

## MODERN-DAY PUBLIC SPACE IN THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF A CITY – NEW DEVELOPMENT OF THE CATHEDRAL SQUARE (DOMPLATZ) IN HAMBURG

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### Abstract

The article presents the history of transforming one of the oldest places in Hamburg - the Cathedral Square (Domplatz), as well as the influence of historical factors on the conception behind its development. A tumultuous history, especially the consequences of World War II, has led to the diminishment of its historical significance. The undeveloped quarter once occupied by a prehistoric settlement and St. Mary's Cathedral functioned as an urban wasteland and a parking lot for a few decades. Attempts to change this state of things proved unsuccessful.

Currently, revitalization works aimed at renewing city centers are being realized more and more often, in order to make them become competitive against the overly developed suburbs and so as to return to the tradition of forming a European city. The green area established in the Cathedral Square in 2009 was to be built-up initially, but owing to the objection of urban communities - conservators, archeologists, politicians, as well as public opinion, such plans were abandoned. The proposed and realized current form of the square reflects the historical background of the city and honors the importance of the location. The article refers the described example to the Recommendation signed in 2011 by the UNESCO General Conference regarding Historic Urban Landscape.

Keywords: current area of square, historical identity of a location

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Cathedral Square in Hamburg is located in the oldest part of the city – in the heart of Altstadt (Fig. 1). In an internet questionnaire conducted in 2007, the local society supported transforming the square into a green area – thus creating a "green oasis"<sup>2</sup>. In the year 2009, a project of revitalizing this site was carried out, which takes a spatial form of commemorating the past owing to the discovered archeological relics of a past settlement and St. Mary's Cathedral.



Fig. 1. Hamburg-Mitte along with location of Cathedral Square (a), Cathedral Square (b). (based on: [www.maps.google.com](http://www.maps.google.com))

The presented concept of managing the square falls within the scope of issues covered by the Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (UNESCO) of 2011 [8]. The document acknowledges that historic heritage can constitute an important economic factor in the development of a city as well as helping preserve the identity and unity of a given community. The landscape approach is promoted, based on sustainable development – such that will serve as a compromise between maintaining historical values and the possibility of further reshaping the area. The provisions of the Recommendation do not inhibit the possibility of applying modern architectural and landscape forms in historical context.

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<sup>2</sup> In organized debates (29.05 and 14.06.2007), participants were able to present their civic ideas. Although they were not realized, it was on their basis that the direction of thinking regarding the future development of this area changed. Most importantly, the idea of building up the area was abandoned.

## 2. HISTORY OF THE AREA

The beginning of the existence of Hamburg is connected with a settlement from the VIII century surrounded by mounds - Hammaburg (from the word *Hamme* meaning "forests, land on swamps"), which was located within the area now occupied by the current Cathedral Square<sup>3</sup>. Topographic conditions favored such a location. The swampy land with multiple river tributaries was a defensive advantage, making it difficult to access the town. Over time, at the turn of the XIV century, St. Mary's Cathedral was built, from which the current name of the area is derived - Cathedral Square. St. Mary's cathedral was deconsecrated in 1804, selling all of its most valuable elements<sup>4</sup>, and demolished in 1806 due to secularization<sup>5</sup>. In its place, a classicist school was built in the years 1838-40 – Johanneum (arch. Carl Ludwig Wimmel, Franz Gustaw Forsmann), which also served as a public library. The building was open to the north through arcades and an entrance into the courtyard, which served as semi-public space. Following World War II, the remains of the building were removed and the quarter remained undeveloped – functioning as a parking for users of the nearby institutions. It was intended to serve as a reserve area for future investments.

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<sup>3</sup> This was confirmed by archaeological studies conducted in the years: 1949-56, 1980-87, 2005-06. The works were summarized following the last research session of the Archaeological Museum of Hamburg. The diameter of the town's fortifications increased over time. Originally, the settlement was characterized by an oval shape (50 x 57 meters), which over time reached a diameter of 71 meters. The third expansion of the town took place around the year 900, to approximately 130 meters in diameter. What is more, based on the findings it was established that settlers inhabited this area much earlier - in the late Neolithic period, however it was the settlement that was the beginning of the formation of the city. [10]

<sup>4</sup> One of the more important elements of the cathedral's furnishing, i.e. the panels of the main altar, are a part of the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw.

<sup>5</sup> Despite original plans to rebuild the deconsecrated cathedral into a modern theatre, projects proposals of Dutch architects, tearing down the temple turned out to be the most economical solution. Materials from the building, including the stones from the foundations, were reused as building materials. In 1814, it was deliberated that a free, undeveloped green square be left as an area of national pride and for constructing statues of: Gutenberg, Luter and Blücher. In 1816, in line with the idea of beatifying the center of the city, it was proposed that a market be created, with fragments of the ruins incorporated as its elements. In 1822, the location of the theatre was planned to be moved from the Goose Market (Gänsemarkt) to the Cathedral Square, but a different site was ultimately chosen. [1]

In the nearest proximity of the Square is the Church of St. Peter, which is the oldest parish church in the city – built on the site of the former Market *Church* (*Marktkirche*). It was reconstructed following the great fire of the city in 1842<sup>6</sup>. It is currently a Temple of the *Evangelical-Augsburg community*.

On the east side, the square borders a press building built in 1938 according to the project by architect Rudolf Klophaus. At the beginning, it was the headquarters of the editorial office of Nazi *Hamburger Tageblatt*, and after the war, during the years 1952-62, the editorial office of *der Spiegel* and *der Stern*, and currently *die Zeit*.

### 3. POST-WAR SITUATION – PLANNING CONDITIONS AND CONCEPTS OF DEVELOPING THE SQUARE

The type and means of developing a given area in Hamburg are determined by: the development plan (*Bebauungsplan*) as well as spatial development plan (*Bauleitplan*).

In regards to areas around the square where the cathedral once stood, old development plans established under the Act of 1960 and Building Law of 1987 are still in force. They were partially prepared based on the development plan determining land use (*Hamburgisches Bebauungsplangesetz*) of 1923, as well as the regulation on the spatial planning of buildings (*Baupolizeiverordnung BPVO*) of 1938 [7].

In the post-war urban development plan of 1955 (*Baustufenplan der Hansestadt Hamburg Innenstadt*), the discussed square was cut in half by the transport artery – *Domstraße-Speersort* (realized in 1960), directing traffic to the East-West route created in 1948, i.e. *Ludwig-Erhard-Straße* and *Willy-Brandt-Straße*. The area was designated for a public-use building, with the inner courtyard and arcades facing the street, the form of which reflected the former school. Upon completing archeological studies in 1956, an architectural contest for developing the site was held. It was won by Fritz Trautwein, who proposed building a exhibition hall with sculptures. The idea, however, was never put into practice and the previous plan was maintained.

In 1977, Allianz insurance agency tried to get approval for the idea of building an office building - multi-media center, which was thwarted by public outcry. In 1982, The Patriotic Community (*Patriotische Gesellschaft*) organized yet another contest in which 120 architectural teams took part. The works entered into the contest drew upon the history and values of the site in multiple ways,

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<sup>6</sup> The church was reconstructed according to medieval plans by architects Alexis de Chateauneuf and Hermann Peter Fersenfeldt.

but none of them resulted in a project that would be implemented. In 1983, due to the commencement of further archeological studies, it was proposed that an archeological garden with numerous walkways over the archeological digs be set up. Another proposition called for constructing a new Market Hall – a new center of the district, which was put forth by the chief architect of the city Egbert Kossak in the 90's of the XX century. Similar concepts with the initiative of building up the square also came up in 2000-2001. Ludwig Görtz also suggested livening up the site by building a spectacular new architectural work of art – comparable to the Pompidou center [9]. In 2002, yet another architectural contest was held, the effect of which was to be a glass building connecting the functions of: a library, archeological center and dwelling functions in the form of apartments.

The site as well as the significance of the Cathedral Square were completely degraded following the war, while the numerous urbanistic concepts put forth for the area were not followed up by implementation, that is why the senate of the city made one more attempt to transform the area. As a result of this, a debate was organized to decide in what way it should be developed. In 2005, an architectural contest was held, won by architects from Munich - Auer+Weber. They proposed a glass multifunctional building of a modern form. Similarly, all awarded works called for building up the square, as called for by the stipulations of the contest.

In an internet survey, in which other, alternative ways of using the space were presented, the concept of a "green square" proved to be most popular, and this is the course the development of the square finally took. The history of the site shows how difficult it is to find a new spatial solution for a site with a rich cultural identity, such that will be accepted by the local society.

#### **4. NEW SQUARE**

The current development of the area is a public green area. The total area of the plot of land according to the cadastre amounts to 5,345 m<sup>2</sup>. In the north, the green area borders 17 plane trees, whereas its south-eastern part contains a sycamore tree with a trunk diameter of over 80 cm. The area rises 10 m above sea level. The water level is at a depth of 8.19-5.56 m [6].

Located in the immediate proximity of the Cathedral Square are: the editorial headquarters of the weekly magazine *die Zeit* to the east, Domplatz Galleries, a scientology church and office buildings to the south, and St. Peter's church with a newly erected pastoral center to the north.

The project of reshaping the square was carried out by Breimann & Bruun architectural landscape studio in Hamburg. The main idea was to create public

space the main attraction of which was to be greenery. Thanks to consultations with city and local representatives and the local Archeological Museum, an idea emerged to refer back to the history of the site [3]. In the present realization, issues regarding the identity of the site were emphasized by two elements, indicating two stages in the history of the place. The first is connected with the existence of St. Mary's Cathedral - 39 acrylic, glow in the dark cube-shaped seats measuring 1.5x1.5 m were placed where pillars of the cathedral had once stood. The second signifies the existence of a settlement - fragments of steel barriers reflect the location of former embankments.

Pro-ecological solutions were accounted for by applying energy-efficient light sources with 3-level dimming regulation. A biologically active grassy surface makes up a large part of the square, which is a new attribute to this site. Such a form of development goes along with the advocated idea of sustainable development – it does not block the possibility of carrying out possible future archeological works<sup>7</sup>, as well as making it possible to transform the area in the future. On the other hand, the lack of permanent and distinctive building development has become an argument behind the criticisms of some urban planners.

## 5. FUTURE VISIONS

In the city center development concept of 2010 (*Innenstadtkonzept Hamaburg 2010*) [4], actions connected with a few existing communication routes of strategic importance were proposed. One of them is connecting Lake Alster - port Magdeburg on the northern branch of the Elbe River. Activating this part of Hamburg by connecting the Center with the newly urbanized HafenCity region would take place by improving the quality and functionality of public spaces. Another connection with the Cathedral Square, included in the concept, covers the eastern direction – the Museum of Arts and Crafts. In the updated document from 2014 (*Innenstadtkonzept Hamaburg 2014*)[5], increased importance was placed on the need to spatially connect the city center with the developing HafenCity.

The Cathedral square is a form of space that informs about the historical identity of the site using modern means of architecture. Owing to its references to the past, the area is not anonymous. Despite earlier conceptions to construct a building on this site, it was decided that public space may turn out to be the most center-forming solution for the area. Such a decision has urban planning

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<sup>7</sup> Many elements uncovered in archaeological excavations carried out so far have been removed and secured.

(the square connects different fragments of the city), historical, social and ecological significance.

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WSPÓŁCZESNA PRZESTRZEŃ PUBLICZNA W HISTORYCZNYM KONTEKŚCIE  
MIASTA – NOWE ZAGOSPODAROWANIE PLACU KATEDRALNEGO  
(DOMPLATZ) W HAMBURGU

Streszczenie

W referacie przedstawiono historię przekształcania się jednego z najstarszych najstarszych miejsc Hamburga – Placu Katedralnego (Domplatz) oraz wpływ czynników historycznych na koncepcję jego zagospodarowania. Burzliwa historia, przede wszystkim konsekwencje II wojny światowej, doprowadziła do zatarcia jego historycznego znaczenia. Niezabudowany kwartał po dawnym grodzie i Katedrze Mariackiej przez kilkadziesiąt lat funkcjonował jako nieużytek miejski i parking. Podejmowane próby zmiany tego stanu były nieefektywne.

Obecnie coraz częściej realizowane są działania rewitalizacyjne, których celem jest odnowa centrów miast, tak aby stały się one konkurencyjne wobec nadmiernie zabudowywanych przedmieść oraz po to, żeby powrócić do tradycji kształtowania miasta europejskiego. Zrealizowany w 2009 roku na Placu Katedralnym zielony skwer miał być pierwotnie zabudowany, ale dzięki sprzeciwowi środowisk miejskich – konserwatorów, archeologów, urbanistów, polityków, jak i głosom społecznym wycofano się z tych planów. Zaproponowana i zrealizowana współczesna forma placu nawiązuje do historycznej tożsamości miejsca i honoruje znaczenie miejsca. W artykule odniesiono omawiany przykład do podpisanej w 2011 roku przez Zgromadzenie Generalne UNESCO Rekomendacji w sprawie Historycznego Krajobrazu Miejskiego

Słowa kluczowe: współczesna przestrzeń placu, historyczna tożsamość miejsca, Hamburg

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