



VIEWPOINTS

Discussion of topical issues
in urban morphology

From rural plots to urban superblocks

Anna Agata Kantarek, Faculty of Architecture, Cracow University of Technology, 31–450 Kraków, ul. Ułanów 28, Poland. E-mail: akanta@poczta.onet.pl, **Krzysztof Kwiatkowski**, Faculty of Architecture, Cracow University of Technology, 30–085 Kraków, ul. Grenadierów 5/6, Poland. E-mail: kwarch54@gmail.com, and **Ivor Samuels**, Urban Morphology Research Group, School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of Birmingham, Birmingham B15 2TT. E-mail: ivor.samuels@googlemail.com

After the Second World War, private land in Krakow was largely expropriated and spatial policy was based on the implementation of large functional complexes in the form of superblocks. Political changes in 1989 restored private land ownership as the basis of spatial development but, owing to the lack of mechanisms for redistributing land, the mosaic of existing land divisions is having a major influence on urban form.

Rural strip plots have provided the morphological frame for urban development in parts of Krakow, but the insensitive way in which this has been undertaken has created a variety of problems. An example is a former agricultural area (Figure 1) that is being developed as long, narrow urban plots. It was incorporated within the city limits at the beginning of the twentieth century as part of the foundation of Greater Krakow.

The 1988 Master Plan designated various uses in this area, mainly housing, but also cultural, administrative and green spaces. The plan assumed a widening of Głowackiego and Bronowicka streets, which has entailed the demolition of buildings on the previous building line. A modernist model was followed in which previous building lines were not a defining feature, except in important historical complexes. The generality of the plan, the absence



Figure 1. The pattern of strip plots in 1934, adapted by A. A. Kantarek from a map of Krakow (<http://przypadkiadama.com/mapy/1934d.png>).

of regulations for land redistribution, the large depth of the plots, and the lack of any specific road regulations meant that the plan specified only the functional content of the future development, not its spatial form. However, rules were in force that specified the permitted density of development, the reconstruction of any existing urban layout, and the protection of views relating to historical buildings in the immediate vicinity.

Integral to nine separate investments between 1991 and 2009, including seven residential ones, development took place that maintained the division into rural plots, retaining the absence of connections between individual plots. There were culs-de-sac for cars and pedestrians. In a few cases

these access arrangements were duplicated on either side of a plot boundary (Figure 2).

Currently, the area does not have a detailed plan. In a Krakow Commune strategic document the area is designated for housing. Densification and building replacement have occurred and in four locations new housing development is planned.

In one project, almost the entire area is paved (Figure 3). In another, most of the ground floors are allocated for services, but because they are so poorly connected to the streets their success must be in question.

As the area is being developed plot by plot as a set of isolated enclaves, there are a number of problems. These include:



Figure 2. Building blocks, plot boundaries and culs-de-sac. Drawn by A. A. Kantarek based on maps from Krakow City Council Department of Cartography (<http://obserwatorium.um.krakow.pl/obserwatorium/kompozycje/?config=config.json#>).



Figure 3. Perpetuation of rural plot boundaries, duplication of access ways and dominance of paved surfaces (photographs by I. Samuels and A. A. Kantarek).

- separateness of neighbouring units;
- poor internal structure of enclaves with regard to shops and schools;
- excessive provision of internal roads;
- insufficient co-ordination between the design of individual projects.

The lack of any system of co-ordination between separate developments illustrated here exemplifies

the problems arising in Polish cities as the once comprehensive planning system is progressively dismantled.

Acknowledgment

This research was funded by ISUF.

Burgages and *partayas*

Aleksandra Djordjević, Faculty of Architecture, University of Belgrade, Bulevar Kralja Aleksandra, 73/II, 11000 Beograd, Serbia. E-mail: aleksandra.dj@arh.bg.ac.rs and **Milica Milojević**, Faculty of Architecture, University of Belgrade, Bulevar Kralja Aleksandra, 73/II, 11000 Beograd, Serbia. E-mail: m.milojevic@arh.bg.ac.rs

In Newcastle upon Tyne, burgages were described by Conzen (1962) as medieval in origin. Much later, *partayas* were recognized as similar forms in the present city of Belgrade, Serbia. What is the relationship, if any, between these two forms?

Morphological similarities between these two phenomena suggest the possibility of their essentially common origin. The differences between

them may reflect variations in morphological process. The main purpose of this Viewpoint is to explore the conditions that caused transformation of the plot pattern in one context and resilience in another.

According to Conzen (1962) burgages are narrow plots occupied by the enfranchised members of medieval boroughs for a fixed annual rent. Initially