

The principles of *arturbain.fr* for teaching sustainable urban design

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ABSTRACT: Argued in this article is the importance in contemporary education of architecture of students applying an ordered repertoire of principles and concepts of a universal nature while, at the same time, pointing to the new directions of solutions and answers to 21st Century problems. This task is implemented by the French Association, *L'Art Urbain dans les Territoires* (Urban Art in the Territories). It is accompanied by an idea that consists in observing a few basic principles in urban planning: that is, learn to look; learn to get to know vocabulary; learn to cultivate memory; learn to work in a multidisciplinary team; and learn to communicate. In adopting an attitude, thus defined towards the built environment, the implication is that specific actions are undertaken for the recovery of public space, the restoration of landscape diversity, of socio-cultural identity and protection of the natural environment.

INTRODUCTION

From the Pages of *L'Art Urbain* History

The association, *L'Art Urbain dans les Territoires* (Urban Art in the Territories), was founded by the architect and urban planner Robert-Max Antoni (1939-2017) as *Séminaire Robert Auzelle* (SRA) in Paris in 1984. The inspiration for its establishment was Robert Auzelle, an outstanding architect and urban planner (1913-1983), whose work had a significant impact on forming the approach of many architects to creating solutions in architecture and urban planning [1].

Auzelle emphasised the responsibility of the architect for their works, the one who, by permanently inscribing them in urban spaces, often determines their nature for hundreds of years [2]. He played an important role in building the programme for training architects in France in the second half of the 20th Century [3-5]. It was out of the inspiration from his work that one of the main goals of Association activity became the pursuit of a conscious organisation of space, referring to the scale of man and the needs of individuals and groups.

The Art Urbain Idea

The Art Urbain concept is defined as a *set of multidisciplinary actions to improve living conditions, combined with concern about the quality of the architecture, quality of social life, and respect for the environment* [6]. Thus, the Art Urbain idea contains a message of forming urban space, which consists in improving architectural solutions, at the same time aiming to improve the quality of social life and to protect the environment. Thus, it serves to build or recover cultural and historical identity. Seen in this way, the art of forming space fits into the broader framework of the discussion of contemporary urban planning about the relationship between various dimensions (not only spatial) of urban phenomena.

The desiderata of the Association are based on principles adopted since its inception:

First, the rationale results from the perception of the need for the comprehensive and systematic acquisition and deepening of knowledge, and the critical reflection that accompanies this process.

Second, it follows from adopting as obligatory clearly defined concepts in teaching urban design.

Third, it results from the assumption that memory, space and society are in mutual relationships. An important element of the principles promoted by the Association is also building good communication and co-operation with representatives of various scientific disciplines.

ASSUMPTIONS OF URBAN PLANNING AND DESIGN

Quality of Architectural Solutions

According to the Association guidelines, a basic determinant of the quality of urban space is that of architectural solutions and the nature of architectural objects. *Architectural quality refers to placing in a location and taking into account the landscape, with particular emphasis on the treatment of public space [7].*

Architectural solutions largely determine the effects of transforming urban spaces. Depending on the function, architectural objects can be an attractive hiking destination for many users. Transformations of existing structures and implementation of the new are carried out in context. In the last 30 years of the 20th Century, in connection with globalisation, space management in Europe was in the hands of numerous dispersed entities (economic and social forces). In some cases, the new architecture retains the original narrative, interpreting the past in a contemporary way or is a new story based on foundations rooted in history.

In the absence of a pre-existing, recognizable common heritage, it is the concept of the project that develops the identity and meaning of a place. A place that is a carrier of identity is not exchangeable, it has its own nature, which provides the feeling of being somewhere. This reference is related to the previous consistency between composition and functionality because it requires that functionality be provided, just like the aesthetics of formal choices, so that the project takes on life and that identity emerges [7].

Quality of Social Life

The *quality of life* category is exceedingly broad, hence the definition of it requires reference to a number of aspects. One major element can be found in numerous studies on this subject. This is the level of satisfaction an individual or group experiences as a result of the consumption of goods and services purchased in the market, and the consumption of public goods. *Quality of life is the result of an agreement between the creators and users of the surroundings of the place of residence, the object of constant attention, the variety of functions and wealth of purposes of places of residence and places of walking and relaxation [7].*

However, regardless of the adopted interpretation, the notion refers to the desired level of values in a location. The quality of life is not only an objective category, but an aggregate of numerous subjective assessments relating to various aspects of life and values of urban space. Taking into account the principles adopted by the Association, these are mainly about the social dimension of the designed space, especially public. It is the latter that remains an important thread and a factor affecting the quality of life in the city, and the sense of urban character [8]. The question about public space is also related to other questions: whose is it and who should it serve?

This reference concerns all the measures taken to involve residents, including those in surrounding areas, before a plan is developed: these measures may take the form of a public inquiry procedure by local authorities, public debate, or simply consultation, dialogue between different parties to gather the opinions and concerns of each of them [7].

Respect for the Environment

The *L'Art Urbain dans les Territoires* Association considers the solutions conducive to environmental protection to be extremely significant as an important indicator of high quality urban space. As with the signatories of the New Athens Charter, members of the European Urban Council, and other authors of various pro-environmental programmes, it recognises that areas formed from *green and blue material* should constitute continuous systems, and thus contribute to the maintaining of a sustainable balance of the urban environment.

Therefore, in their opinion, all undertakings strengthening the existing systems of ecological routes and creating conditions for the development of biodiversity, while protecting natural resources are valuable. The quality of solutions for environmental protection is also determined by all the measures conducive to the reduction of emissions and those that enable energy saving. *The purpose of respecting the environment is to create conditions for the development of biodiversity and the protection of natural resources [7].*

ROLE OF ART URBAIN IN TEACHING URBAN PLANNING AND DESIGN

Competitions *arturbain.fr*

From the beginning, the *L'Art Urbain dans les Territoires* Association conducted research on the quality of urban space and organised a number of activities aimed at improving the value of existing structures. Along with the physical changes in cities, the Association responds dynamically to changing needs and sets appropriate goals in line with French urban policy, related to sustainable development. These objectives are also in other European recommendations regarding urban development (e.g. the Leipzig Charter, Urban and URBACT - integrated urban development programmes).

As part of the projects implemented by the Association, events are devoted to issues current in a given period. Each year, a topic of reflection is announced. It is the subject of research, organised debates and competitions. The issues of ethics, deontology and quality of life are often raised during meetings with national organisations of professionals. Numerous urban development projects - rewarded by the Association - and which were awarded the *Prix National* prize presented to city mayors, investors and creators, are good examples of putting into practice the idea of creating a high-quality *built environment*.

The *Art Urbain* idea has an international dimension and, in the form of a competition, is addressed to teams composed of students and teachers representing the schools of architecture of all countries. One method of promotion is the preparation of competition projects implemented in numerous universities around the world, including Poland, in the Faculty of Architecture at Gdańsk University of Technology in (since 2005). In 2017, the *Art Urbain* idea was included as a separate subject in the curriculum of second-cycle studies.

The detailed regulations of all editions of the competition contain the main topic and indicate the necessary procedure for the development of the project. According to the regulations, the selection of a place to be designed is open. An important requirement to meet is the development of a detailed design for an area the size of which will not exceed 10 hectares. In each case, the criteria for assessing the proposed transformations relate to architectural quality, the quality of social life and the quality of solutions conducive to environmental protection.

When preparing the design for the space selected by the authors, it is important to evoke its history. This stage of work fits into the desiderata of the Association stating the need for constant *learning* of space, place and people. It involves an identity project that requires some effort to acquire knowledge about the city, the history, the history of individual districts or given places or objects. It is worth emphasising that, when working on a project, it is recommended that terms be employed that refer to similar associations, symbols and meanings.

Towards the Reclamation of City and Urbanity

Regardless of the topic announced in a given year, an important element of each project is the presentation of the concept of transforming public space. It is considered a most important part of architectural studies and analyses, and valuable in seeking answers to questions about the role of social space in forming the urban built environment. The introduction of the humanistic element into the language of space makes it possible to look at the city from a broader, non-spatial perspective, albeit inextricably linked to it.

The competitions create an intellectual field for reflection on urban space from the perspective of cultural values, social needs and contemporary challenges faced by architects. This is evidenced by the topics of the competitions that are part of the international discourse on public spaces and their social role, e.g. the public square, a place for social life/*La place publique, lieu de vie sociale* (2007).

The issue of public space and the revitalisation of city centres related to it is an issue most widely discussed and analysed. *Cities are seen as social networks of people and institutions, whose physical organization allows the exchange of goods and information* [9].

Serving as hubs for urban activities, city centres have been the subject of forming and transforming for many years, e.g.:

- Reconsider the piece of land, as an urban ensemble in human measure/*Reconsidérer le lotissement comme ensemble urbain à mesure humaine* (2008).
- The urban centre and its environment accessible to all/*Le centre urbain et son environnement accessibles à tous* (2010) (see Figure 1).
- The urban centre and its environment accessible to all/*L'espace public au coeur du renouvellement urbain* (2015).
- The case for felicitous public space enhanced by light and the arts/*Pour un espace public heureux, mis en valeur par la lumière et les arts* (2016).
- Enhancing public spaces, common good of the citizens/*Mettre en valeur l'Espace public, Bien commun des citoyens* (2017).
- For a network of public spaces accessible to all/*Pour un réseau d'espaces publics accessibles à tous* (2018) (see Figure 2).

Contemporary, market-oriented urban policy tendencies favour the practice of renovating places that are attractive and have market potential [and] that [are] not used because of their physical and social degeneration [10].

In the renovation process, the attractiveness of a location with easy access to public transport, as well as to collective and individual consumption services, deserves attention. Hence, the issue of urban revitalisation was included in the competition, e.g.:

- Revitalising the centres of small and medium-sized towns/*Revitaliser les centres des villes petites et moyennes* (2019) (see Figure 3).

Aller à vélo et à pied dans de la ville, au bord de la mer, dans la forêt. RUMIA

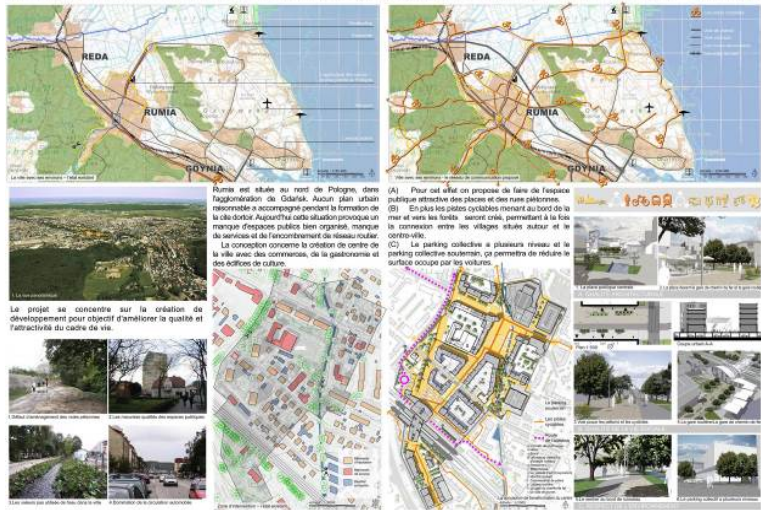


Figure 1: Project awarded a prize in the 2010 competition by architect Janusz Gujski with students Michal Dąbrowski and Norbert Brandt: *Aller à vélo et à pied dans la ville, au bord de la mer, dans la forêt*. Urban Design. Group led by architects Janusz Gujski and Izabela Burda.



Figure 2: Project awarded a prize in the 2018 competition by architect Izabela Burda with students Alicja Sikorska and Aneta Szrot: *Emmenez-moi au bord de la mer*. Urban Design. Group led by architects Janusz Gujski, Izabela Burda and Katarzyna Zielonko-Jung.

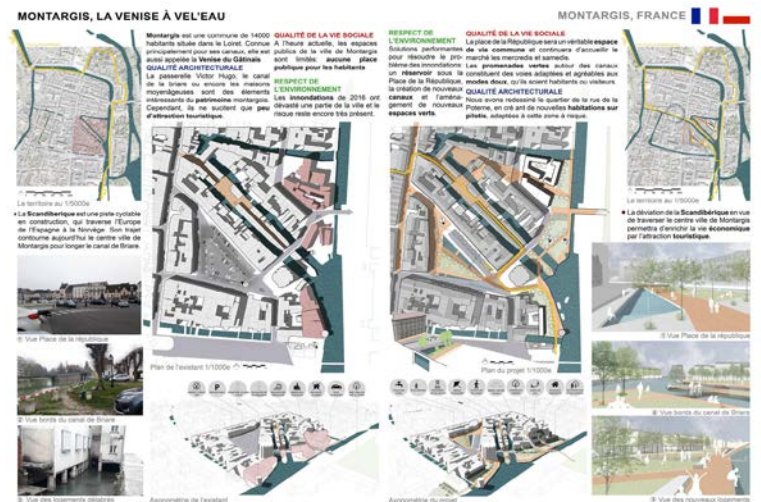


Figure 3: Project awarded a prize in the 2019 competition by architect Janusz Gujski with students Ivanne Dartige du Fournet, Pénélope Barret and Hugo Santos: *Montargis, la Venise à vél'eau*. Urban Design. Group led by architects Janusz Gujski, Izabela Burda and Katarzyna Zielonko-Jung.

Contemporary reflections on nature in architecture are accompanied by new methodologies to praise the diversity of connections between urban cultures and nature [11]. Turning to water in the competition shows that the presence of nature in the city is a desirable source of renewal of urban structures. Green and blue urban planning is all about the necessary directions of changes resulting not only in the appearance of modern cities, but also in solutions that reduce energy consumption and the emissions of harmful substances into the environment, improve public transport or increase accessibility to open public spaces, e.g.:

- Design with nature, intercommunal territories and small towns/*Composer avec la nature, territoires intercommunaux et petites villes* (2009).
- Faced with urban sprawl, which way of life for tomorrow?/*Face à l'étalement urbain, quel cadre de vie pour demain?* (2012).
- Ecological districts linked to a Nature network/*Quartiers écologiques en lien avec un réseau nature* (2013).

One of the editions of the competition was dedicated to empty, forgotten places. This served to find a potential for new content and values (revitalising emptiness) or, by contrast, to reduce the distance between the place or building and the user. The formula of the competition made it possible to combine analogue and digital solutions, e.g.:

- Putting forgotten empty spaces to good use/*Valoriser les espaces vides oubliés* (2011).

The issues of suburbanisation, of population migration and housing development in the suburban area which, on the one hand, attract residents to suburban areas, or *push* them out of central locations, was also allowed for. The purpose of the competition was to attempt to respond to changes in the social structure of a selected suburban area, lifestyle changes, dependence on individual transport, and the negative effects of these phenomena on social, economic and environmental life (commuting, noise, traffic jams), e.g.:

- For a reorganisation of suburban districts by means of mobility/*Pour une réorganisation des quartiers périurbains par les mobilités* (2014).

PROJECT PRESENTATION

Requirements related to the way a project is presented are an important element of teaching. Compliance with the formula for presenting work on one A1 board serves to limit statements to the most important elements that best explain the adopted solutions. According to the competition regulations, it should be possible to see the proposed scope of changes aimed at improving quality of life in the space covered by the competition. Such a strictly defined form of communication makes it easier to compare projects that relate to different cultural areas [12].

Also deserving attention is that works which receive awards are presented on the organiser's Web site, and every year a seminar summarising that edition of the competition and an exhibition of projects rewarded in a given year, are held. Winning an award or distinction obliges participants to attend the seminar and to publicly present their project to an international group. This is particularly important for students who acquire new competencies, not only in soft skills, but also in expanding their knowledge and gaining new experience [13].

CONCLUSIONS

The ideas propagated by the *L'Art Urbain dans les Territoires* Association are directly reflected in the *arturbain.fr* competition. They provide guidelines for urban design which are focused on contemporary and urgent problems to be solved in accordance with the sustainable development of the urban built environment. The participation of students in *arturbain.fr* international competitions combines education with cognition. It is an inspiring method of holistic teaching in the approach to urban design. It makes it possible to better understand spatial, social and cultural diversity in a natural context.

The main desiderata of *arturbain.fr* include an increase in the quality of life of users of a given space. In all editions of the competition, an important place is occupied by sustainable urbanism and, within it, public space as a common good. This means, regardless of time and place, to adopt an attitude towards the urban built environment based on the necessity to raise the standard of existing locations/complexes of development; mix development functions (to make spaces as self-sufficient as possible in terms of available services); and to renew/regenerate degraded areas.

These desiderata are related to sustainable transport and the idea of compact or coherent space development. They also result from the assumption that in many cases their fulfilment will not be possible without appropriate initial and broader socio-cultural conditions. Therefore, participation in the *arturbain.fr* competition can be an important element in introducing students to professional life [14].

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