was abandoned, due to the fact that the selected building plot was

⁸ *The Spatial Planning and Land Development Act* (Legal Journal of 2003, no 80, point 717 with subsequent amendments).

⁹ In the effect of the above-mentioned lack of conviction that the venue would prove to be economically productive, the representatives of the local authorities at the beginning decided a of its non-commercial use and accessibility.

unwooded, offering an all-round view and the erection of a tower construction there would in no way have increased the already immense attractiveness of the site. It was suggested that instead of a tower, a spiral platform whose form would underscore the localization of its situation on a tourist trail (Fig. 4), should be built there. The configuration of the plot lying on a natural slope which constitutes a sort of gorge, was also taken advantage of. The suggested structure emphasizes the continuum of the walking trail; it does not interrupt its course but creates a sort of culmination point. In this way, the need for movement and completion of a full circle, thanks to which one's attention is not focused on a single point, but on a sequence of points, is also formally emphasized. Thus, focusing one's attention of the *entire* surroundings, proves to be one of the most important features of this form. Directing the viewer's eyesight to the surrounding terrain also plays an important role in shaping his awareness of the condition of the local environment and allows one to bring to attention all the manifestations of cultural activity in the area; it also marks out the course of the *inner edge of landscape* which frames the space associated with the structure and allows it to fulfill its imposed function of a viewing point. The above presented conception proved convincing enough to the authorities to make them change the original ULICP zoning approval and pass a resolution concerning an increase of the construction funds.

**Figure 4. Spiral viewing platform on the tourist trail exposing the landscape around
(chief designer W. Świątek)**



Source: Photo by M. Rola (2014)

The Inner edge of landscape in Wola Krogulecka

In spite of the varying initial expectations, after nearly two years since the realization of the project, one may conclude that it fulfills the hopes that had initially been associated with it. The platform operates as a public space and continues to enjoy unabated popularity constituting a tourist attraction which promotes the chief benefits and attractions of the local community (Fig.

5). The commercial potential of the structure had been observed by external investors who expressed a wish to erect a commercial structure in its vicinity, as the visitors to the venue often draw attention to a lack of such commercial, gastronomical and collective accommodation establishments in the area, which would allow them to spend more time in the neighborhood. Yet, it is worth emphasizing that the responsibility for the nurture and maintenance of the *inner edge of landscape* and its protective zone falls on the inhabitants and the local authorities. It is them who ultimately make the decisions concerning the sale of plots, for the issuing of building permits etc. The decisions that have been made so far, allow one to remain optimistic; the interested parties do not wish to weaken the impact of the new identity symbol and tend to select sites for successive investments (functionally associated with the viewing platform, such as e.g. a car park) next to the district road, nearer to the village center and outside the impact range of the platform – beyond the *inner edge of landscape*.

Figure 5 New object of cultural expression in Wola Krogulecka (chief designer W. Świątek)



Source: Photo by M. Rola (2014)

Conclusions

Public space in an open landscape, which is attractive to external visitors, should make the cultural features of the place visible. Despite its non-commercial use, it possesses a tangible economic value which increases investment pressure on peripheral regions. The selection of an out-of-the-way and secluded localization allows to build the local identity and, at the same time, limits the negative impact of tourist traffic on the everyday life of the local residents, but

simultaneously, increases the threat of commercialization in places which up until now were less accessible, although regarded as public. Designing an object which, thanks to its geometry, focuses one's attention on the surroundings (Fig. 5), helps minimize investment projects in its immediate vicinity.

There is no social approval – both on the part of the local residents and the authorities – of activities which could diminish the significance of the new symbol of local identity which emphasizes it in an expressive way (through its form). The object facilitating access to landscape (also to persons with restricted mobility) and perceived by many as superfluous, turned out to be immensely popular, particularly among groups which precisely thanks to such people had so far had little opportunity to stay out in the open landscape. While looking for the sense of the *in-between city area* and planning its improvement, it is worth remembering the fact that accessible public spaces, highlighting the local culture and restricting the phenomenon of urban sprawl, also improve the quality of life of their inhabitants.

In conclusion, it should be stressed that the objects of *cultural expression* focus our attention on the manifestations of man's activity in their immediate surroundings; they create meeting places and – most importantly – they help maintain control and organize land development in particularly sensitive areas, due to their scenic qualities.

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