Conditions for a Dialogue of Local Community and *Genius Loci*

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Abstract - **The research focuses on local community dialogue with *genius loci* as certain subjectivity of urbanized environment. The following research methods were used: abstraction, analogy, generalization, synthesis, and semantic analysis. Sets of informational units as system of *genius loci* symptoms, offered in this article, can be used for the presentation of *genius loci*. Such data figure as network of knowledge highlighted from a cultural-ecological point of view. Some traits of *genius loci* of Lentvaris manor park are presented.**

Keywords – **Conditions of dialogue with *genius loci*; consensual units as ecologically motivated symptoms; informational units required for dialogue; public participation; subjectivity of urban environment as *genius loci*.**

Introduction

The aim of the research is to study the conditions of local community dialogue with *genius loci* as certain subjectivity of urbanized environment, and to find specific consensual units as ecologically motivated symptoms required for that dialogue. The following tasks are set:

- to define advantages and disadvantages of public participation;
- to identify other subjects related with locality, interests of which have to be taken into account (namely *genius loci*);
- disclose the conditions of dialogue with *genius loci*;
- to explain the nature of consensus units required for the dialogue, and to present an example – sets of consensus units representing some traits of Lentvaris manor park *genius loci*.

Theoretical and practical considerations of the dialogue with the *genius loci* have been prepared using a variety of research methods: abstraction, analogy, generalization, reasoning, synthesis; methods of phenomenology and semantic analysis also were applied.

I. Advantages and Disadvantages of Public Participation in Urban Renovation

Public participation is the process by which an organization consults with interested or affected individuals, organizations, and government entities before making a decision. Public participation is a collaborative problem solving with the goal of achieving better and more acceptable decisions. Public participation prevents or minimizes disputes by creating a process for resolving issues before they become polarized [1].

Disadvantages of public participation are the following: it can be time consuming, there are possible high financial costs, possible need for staff training and capacity building within organization, difficulties in obtaining constructive debate when interest groups are entrenched in their views [2]. As W. Kreiken writes, "public participation does not necessarily add to the quality of the decision process. Although public participation should produce a more balanced decision, it is also possible that one or more stakeholders use the public participation process to unbalance the decision in their favour. <...> Even when the public participation process is successful, the end result may not be satisfactory to all participants or stakeholders. This could result in frustration in the process and government distrust, also weakening further participation" [3].

Besides that, we encounter a problem that the excessive emphasis of superficially understood public participation is blocking general studies on urbanized environment and especially devaluates the research activities regarding *genius loci's* manifestations and efforts to grasp its essence.

II. Other Subjectivities Related to Locality That Have to be Taken into Account When Planning Renovation. *Genius Loci*

While managing the urbanized environment from the cultural point of view, it is important to take into account the interests not only of the local population but also of other subjectivities related to certain locality such as 1) people who are living in other places, but the place where the reorganizations are planned is important for them too; 2) those who are not born yet; 3) those who have already died, but participated earlier and left environment to us.

Namely, the latter ones may be most associated with the historically established subjectivity that can be associated with the concept of *genius loci*. Olga Freidenberg, famous investigator of Antic culture, wrote: "Everything in nature and in the surrounding life, in the real world and in the home, had its own *genius*, whether it is a building or landscape, etc." [4] Such *genius* for Romans was kind of *duplicate* of things and phenomena.

The idea that human relations with the environment resemble a dialogue has already been considered in the archaic culture. According to famous etnograph A. Baiburin, we are accustomed to treating phenomena of the external world as objects, while an archaic man was thinking about them as subjectivities [5, *64*].

The idea of *genius loci* as a sort of *duplicate* personality, as a partner or as intermediary with whom to consult when managing the locality, is important not only in archaic, traditional cultures. C. Norberg-Schulz analysing the works by A. Aalto, Le Corbusier, Ch. Moore, L. Kahn and other prominent architects, applies the fact of respectation of historically developed *genius loci* as an integral criterion of successful project [6, *200*].

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III. Organisational and Methodological Presumptions for the Dialogue with *Genius Loci*, Consensual Informational Units Required for the Dialogue

By looking at a certain place, locality as a cultural dynamic system, it can be treated as an analogue of a biological system. To maintain the identity of system, it is necessary to take into account the system history (memory). In other words, we have to respect historical determinants of *genius loci*. We are sure, that these determinants representing the "interests" of *genius loci* (interests to survive, to continue) can be written down using a special code. Such code may consist of ecologically motivated symptoms that at the same time are consensual units important for carrying out the dialogue. Such informational units are non-private, common for all subjectivities. They belong to the domain of cultural memory and have a resemblance to specific semantic structures (myth, canon), which on cultural level are relatively "eternal".

It is important to emphasize, that mythological statements with the help of which we are describing *genius loci* have a semiotic character. It is natural, because they are working not as text elements but as elements of code.

According to H. Maturana and F. Varela, living organisms are characterized by an "autopoeia organization". "Autopoietic" systems are systems that, as a whole, are determined by the component production network. The components recursively (evaluating the return link) through interactions are generating and implementing a network that creates themselves [7]. Synergy, by applying a recursive model (forming a structural relation between autopoietic entities), determines that what cannot be observed and cannot be identified on the base of static ontology, becomes observable and recognizable [8, *59*].

The phenomenon of *autopoiesis* can be related with the notion of autocommunication, elaborated by J. Lotman. A text, which in autocommunication, does not provide us with new information, but transforms a selfpicture of 'me' <...> is circulating in a functional way as a code, not as a message. "Asemantic texts, which are thoroughly organized syntagmatically, become the initiators of our associations: the more emphatic the syntagmatics, the more associative it is!" [9, 90]. Such text code works as *shifter* (or system of *shifters*) (In linguistics, the term *shifter* means the position dependent on the shift of observation point [10]).

The *genius loci* description units, namely, are the elements of such type of "text-code". They are analogous to the mentioned *shifters*, which also have a function to restructure the mode of perception for better understanding of such phenomena as contextually actualized memory and continuity in time.

The fact that we still often cannot see the environment as something alive (also grasp the *genius loci*) is due to the relic of classical worldview – objectivistic treatment of environment, and understanding other subjectivities only as object of action, of manipulation. We will not notice the subjectivity of a place if we look at it through the lens of individual psychology categories. When people get educated, they are usually looking at the world with empathy on the base of collective psychology that let them see other personalities – subjectivities, and grasp the essence of cultural processes.

As George Dickie explains, aesthetics in the twentieth century, with regard to its central problems, fall into three relatively distinct periods: the psychological, the analytic and the contextual [11, *269*]. According to Dickie, until the 1950s, philosophers attempted to resolve the central questions of aesthetics – the nature of the experience of art and the nature of art – by using notions of *individual psychology*, notions of what people do or undergo as individuals. These notions of individual psychology contrast with social notions of what people do or undergo as members of groups. From the early 1960s, a number of philosophers have attempted to resolve the central problems of aesthetics with *contextual theories*. Arthur Danto explains, that the new thing for the twentieth-century aesthetics was the idea that context involves cultural concepts, not the notions of individual psychology [11, *281*]. We treat here cultural concepts as synonyms of term cultural connotations.

The ability to comprehend something hidden in the environment still is blocked by the principle of spatiality. This principle inherent in classical rationalism, according to M. Mamardashvili, requires complete articulation of the matter outwards (available for external observation) as the condition of the things that could be generally known about the matter. The act of phenomena observation supposedly does not change the essence [12].

We want to emphasize, that the essence of *genius loci* can be perceived only through *intermediaries* – compactly expressed conditionalized knowledge, which introduces certain "devices" named by M. Mamardashvili as "substitutes of regularities (laws)", peculiar perceptual devices, intelligent bodies [12]. An architect taking into account a set of such symptoms, which represent peculiarities of localities, as a certain archetypal role structure, has mores chances to understand *genius loci* with empathy. In this process architect can understand things that allows him to create something new at the same time taking into account cultural identity of *locus*. In such a case the architect is operating with "conditionalized" knowledge (as it is understood by F. McPherson), that is, knowledge about something including data about the contexts in which that knowledge will be useful [13].

Units of proposed code functions as *substitutes of regularities* have practical implications – they are consensus units that allow one another to understand each other. They can help recognize related with them invariant structures relatively constant in time (Mamardashvili gives a good example, analogue, of substitution of regularities: monetary units as invariant structures representing the price of goods for all participants in the process of goods exchange) [12]. It is a good example based on a work of collective psychology.

Such shifters – consensual units, have a certain two-sided nature. We can treat them as some kind of "centaurs", where the physical side (visible objects, places) or elementary denotative semantic features are accepted at once, but for comprehension of deeper metaphysical side (cultural meanings) some special competency is necessary and can be acquired in the educational process. As long as the invariant symptoms ("centaurs") are not

Fig. 1. Lentvaris Manor Park. Cascades, semantically related with lake waterfall, 2010 [Picture: V. Petrušonis].

Fig. 2. Lentvaris Manor Park. Bridge-viaduct with a grotto, rivulet, 2016 [Picture: V. Petrušonis].

perceived implicitly, i. e. they are still not learned, it is necessary to use mediating tools – semantic manuals and related with them legal documents, which regulate territory development and contain cultural meanings associated with the certain places. It is best to arrange such descriptions of dialogue conditions to a greater degree close to the denotative characterisation using cultural connotations. H. Maturana emphasizes that in the language the perceptual shift, orientation of perception, is organized namely by connotative semantic units [14].

The denotation and connotation characteristics must be combined in the knowledge presented in an explicit form. Delivering knowledge in an accessible form to all interested parties can guarantee the availability of information on the conditions for the implementation of public interest.

A code element (consensual units) consists of 1) names of identified easy recognizable objects forming a place; and 2) cultural ideas, connotational characteristics of those objects. Some ideas appear as simple cultural connotations of certain objects and are easily identifiable. However, fuller knowledge of local cultural-symbolic potential requires use of data that has a more complex connotational structure. Such ideas encourage designers to comprehend the distinctive features of the place more deeply; also they are helping them to take into account personal existential experiences that are essential for stimulation of original creative design solutions.

The ability to see in the city environment various, even the most complex, contextual meanings is developed and deepened in collaboration with *thesaurus* (model of *locus* identity), which not only presents peculiarities of place but at the same time is "explaining" the "intentions" of the locality.

Iv. The Case of Lentvaris Manor Park. Discussion

The article presents a set of consensus units representing some traits of Lentvaris Manor Park *genius loci*. Lentvaris manor park displays the manifestation of cultural ideas and cultural connotations, which were unknown to the researchers of the park and to its protectors or possible restorers before. The results of the semantic research on the Lentvaris Manor Park (designed by Édouard François André, 1840–1911) allow us to recognize the idea of *Earthly Paradise* implemented in the landscaped part of the park, which is significant for European culture.

The studies of the Lentvaris Manor Park by other authors are assessed critically, because they focus mainly on the personality of the creator of the park, his activities and features of the park's style, emphasizing the universal typological compositional aspects that are often too general and therefore do not illustrate the aspects of this specific park. The description of the Lentvaris Manor Park as a cultural property in legal documents does not take into account cultural qualities. Besides, all the valuable features of the park are defined referring to superficial historical, cultural and aesthetic information.

The semantic study of the Lentvaris park was inspired by the model of *Earthly Paradise* based on the Jesuit Athanasius Kircher's concept and discussed in Mikhail Yampolsky's [15] and Eugenio Lo Sardo's [16] works. The *Earthly Paradise* is marked by the following elements: water cascades and waterfall (Fig. 1), obelisk-column, labyrinth (Fig. 3), bridge-viaduct with a grotto (Fig. 2), "pathway of predecessors/philosophers", tower (more detailed hierarchical system of cultural connotations of the park is presented in other articles of author [17]).

Fig. 3. Lentvaris Manor Park. Column – obelisk and paths forming a labyrinth 2016 [Picture: V. Petrušonis].

The idea of *Earthly Paradise* was represented in the Lentvaris park indirectly, through the cultural tradition of park design. As we can see from available sources, Eduard Andre designed the park without reflecting on this concept.

It would be a good option to make descriptions combining denotative and connotative features.

What do we usually see during a public meeting where project solutions should be discussed? There are several elderly people with a doubtful competency, who can only express their own private opinion, but cannot express a social stand at the public meeting. A private superficial opinion is rooted in individual's psychology without references to broader social-cultural context. Actually members of such meeting are not participants of real dialogue with other interested stakeholders (including *genius loci*).

At the moment excessive attention to superficial public participation is blocking both research on urban environmental issues and of education of specialists, as well as upbringing of public. If the cultural-ecological competency of the participants, members of local community, is not enough to perceive the invariant features of the environment, their participation in environmental management process may be destructive to that environment.

Such kind of *genius loci* representation means (combining denotative and connotative semantics) described here as system of ecologically motivated symptoms would be the best measure to create the consensus between architects and community members from one side and *genius loci* from the other side. Explicitly presented set of consensual units, representing *genius loci* "interests" has to be presented to the participants of public discussion regarding the future of certain locality.

Conclusion

1. There is no need to treat public participation as a panacea, a way of solving complex problems. Emphasizing the right to the "opinion without justification" to the several local community members, in practice can cause damage not only to the *genius loci* to the community as well. Such a shield of democracy should not be used to instigate superficial debate regarding valuable features of locality.

2. The voice of *genius loci* that is communicating with us through cultural concepts and conveying information to us about the conditions for the continuity of the identity of the locality, is currently ignored. There is no systematic presentation of ecologically-conditionalized knowledge, it is not theoretically discussed (this tendency is reflected in the current legal description of Lentvaris Manor Park).

3. In the documents describing urban places and cultural heritage objects, there is no space provided for presenting cultural ideas, cultural connotations associated with the place, with the buildings (or their elements). Data of such descriptions can not be grasped with the consciousness of the designers; there are no possibilities for creatively solving the problems of urban renovation. This is because such presentations do not contain invariant structures – consensus units (functioning as *shifters* of understanding).

4. The sets of information units of the multilayer identity determinant system, as a system of *genius loci* symptoms, offered in this article, can be used for the presentation of *genius loci*. They represent many types of local identities; they also illustrate the network of knowledge emphasized from the cultural-ecological point of view. When in the process of

environmental management we see the conditions of locality identity continuity, it is possible to take into account the "interests" of local subjectivity, i.e. the *genius loci*. The role of cultural connotations in such description is very significant. Now, unfortunately, both in the inventory of heritage objects and in the issues discussed in the process of participation, the place is characterized almost exclusively by denotations.

5. Descriptions combining denotative and connotative semantics (the latter is especially important for promoting creative thinking) might contribute to the existential experience actualisation of an architect for solving creative tasks as well as might play the role of a solution catalyst; informative support organised as mentioned above is the only way enabling the development of new original architectural pieces taking into account the social cultural memory.

6. Such kind of *genius loci* representation would be the best measure to create consensus between architects and community members. Territorial regulations or descriptions of heritage objects should be based on presenting conditionalized, contextually sensitive knowledge. Human activity requires objective mediation using signs, and symbols. It is supported by technical systems, objects of material culture, language, and text systems, behind which there are various socio-cultural meanings. Heritage locality or separate object regulation specifying the cultural ideas and connotations related to the objects may be used as both a legal document and advisory intellectual system containing both textual and cartographic tools (e.g. dynamic GIS solution). Delivering of such conditionalized knowledge in an accessible form to all interested parties can guarantee the availability of information on the conditions for the implementation of public interest.

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