

**MUNICIPAL ARCHITECTS AS POSSIBLE KEY PLAYERS IN THE
 DEVELOPMENT OF TOWNS AND SMALL CITIES - MUNICIPAL ARCHITECTS
 IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND THEIR WORK, TAKING INTO ACCOUNT
 DENMARK**

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ABSTRACT

The involvement of experts as advisers and coordinators of municipalities and the public is suitable for the appropriate and conceptual development of cities in Europe. In European countries, such involvement is addressed in several ways. In German-speaking countries, an expert committee is usual. In Ireland and the Netherlands there are state architects. In Belgium, which is a federation, they use regional chief architects. In the Czech Republic, Slovakia, but also in Denmark, some cities use a municipal architect. The presentation deals with a general overview of municipal architects in the Czech Republic, their formal establishment and examples of their work. An overview of a similar institute in Denmark is added for comparison.

KEYWORDS: Municipal architect, city architect, expert advisor, municipality, town, small city, Czech Republic, conceptual urban development

INTRODUCTION

A vital municipality has a vibrant town centre, in which people live and businesses are at home. The centre has a defining overall appearance of the locality and offers quality of stay in public areas for all generations. In this sense architecture (baukultur) forms the key framework for improved quality of life and attractiveness in rural areas. Architecture (buaukultur) can be the impetus and result of a place's self-assurance and revitalization and of a shared local identity. This has a positive impact on the provision of public services and on the development of business and tourism in a municipality. (Baukultur Bericht,2017)

Reason for interest in the topic – man-made environment and taking care of environment

I consider the quality of the environment important for the good functioning of society and the individual. The topic of care and development of environment in which we live seems to me to be neglected in comparison with the topic of social relations (political, social, economic etc). The relationship between environment and social relations is mutual. Social order and relationships affect the environment and the environment affects the quality of social order. Quality environment has a positive effect on its inhabitants. Specifically, I am concerned with the part of the environment created by human activities. The quality of the

man-made environment matters and its care should be part of policies and public debate at all levels of government, including municipalities. The topic is summarized in individual European Architecture Policies (Baukulturelle Leitlinien, 2017).

Municipalities are a natural visualization of the built environment - it is most concentrated in them compared to the landscape, for example. They have long been the subject of human interest and research. They are studied from different angles. In social geography, it is primarily the overall urbanization network. Municipalities are also described in terms of cultural and creative industries and their management. The quality of municipalities is a complicated topic. We can talk about better and lower quality municipalities, of course, but it is difficult to find general criteria for such an assessment. Economic prosperity and the improvement of living standards are most often used. There are several global rankings and one Czech ranking that compare the quality of life in cities and use a number of economic and social indicators. The theme of the city and urbanity is very popular among philosophers and is considered an essential part and mainstay of European culture (Mongin, 2017). Municipalities are the smallest administrative units that take care of the common environment. Therefore, it makes sense to focus on them, as evidenced by a number of European Architecture Policies.

Why small and medium-sized towns?

The size of the community is very important for the way we perceive the environment. Human ability to know the number of other people and the extent of the territory is limited. Contemporary Czech small and medium-sized town is similar in population to most historic (pre-industrial) cities, and therefore these towns offer the extent and intensity of social and spatial relations to an extent that is perceived in the historical consciousness as usual and experienced. The number of inhabitants (I consider 1,000-50,000) already exceeds the thresholds of identification with the human group according to McCarthy (2001), but especially in the case of small Czech towns, this is not an order of magnitude difference.

In an interview in *Das Potenzial der kleinen Stadt Litomyšl*, Tomáš Valena mentions Kevin Lynch's memorability and claims that one will cope with an area that he/she can still cross effortlessly, which is about 10-15 minutes of walking and therefore about 1 km. According to him, about 15,000 - 30,000 inhabitants live in an area with a radius of 1 km in the density of small and medium-sized towns (Aicher 2019).

What is significant is the fact that 53% of the population live in small and medium-sized towns in the Czech Republic and their administrative territory occupies 41.5% of the state area (CZSO, 2019). That is why research on small and medium-sized towns seems to be important and beneficial. A similar situation is typical for the entire Central Europe (Baukultur Bericht 2017). It has a traditional dense network of municipalities. After liberalization after the Velvet Revolution in 1989, the Czech Republic went through extreme decentralization of local government. 10.7 million inhabitants live in 6,258 municipalities, of which only 606 are formal towns or cities and only 18 of them have more than 50,000 inhabitants (CZSO, 2021).

The context of taking care of urban environment in the Czech Republic and the municipal architect

The basic framework for the management and care of environment in each European country is the regulation of construction and planning of cities and regions. Its primary task in establishing the building code at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries was to ensure a

healthy and safe environment after the excesses of rapid urban development at the end of the 19th century. In the second half of the 20th century, however, the issues of health and man-made environment separated. Current standards focus on minimizing discomfort (Hobday 2012). Thus, legislation is supposed to prevent explicitly bad solutions, but it cannot guarantee good solutions.

The basic tool of environmental management in the Czech Republic is spatial planning documentation. Is it sufficient? Its processing depends on the qualities of the processor, on the ability of local government to cooperate and to consider these documents as a necessary tool, and on the institutional capacity of the administrative bodies to control the process. Unfortunately, the reality of the selection of spatial planners is problematic in the Czech Republic and the quality is sometimes unsatisfactory. One of the reasons is that most authors are selected only according to the criterion of the lowest price, which makes it practically impossible to deploy a wider professional team. The work with the issued spatial planning documentation is in the hands of spatial planning authorities (PASK ČR: Zpráva o plnění k prosinci 2017, 2018) and the effectiveness is already governed by a strictly legal interpretation. The exceptions are local governments, which have people with knowledge of architecture and urbanism among politicians or officials or can invite them as external experts. In such a case, it is possible to obtain professional opposition in the processing of documentation and also someone who devotes himself systematically and long-term to the qualitative and conceptual aspect of the development of the municipality. However, spatial planning documentation has a limited range of scale and details. It cannot fully affect the definition of quality in urban detail, for example. A related topic is the care of municipal property - land and buildings (squares, streets, parks, sports grounds, schools, cultural buildings, etc.). This also depends on the professional background that the local government has at its disposal and whether it is willing to listen to experts.

Most small municipalities do not have experts among municipal politicians - architects, urban planners or landscape architects. Likewise, these professions rarely appear in the ranks of officials in the Department of Construction, Development, Asset Management and Investment, where there are predominantly technical and economic professions. As a result, a comprehensive architectural and urban perspective is often lacking in the planning and decision-making processes of these departments. This does not matter in the short term of one election period, but the strategic and long-term approach thus loses the consideration of architectural factors, which are essential for taking care of the environment of municipalities and its resulting quality. One of the ways to engage experts with knowledge of architecture and urbanism is to involve them in the development commission established under the Czech Municipalities Act or to establish an independent professional advisory body (an independent architectural council is typical for Germany and Austria). In the Czech Republic, such expert councils of the mayor are limited to large cities (Prague 1,335,000 inh., Liberec 100,000 inh.). The much more common statutory development commissions serving the City Council usually perform the same function, but are limited by the availability of architects and urban planners in the given municipality. The common disadvantage of the commission and expert council is little action. Due to a bigger number of participants, they usually meet once a month. Voluntary participation also makes it difficult to maintain an intensive focus on problems and their long-term follow-up. Probably for this reason, a specific position of municipal architect has taken over in the Czech Republic, precisely in small and medium-sized towns. These towns do not require teams, and one specific person is sufficient if he/she has the conditions for his/her activities and has the political support of

self-government. The advantage of a municipal architect over expert commissions is more intensive and long-term systematic work for the given self-government. At the same time, the scope of work can be adapted to the size and type of the municipality.

DEFINITIONS

Environment - The concept of environment is marked in everyday communication by its use in various contexts. In this work, the term environment refers to a man-made or transformed physical part of the environment.

Small and medium-sized town - in this work I define a municipality that has 1,000 to 50,000 inhabitants. It does not have to have the formal status of a city or town.

Municipal architect - in the Czech environment, an expert hired by the local government to take care of the municipality's environment and its coordination. The position has no precise legal definition. Municipal architects operate in an environment (in a general sense) stipulated by objective circumstances (physical environment, existing rules: laws, plans, decrees etc.) and social situation (politicians, officials, the public etc.). They interpret the context with the help of their professional knowledge and personal experience, including their own ideas of taking care for the environment, and act based on their opinions. In the case of cities, it is usually a team composed of several experts with different specializations.

HISTORY OF MUNICIPAL ARCHITECTS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA

In Czechoslovakia, a certain form of long-term cooperation between communal politicians and a specific architect or an entire team existed at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries and after the First World War. An example is the long-term cooperation of the mayor of Hradec Králové (100,000 inhabitants) František Ulrich with architect Josef Gočár. There was also the position of architect of Prague Castle, with Josip Plečnik as the first one. However, at the same time, a state-established regulatory commission functioned as a collective body for the capital city of Prague.

After World War II and the establishment of the communist government in 1948, the activities of architects were formalized and the power of municipalities was significantly limited. At the same time, spatial planning developed in connection with major post-war reconstructions. Work on the new zoning plan of Prague led to the formation of a multidisciplinary team. In 1961, the Department of the Chief Architect was established with the task of completing the zoning plan. Thus, the tradition of municipal architects was established. In the 1960s, Prague became an inspiration for other cities: Liberec (100,000 inh.), Ostrava (300,000 inh.), Olomouc (100,000 inh.). In the 1970s, after the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops, some departments ceased to exist. However, many persisted until the early 1990s, when, following the Velvet Revolution after 1989, they gradually lost political support due to general demand for deregulation. On the other hand, municipal architects started to work in small towns due to their personal relationship with the town (Jablunné nad Orlicí, 3,500 inh.), or later due to the decision of new local government (Litomyšl since 1991 - 10,000 inh.; Písek since 1992, 30,000 inh.). However, most municipal architects have since been operating in the closed microworld of their town without mutual information and exchange of experience. They often design zoning plans (in the 1990s, the demand for these plans increased in municipalities). Although the position of the municipal architect has become established, he/she is often more of an urban planner limited to the

interpretation of a zoning plan. However, this situation has begun to change in the last 10 years. There is a generational exchange of architects and municipal politicians who are interested in this field. In 2013, the Czech Chamber of Architects took up this issue despite the fact that municipal architects do not have to be members of the Chamber. The Chamber created the list of municipal architects, which is revised annually. This issue features in the Policy of Architecture and Building Culture of the Czech Republic and is addressed by a new independent Platform of Municipal Architects. Debates are held within the Chamber and the Platform. This issue is mentioned in the programs of political parties.

STATE OF RESEARCH OF THE TOPIC

The way the environment is cared for is fragmented in Europe. In each country, the strategy was created individually, or only taking into account the experience of neighbouring countries. In some places, an individual at the municipal, regional, or state level is an expert guarantor. Elsewhere, it's a commission. The current situation has not been mapped. The first material is a study commissioned by the Estonian government in 2019 (Bento and Laopoulou, 2019). However, the study primarily deals with the topic of the state architect, i.e. an expert at the state level. It presents examples from Ireland, Scotland and Flanders (the federal state of Belgium). At the city level, it deals with Vienna, where there is a commission. The only example of a municipal architect is Denmark.

Even in the Czech Republic, the research has not paid much attention to municipal architects so far. Several texts briefly describe the work of the municipal architect. The Czech Chamber of Architects issued a formal recommendation for the work of municipal architects. The only text trying to comprehensively describe municipal architects in the Czech Republic is an article in the journal *Urbanism and Territorial Development* (Lešek, 2020).

FOCUS OF RESEARCH

The initial goal was to assess small and medium-sized towns in the Czech Republic, which are considered the best, or in some respects exemplary, due to their above-average activities and results in the field of architecture. The selection is based on the collection of available data on the topic of architecture: achievements in Czech architectural awards, the number of organized architectural competitions and local architectural activism. The purpose was to find applicable examples of good practice. The use of pre-set circuits was abandoned, and on the contrary, it was planned to obtain directly from municipal architect ways he sees and develops the entrusted municipality. It was important to get an opinion on the quality of the environment and its definition. At the same time, the research scope was limited only to municipal architects as key actors. The resulting intention is to focus on the success of municipal architects in promoting goals and concepts related to environmental care.

The aim is to find the strategy and success of its promotion in the care of the environment of "their" municipality among selected municipal architects in the Czech Republic. Similarly, to obtain the opinion of a municipal politician on the work of a municipal architect. The intention is to find out how municipal architects approach expert care of a given municipality, whether they had a strategy at the beginning of their work and how they compiled it or created during practice. Whether and how the continuity or stability in the activities of the municipal architect on the achievement of development goals and on the conceptuality of development is manifested. Whether they have set feedback on its improvement. Compare

these strategies and approaches, find out their success and transferability. The choice of methodology - interviews - also depends on the goal of the research. Their collection should not only provide insight into the functioning of municipal architects in small and medium-sized towns, but also serve as a source of inspiring information.

MetHodology

I chose a multi-case study combined with a semi-structured interview. Respondents in selected municipalities are municipal architects. A semi-structured interview is understood as a professional debate, which is limited and conducted by the researcher. The subject of interest is the acquired professional facts and experience presented by a municipal architect. The sample for interviews is chosen by theoretical saturation: the interviews will stop when new interviews will no longer bring up new topics. Based on this balance, a methodological approach is proposed as a qualitative research focused on the following areas:

1 / What were the ambitions and goals of the city management and the architect himself for the work of a municipal architect?

2 / Mapping and evaluation of strategies and procedures the architect tried to achieve and what led to the achievement of the goals.

These areas are translated into research questions.

V1 - What goals do municipal architects pursue and / or promote?

V2 - What strategies / procedures do municipal architects use to promote these goals and concepts?

V3 - How successful are they in promoting their goals and concepts?

EXAMPLES FROM THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND DENMARK

Examples of the town Litomyšl (10.429 inh.) and the village Dolní Břežany (4.104 inh.)

Litomyšl has had a municipal architect since 1991 and is the most famous example of caring for its environment in the Czech Republic, known in the European context (Aicher 2019). The continuity of political power is important, despite the change of mayors, as well as the continuity of the head of the investment department. The key was the decision of the first mayor after the Velvet Revolution to invite a municipal architect to collaborate. This duo was complemented by a very open chief of the investment department. Together they organized open architectural competitions (park, municipal apartment building, waterfront, retirement home) and a number of invited competitions for municipal investments, but also private investments ranging from small sculptures to big interventions (gardens, parks, reconstruction of historic buildings, squares and streets, waterfront, regeneration of housing estates, apartment buildings, church, sports buildings, school buildings, bus station, shopping center and parking house. The quality of municipal investments has also influenced private investments.

Dolní Břežany is a small town on the outskirts of Prague. After the uncontrolled development in the 1990s, a new generation of local politicians appeared, striving for a quality environment. After municipal elections in 2002, the cooperation between the new mayor and the newly established municipal architect began. Due to the enormous pressure on the growth of the town, the key was the basic strategic plan for the creation of a completely new centre in the brownfield area and the organization of a competition for a new residential area. Gradually, the expansion of the school was added, including a sports hall, a new park on the brownfield, a revitalized town square, a repaired town hall, a health centre, bus stops, a football pitch, a new cemetery, a kindergarten and a regional information centre. The town

also attracted a new research centre. Thanks to the size of the municipality, the cooperation is informal, and a number of personal meetings take place. The mayor did not change throughout the period and other municipality members finally understood the importance and benefits of cooperation and participated in it. Local technical rules are a good tool, issued and complemented by the municipality. A continuously updated yet brief Strategic Plan is important for communication with the public. A specific feature of such a small town is the interest in art interventions in public space, coordinated by the architect.

Regional architect

Many small municipalities only need professional advice in exceptional cases. For such a case, it would be appropriate if they could use the services of existing municipal architect of the town in the area. Similarly, one common regional architect could be used by a union of municipalities. On the other hand, even at the level of regions and the state, decisions are made about public investments and at the same time there is a lack of a coordination between municipal architects, including the transfer of local and foreign experience. The Ústí nad Labem Region was the first to establish a regional architect in 2020.

Denmark (5,739,963 inh. in 2017)

Some cities in Denmark have a municipal architect. Their list can be found on the website of the Danish Association of Architects (Web 1). There are 9 municipalities: Aalborg (city 113,000, municipality 211,000 inh.), Aarhus (city 295,000, municipality 336,000 inh.), Esbjerg (city 70,000, municipality 115,000 inh.), Frederiksberg (part of Copenhagen 105,000 inh.), Gladsaxe (Copenhagen satellite, municipality 70,000 inh.), København, Rødovre (Copenhagen satellite, 36,000 inh.), Vejle (town 50,000, municipality 113,000 inh.), Kolding (municipality 58,000 inh.). There are only 98 municipalities in Denmark (compared to 6,258 in the Czech Republic), and 5 regions (Web 2). Municipalities provide most of social services (kindergartens, schools, retirement homes, social contributions, culture and leisure activities). Some types of construction projects are coordinated between municipalities (infrastructure, environment, flood protection, etc.). Municipal architects are not formalized in Denmark either, and the scope of their work is similar to the Czech Republic. In Denmark the interest in a quality environment by municipalities is much more significant. The pioneer is Vejle, who has had a Municipal Architecture Policy since 1997, the first of its kind in Denmark (Web 3).

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH TO DATE

Due to different history of municipal architects in individual municipalities, it is difficult to describe the method and results of their work. At the same time, most municipal architects, officials and politicians do not share experience with each other, and everyone solves the cooperation individually. Nevertheless, it is possible to specify activities that are usual or inspiring, or should rank among the activities of a municipal architect. Some of them are listed in the Manual of a Municipal Architect compiled by the Czech Chamber of Architects (Web 4)

The most frequent activity is cooperation on the interpretation of spatial planning documentation. However, this cooperation should go beyond the mere supervision of compliance with the zoning plan. Municipal architects should provide the council with expert

background in considering necessary changes and should also come up with ideas for the examination of the area by spatial studies and clarification by regulatory plans.

Follow-up activities are expert opinions on municipal and private developments.

The local government should involve the municipal architect in the elaboration of strategic and conceptual materials. This applies primarily to the strategic plan, but also to key topics (transport, blue-green infrastructure) and manuals (public spaces). Municipal architects usually do not lead processing teams, but their participation will guarantee the connection with the urban development concept and its implementation.

Municipal architects also communicate with relevant state administration bodies, especially the departments of cultural heritage, environment and transport. Thanks to this, it is possible to prevent conflicts during the discussion of self-government intents and to improve and speed up the discussion of private investors' intents. For communication with developers, it is appropriate to prepare rules for cooperation and participation in funding necessary infrastructure.

In collaboration with the municipal architect, some municipalities have developed a strategy for the management and development of municipal property and update it on a regular basis. This includes acquisition of strategic buildings and land in the town, possible leases and sales. It also considers usefulness of individual buildings and land and possible future changes (for example, the need to increase the number of places in schools due to the expected demographic development). The strategy also considers possible support of certain segments of life in the town, for example in the form of cheaper or short-term rental for cultural or social organizations, or start-ups. It can also include energy performance of buildings and infrastructure as well as the entire energy strategy of the municipality.

Every municipality has unique conditions and specifics: location and cultural, social and economic history. Therefore, municipal architects can participate in the assignment of partial strategies for specific localities. An example is a river, a brownfield, a distinctive natural environment, etc. Municipal architects design minor modifications in cases when the cost of selecting an independent processor would be inefficient. Examples are minor modifications of sidewalks or greenery.

Some cities use the services of municipal architects to identify suitable grants related to development and care for the environment.

Recently, local governments have become increasingly interested in cultivating public space through artistic interventions. Municipal architect processes assignments and organizes competitions. These are not only monuments of important public figures, but also restoration of fountains and water features to support a pleasant climate in city centres.

It is not long ago that the topic of advertising regulation resonated in municipalities. It is not only about regulating its size and quantity, but also about cultivating its appearance. Some municipalities used a municipal architect to set rules for regulation. In addition to recommendations using model solutions and local ordinances, the regulation plan of the town's central zone was also used.

In the case of public procurement, the strength of municipal architects in their ability to organize architectural competitions has been demonstrated. That is a selection of submitted proposals, when it is possible to assess their economic, urban, operational and aesthetic suitability. Thus, the municipality does not have to pay for external competition organizers.

A very important part of the work of a municipal architect is the cooperation with the public. In the simplest and most common model, it is cooperation with commissions and committees of self-governments (commissions of development, urbanism, transport,

property, education, culture, etc.). However, even in a small town with simple social interactions, commissions and committees may not cover the full range of views held by the public, and there is a suitable field for a municipal architect. Active municipal architects publish articles in local media, where they can explain intents of the local government and educate citizens. They give lectures and educational activities among seniors, children and young people. Cooperation with nursing homes and schools is essential for involving residents.

Some places are exceptional for their relationship to tourism. Here, too, they can use the services of municipal architects in a team that develops a strategy to encourage or, conversely, regulate tourism. Some municipal architects write or initiate local guides to the town and the countryside.

The scope of work of a municipal architect evolves and very much depends on his/her initiative and relationship with the self-government. According to reactions of the interviewed municipal politicians, it seems that the experience with the work of the municipal architect is entirely positive. However, due to the lack of comparison between municipalities, this is difficult to assess. In the vast majority of municipalities, it can be said that the potential of municipal architect is not fully exploited.

In the Czech Chamber of Architects, I initiated the creation of a list of municipal architects and, more recently, their display on the map of the Czech Republic. According to the lists, there were a total of 82 municipal architects in the Czech Republic in 2016, 91 in 2017. In 2018, their number grew to 98 and to 128 in 2019. At the last revision of the list in 2020, their number amounted to 127. Plus it is possible to add 7 architects of city districts in Prague and a regional architect of the Ústí Region.

CONCLUSION

Creating the position for municipal architects is a suitable way to link experts with municipalities. It is an inspiring solution for small and medium-sized European towns, where it is not possible to create entire professional teams. However, it is essential to ensure the transfer of good practice and support for their activities. It is essential for the successful work of a municipal architect that he/she be directly linked to the political leadership and have their support. He/she should primarily be a professional advisor focused on conceptual tasks. It is important that he/she does not lose his/her drive and is an innovator and initiator in the city.

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Web 3

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