MULTIGENERATIONAL SPACES IN CONCEPTUAL URBAN PROJECTS IN POLISH CITIES

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The contemporary approach to shaping public spaces takes on a new meaning in the face of challenges faced by European societies, including Polish ones. These challenges concern not only demographic changes, including the aging of the society, but also aspects related to social changes, such as the increase in the number of single people, the increase in the number of people suffering from depression or loneliness, the disappearance of the multigenerational family model (Szlendak, 2012), and so on. These trends should set directions and actions for the implementation of urban strategies and for how to shape space to support interpersonal relationships and ties, including multigenerational ones, in order to counteract negative trends, while responding in particular to the needs of sensitive social groups, that is, the elderly, people with disabilities, families with young children, and so on, which are less privileged groups than young, fit, and active city dwellers.

In Poland, the trend of designing through the prism of the needs of an aging society and vulnerable social groups, in accordance with the standards of universal design, is slowly becoming noticeable in newly emerging projects.¹

What is important for the development of multigenerational space design are also conceptual, and experimental designs developed in recent years, which, although not yet implemented, bring a new approach to shaping such spaces in Poland. Such an approach is taken by the Laboratory of Architecture 60+ Foundation (LAB 60+).² This chapter analyzes two urban conceptual projects of multigenerational spaces developed with the participation of experts from the LAB 60+ Foundation, which have a chance to be implemented in Poland in the coming years. The first is the development of a master plan for the Warsaw Social District (WDS), and the second is a concept project for the development of the Multigenerational Square in Lesko. These are two different spatial assumptions in terms of the scale and the context of the place in which they are created. The aim of the authors of the chapter is to analyze the contemporary design concepts of multigenerational assumptions with a different location, specificity, and scale in order to identify significant determinants of shaping multigenerational spaces in Polish cities as illustrated with selected examples.

State of Research

In Poland, public spaces do not always meet the basic standards, as it turns out, despite the fact that, in principle, they ought to be multigenerational in nature and fulfil the needs of different people. As Abłażewicz-Górnicka (2013) points out, physical barriers in space are one of the main reasons for the process of withdrawal of the most sensitive individuals, such as the elderly or people with disabilities. It happens that, for this reason, many people give up active participation in social life, leaving home, or maintaining direct social contacts. In Polish cities, public spaces often fail to meet the basic standards of being equipped with elements of street furniture, Szukalski (2010) notes, pointing to deficiencies related to the elements, that is, benches, playgrounds, green areas, which can facilitate the functioning in the space for all its users. On the other hand, Cymer (2007) draws attention to elements of small architecture and street furniture, which are an important part of shaping multigenerational public spaces. These include, among others, benches and other seatings, tables, bicycle stands, gazebos, information poles, plant pots, stops and posts, and streetlamps (Kimic 2015, Herling 2016). They are an integral part of public spaces and are considered elements that facilitate the physical use of these spaces, increasing their accessibility and functionality. Providing fitness equipment suitable for the physical condition of users and a sufficient number of tables and seats can promote spending time outdoors, the forming of social relationships, and the undertaking of various activities that boost physical and psychological well-being (Yang, Kankan and Jianjun 2018). For urban public spaces, design principles must ensure equality between the different types of users and their needs. Design solutions, apart from following this rule, should, owing to their products, services, or spaces, give new meaning to the users of these solutions (Verganti 2009). Many authors (Arizona State University 2005; National Association of Area Agencies on Aging 2007; Miller & Annesley 2011) also draw attention to the aspect of linking public spaces within the structure of cities with access to public transport (stops) and to facilities with a recreational function or proximity to green areas (parks). Kaplan and Haider (2015) write that well-designed spaces, responding to the needs of different generations, can contribute to increasing their individual activity and support forging multigenerational relationships. It is important to define a multigenerational space through the prism of age-friendly spaces, because owing to this we are able to identify the features and criteria of this space that are important from the point of view of the needs of an aging society. This approach is evident in the concept of *Age Friendly Cities* (WHO 2007) relating to eight aspects of age-friendly city planning,³ one of the elements important for the considerations of this chapter are public spaces and buildings, which should be designed so that, in particular, elderly people can safely and freely move around them and have free access to outdoor areas (Labus 2014). As Plouffe and Kalache (2010) write, the characteristic features of cities and places that are age-friendly and, thus, multigenerational, include physical accessibility, proximity, security, and integration, and Buffel et al. (2012) also add pedestrian safety, crime rates, and environmental changes.

Determinants of Shaping Multigenerational Spaces

Based on the analysis of the literature in relation to multigenerational spaces, determinants of shaping and architectural and urban features of multigenerational spaces were identified, as shown in Table 25.1.

TABLE 25.1 Determinants of shaping and architectural and urban features of multigenerational spaces on the basis of literature analysis

<i>Determinants of shaping multigenerational spaces</i>	<i>Architectural and urban features of multigenerational Space</i>	<i>Authors</i>
The location is surrounded by green areas	• presence of parks and green areas	Arizona State University (2005) National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (2007) Miller and Annesley (2011)
Activating users	• staying in shape and practicing sports (equipping the spaces with exercise and sports equipment suited to all users) • active rest and recreation (spaces ensuring active and passive rest)	Szukalski (2010) Yang, Kankan, and Jianjun (2018)
Social relations in space	• varied functional and spatial program taking into account the needs of sensitive social groups (everyone can find something for themselves) • creating places influencing integration engaging the local community and supporting the forming of multigenerational relationships	Hirsch et al. (2000) Lui et al. (2009) Scharlach (2012) Kaplan and Haider (2015)
Space availability and functionality	• availability of transport and services • safe pedestrian crossings, adapted, low, wide curbs • appropriate size and connection with the surroundings • appropriate space markings (readability, visual identification)	Liu et al. (1991) Mitchell and Burton (2006) Mobility, Mood, and Place (2017)
Well-being and being in space	• independent use of it (access to toilets) • simple and intuitive use of it • solutions for improving comfort and readability • sense of privacy and intimacy and safety while staying, getting about and moving in it	Mitchell and Burton (2006) Plouffe and Klache (2010) Buffel et al. (2012) Speck (2013) Wantuch-Matla (2016)
Reception of space and its elements	• attractiveness, aesthetics, and quality of space • varied sensory experiences, engaging all senses • elements of the so-called small architecture and street furniture (benches and other seats, tables, bicycle stands, gazebos, information posts, plant pots, stops and posts, streetlamps) • references to cultural and social history (city artifacts, reference to the identity of the place)	Cymer (2007) Szukalski (2010) Kimic (2015) Herling (2016) Mobility, Mood, and Place (2017)

Source: Own study.

Conceptual Urban Projects of Multigenerational Spaces in Poland

Warsaw Social District

General information about the project

The Warsaw Social District (pl. Warszawska Dzielnica Społeczna – WDS) is an experimental project of a model housing estate, which is to be built on an area of 18.5 ha in Warsaw.⁴ The project is a response to the widespread criticism of the commercial housing model, as well as the problem of the lack of housing availability visible in many cities.⁵ An important element in shaping the project was the creation of multigenerational common spaces within the district. The estate is to be adapted to users of all ages, with different psychophysical fitness, financial capabilities, and needs, while creating a sense of security and independence, in the so-called “social mix” trend. In addition, the project under discussion is to be an indication of good models and prototyping of new solutions that could be introduced in other places in the city, or in Poland.

Features of the Multigenerational Space

The WDS project provides for the creation of common spaces, both external, in the form of squares, playgrounds, as well as internal ones in the form of local activity centers, services located on the ground floors of buildings, as well as in former postindustrial facilities adapted to new functions integrating the inhabitants, which are the remains of the factory called “House Factory” producing prefabricated products for the surrounding housing estates from the times of the Polish People’s Republic. The WDS project has many goals and ambitions, among which one can find numerous connections with multigenerational spaces and their features. The concept assumes that the complex will be integrated into the already existing and developed urban fabric in the district of Warsaw. It will enable the integration of this space with the surroundings, while enriching this part of the city with new architectural and urban solutions. This allows, among other things, to use the already existing transport infrastructure, while creating own structure inside the estate. It will consist in dividing the WDS structure into large quarters and smaller neighborly (multigenerational) units, that is, into urban – public one and neighborly – greenspace. Common spaces will be places for everyone, serving to build a community, create interpersonal relationships, with taking into account age, gender, level of fitness, and likes and preferences of users.⁶ On the other hand, numerous spaces and neighborly paths and backyard gardens will allow for greater intimacy and a sense of peace, security, and privacy, and thus the creation of more lasting multigenerational relationships. The following public spaces can be distinguished within the designed public spaces in the WDS, as shown in Figure 25.1: WDS Gate – entrance to the subway and office buildings; Central Passage – city promenade, pedestrian, and bicycle traffic, location for most services and trade, avenue with trees; Central Square – the main square of the estate; The Green Track – a recreational boulevard.

The project has separated semipublic neighborly (multigenerational) spaces, as shown in Figure 25.2: House Factory – roofed, sports place, informal activities, temporary arrangements depending on the season; Greenhouse – a roofed meeting place, place of activity for residents; Green Squares – ponds, natural playgrounds, recreation areas, open gyms; Path – a continuous path leading through the entire estate.

FIGURE 25.1 Scheme of urban public spaces. Source: own study based on “The Warsaw Social District. The Initial Concept of the Mastreplan”, Biuro Architektury i Planowania Przestrzennego, BBGK Architekci, 2019.

FIGURE 25.2 Scheme of neighborly semi-public spaces. Source: own study based on “The Warsaw Social District. The Initial Concept of the Mastreplan”, Biuro Architektury i Planowania Przestrzennego, BBGK Architekci, 2019

The multigenerational nature of the project is enhanced by the diverse systemic as well as functional and spatial offerings, owing to which it is possible to provide the space users and residents with the necessary services in their immediate vicinity. There will be such facilities as a kindergarten or a school and also a library, a cultural center, a multigenerational center, and a neighborly house. They are aimed at forming relationships and social contacts, supporting community integration and creating places that initiate multigenerational relationships and activities. An important element of the WDS program, in line with its multigenerational character, is the reference to the cultural history of this place and the use of the city's existing artifacts (remains of factory buildings, silos, overhead cranes, tracks), which will be adapted to new functions. The WDS project also relates to sustainable development in the context of construction, transport-oriented toward its public form, and an environment promoting a resilient ecosystem and adaptation to climate change.

Multigenerational Square in Lesko

General Information about the Project

Lesko is a city located in the Subcarpathian Province, which is the capital of the Lesko County and the Lesko Commune. The study area concerns a plot of land at Smolki street of an irregular shape, with an area of 6,501 m², surrounded by two five-story multifamily residential buildings. A single-story building is currently under construction on the plot serving as a nursery. In the immediate vicinity there are multifamily residential buildings and single-family houses. Moreover, a primary school and a kindergarten are also located in the vicinity of the playground under design. The area is an undeveloped space, devoid of spatial order as well as ordered and arranged greenery. There is no specific offer of spending time there for the residents of the estate and the surrounding area. There are elements of street furniture in the form of benches and an outdoor gym (under the windows of a residential building), without the possibility of ensuring intimacy for the residents who use them.

Features of Multigenerational Space

The design of the Multigenerational Square in Lesko involves the division of the area into several zones, each of which has different functional and spatial elements, as shown in Figure 25.3: Entrance Zone, Community Garden Zone, Sensory Zone, Sports and Recreation Zone, Fun and Development Zone.

The design of the Multigenerational Square in Lesko is an assumption suited to the existing conditions and thus integrated into the structure of a large-panel housing estate. The aim of the project is to connect it with the existing communication infrastructure and to enrich the area with a public green area. The Square can be used as an area for recreation and spending time for children and youth from nearby educational institutions (the nursery under construction, the existing kindergarten and primary school). The concept of the Square concerns a varied functional and spatial program that takes into account the needs of all social groups. As part of the functional and spatial program, the following elements have been designed: a barrier-free playground for every user, regardless of age and level of fitness, ensuring comfort and intuitive independent use; the existing outdoor gym has been moved to a secluded place, surrounded by greenery, owing to which it will be possible to activate and maintain the physical condition of residents, guaranteeing a sense of security

FIGURE 25.3 Distinction of functional and spatial multigenerational elements within the Multi-generational Square in Lesko. Source: Laboratory of Architecture 60+ Foundation (LAB 60+), 2020.

and intimacy, increasing the quality and feeling of being in the space; a social garden, the aim of which is to connect generations and activate, educate, and improve competences and knowledge in the field of gardening, ecology, and architecture. The educational nature of the designed functions is important in the project, which strengthens social relations in the space, thanks to the creation of a place that will integrate and encourage the local community to spend time together and form multigenerational relationships. What is important in the project is a positive reception of the space and its individual elements of equipment. The elements of the so-called small architecture include: numerous places to sit, tables, a fountain, plants that activate the senses, and various surfaces, not only to increase the attractiveness and aesthetics of the space but also to use the space, increase the comfort of being in it, and stimulate the senses and develop creativity.

Discussion of Research Results

The two conceptual urban projects of multigenerational spaces discussed in this chapter were analyzed in terms of previously defined determinants of shaping and architectural and urban features of multigenerational spaces. As exemplified by the Warsaw Social District and the Multigenerational Square in Lesko, we can see different determinants and features of shaping multigenerational spaces, which are related to the scale of the project itself and the size and context of the city in which they will be built. In Table 25.2, a synthesis of the analyzed examples of selected design concepts of multigenerational spaces in Poland is presented in relation to the identified determinants of shaping multigenerational space.

TABLE 25.2 Synthesis of the analyzed examples of selected design concepts of multigenerational spaces in Poland in relation to the identified determinants of shaping multigenerational space

<i>Determinants of shaping multigenerational space</i>	<i>Warsaw Social District</i>	<i>Multigenerational Square in Lesko</i>
The location is surrounded by green areas	• postindustrial area of the former “House Factory” • an empty, muddy plot	• in the vicinity of areas of large-panel housing estates, single-family houses, in the vicinity of primary schools and kindergartens, and undeveloped green areas
Activating users	• a roofed, sports place, informal activities, temporary arrangements, depending on the season, residents’ place of activity, open gyms	• sports and recreation zone – multigenerational gym, community garden zone, playground for everyone, playing an educational role
Social relations in space	• creating new relationships between people, learning to interact with a new space	• an attempt to change the existing habits of people and the relationship between users and space
Space availability and functionality	• a complex of buildings, infrastructure, functional and spatial program built from the scratch in the trend of universal design, the social mix, with communication with the immediate surroundings and the city center ensured	• fitting into an existing space, a diversified functional and spatial program, designed in the universal design trend
Well-being and staying in space	• a sense of privacy and intimacy ensured by hierarchization and zoning of public spaces: urban public space, neighborly semipublic space and private space • adapting the program of public spaces to weather conditions (warm/sunny season and cold/rainy season)	• division into readable and accentuated zones of multigenerational space fostering a sense of orientation in space, readability, safety while staying in, getting about and moving around it.
Reception of space and its elements	• reference to the identity of the place by adapting the existing postindustrial facilities to the functions of local centers of residents’ activity	• a sensory garden with elements that engage the senses

Source: Own study.

Based on the literature analysis and case studies, a *multigenerational space* was defined, understood as a space designed based on the needs of people of all ages, with particular attention to the needs of vulnerable social groups (elderly, people with dementia or mental health impairments, people with disabilities, families with young children, etc.):

- giving a sense of different opportunities in terms of access, sense of security, comfort of use, and so on;
- defined as a common space, that is, external and internal, in which each of its users will feel good and will be able to function regardless of restrictions or weather conditions;
- referring to the social, mental, and physical activity of users, facilitating the formation of relationships between people, encouraging them to sustain this relationship and be active;
- accessible, safe, functional, comfortable, readable, attractive, creating the right atmosphere, with diverse functional and spatial programs;
- ensuring positive well-being and reception by various users, ensuring the highest possible quality of staying in it, also owing to access to green areas, equipped with elements of street furniture.

Summary

In recent years in Poland, attention has been given to the implementation of common spaces (external and internal) in terms of multigenerational assumptions, tailored to the needs, preferences, and capabilities of each age group. Until now, multigenerationality has been inscribed into one of the features of public spaces, but without paying particular attention to the determinants that determine it. Based on the analysis of selected urban projects of multigenerational spaces in cities of various sizes, the authors of the present chapter have made an attempt to define multigenerational space by identifying selected determinants of space that determine its multigenerational character. On the basis of the analyzed examples, one can notice a different scale and specificity of shaping multigenerational spaces. In large cities such as Warsaw, which have the capacity and funds for the implementation of experimental large urban projects, it has been observed that an important role in the location of multigenerational spaces is played by transport and service accessibility, a diversified functional and spatial program, and forming social relations, for example, through references to the cultural history of a given place. It is also important to pay attention to the scale of the project and the hierarchy of public spaces in the division into public and neighborly one. The neighborly nature of shaping space is closer to the approach of shaping multigenerational space in smaller towns such as Lesko in which the important determinants are: stimulating the activity (physical, social, recreational) of the inhabitants of nearby estates, ensuring the comfort of staying in a space, for example, ensuring safety and attractiveness, and a diverse functional and spatial program. It is worth noting, however, that in the case of the project in Lesko, there was no common space inside the building, which is an important element of establishing a multigenerational character, for example, during unfavorable weather conditions. The distinction between the determinants and features of multigenerational spaces and their proper implementation should be taken into account when designing public spaces, while taking into account the scale of the city and the scale of solutions and focusing on specific and appropriate features and dimensions of multigenerational spaces tailored to the needs of its users.

Notes

- 1 In 2020, the Terrace in the Świątokrzyski Park in Warsaw was created as a place for integration and recreation for all generations. The concept assumed changing the previously neglected space in the very center of the city into a place equipped with, among others, a skate park, a playground for children, tables for board games, city hammocks, and benches. The project draws attention to an organized and multifunctional space program, central location, high accessibility, and the proximity of the city park. Another example of a multigenerational space, recognized this year as the best response to social challenges in Poland, is the Local Activity Centre in Rybnik-Kłokocin, appreciated in the 9th edition of the Life in Architecture competition. The project was appreciated for the original solutions of the modular and multifunctional street furniture system, which are used upon creation of public spaces for local communities. The elements can be used as a place to sit at children's playgrounds, set a meeting and recreation spot near the housing estate, or serve as a shelter from rain. The project shows that even small architectural changes in public space can serve different needs of local communities, create new centers of public life, and provide safe and accessible spaces for everyone.
- 2 It is an innovative nongovernmental organization which, as the first in Poland, started dealing with an innovative approach to design as part of the trend of universal design social mix and multigenerational spatial solutions, while responding to the challenges of not only the contemporary generations but also of the future ones. The LAB 60+ Foundation implements projects in an interdisciplinary team comprising people from various fields and representatives of many disciplines, that is, architecture, urban planning, sociology, gerontology, law, environmental psychology, spatial management, and so on. As part of its operations, it undertakes experimental and pilot projects that bring a novelty in the approach to solving spatial problems, for which it has been recognized by numerous organizations. It is featured on the map of innovative laboratories of the European Commission, and, since 2020, in the European arena as part of the "Innovation Politics Award" competition organized by The Innovation in Politics Institute in Vienna. LAB 60+ was among the best 10 projects from Europe in the "Quality of Life" category.
- 3 Among which we can mention: transport, housing, public spaces and buildings, social participation, respect and social inclusion, active citizenship and employment, social support and health services, communication and information.
- 4 In the western part of the Wola district, right next to the border with the Bemowo district.
- 5 The WDS is a comprehensive project focused primarily on the residential function which will play a major role there. It is also enriched with a number of other assumptions related to offices and workplaces; educational, cultural, and sports services; and internal infrastructure.
- 6 As part of the project, profiles of potential residents were developed and broken down into: young people, elderly people, family (2 + 1, 1 + 1, 2 + 1, 2 + 3 and more), people with disabilities, including the elderly. Persons were defined on the basis of the criteria of the housing and life needs and preferences of the planned target groups. When making the profiles, the idea of taking care of social groups at risk of marginalization was also taken into account, which, as shown by the analysis of the socioeconomic situation, applies in particular to people with disabilities and the elderly. The proposed proportions of settlement result from the willingness to ensure mutual interaction between the inhabitants and the diversification of resources at their disposal. The descriptions took into account: the degree of independence of a representative of a tenant group defined in several dimensions: intellectual capacity, physical fitness, the need for support from third parties, life activity and readiness to co-create an estate or a neighborly unit, housing needs in relation to the current housing situation, average planned length of living in the estate for individual groups of tenants (estimated on the basis of the life stage of the target group representative and possible changes in personal, professional, or health matters), motivations and barriers of a representative of the tenant group in the context of settling the estate, resources and expectations regarding support from the community, demand for services available in the vicinity of the estate, activities in place in the community preferred by a given group of tenants, and possible variants of potential residents within individual profiles.

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