

CITYING. Like It!

By Anna Ruminska

I want to promote CITYING - sitting in city / city sitting - whatever you call it but it's a word-puzzle.

People like sitting in cities. People like sitting in streets. People like sitting and staring at other people. Why don't we give them this opportunity? Let's then promote informal sitting - not only in pubs and restaurants, not only on benches, which we always miss, but CITYING on anything architectural, anything permanent, anything accidental somehow, informal, not-on-purpose.



Photo No 1 – Bologna, Italy (Anna Rumińska)

In order to achieve I believe that architects should design architecture in the way that enables people CITYING = sitting ON the architecture, not near to architecture, that means without the necessity of additional design of so called "city furniture" - benches most of all - which take costs and are maintenance expensive. Some of old Italian towns are the good example of what should be designed.

Florence with its urban palaces shows lots of seats - not seats designed on purpose, though. Visits of wellborn gents coming with their horses caused the need of special wall-shelves which once served as shelves for kind of horse-cribs (photo No 2).



Photo No 2 - Florence, Italy (Anna Rumińska)

Nowadays they are public seats. Real citying infrastructure is however easy to find there: lots of stairs, low buffer-walls (of seat-height) and fountains of course. Florence, Bologna, Modena, Ferrara and other Italian towns are similar in that way of varying public seats (photo No 3). As in that times the consciousness of

sitability need was not that trendy, now we can learn how to arrange public spaces to minimize costs of mounting additional seats - benches most of all. So this is architects role to fulfill these needs and to create architecture rich in informal seats - sort of thickened walls, wider stairs, fountains suitable for sitting in order to enable CITYING.



Photo No 3 - Florence, Italy (Anna Rumińska)

The other important perspective of CITYING is the social one: people most preferably use informal chairs than formal, organized seats in restaurants or even in public spaces. Once, once, once... and especially in southern countries (most of all in poor countries in fact) people used to put their chairs or armchairs or common poor benches onto the streets of their estates and they spent their time together with relations and neighbours. And they still do like this. This great way of socializing and creating social capital is found passé by some groups of other kind of people who prefer spending their money and time in cafes being served by servants.

The Western Europe's contemporary habits and rules determined by them (not tradition yet) based very often on wishful thinking somehow killed these old, humanistic and socializing habits and abilities. SITABILITY of many modern streets is very low low (photo No 4). European Union prefers many branded and commercial seats in cafes and pubs and a few public benches just to make the vendors earn money. But people in the streets prefer something quite different.



Photo No 4 - Brugem, Belgium (Anna Rumińska)

Basic CITYING places are: branded chairs, public chairs, private chairs, benches, fountains, monuments, buffer-walls, curbs and sidewalks.

In many urban streets you can notice the hierarchy of sitting and CITYING. The thinner is the wallet, the lower is the seat. Not only the lower but sometimes the less formal as well. Or - ignoring

the financial issues - the less formal is the person, the less formal is the seat. Or - ignoring the formality issues - the lower is the status in the society, the lower is the sit.

In other words and very much in general: wealthy tourists take branded and commercial seats - chairs in cafes, pubs, restaurants. Less wealthy or less formal tourists take benches or cheaper and less formal pubs. Inhabitants watching all these tourists take usually benches in public

spaces, low buffer-walls, rarely fountains. Inhabitants take also of course chairs in cheap local pubs but this is sitting - we are more interested in CITYING. Inhabitants rarely sit on local monuments while tourists often do - they eagerly sit on fountains as well. Youngsters (students among them) take stairs, low buffer-walls and fountains (photo No 1). They search places that enable sitting in a group.

Seniors take always benches with a back, rarely sit in an informal way - the age factor is another important issue of CITYING but we will discuss it later.

Fast informal tourists in a hurry take buffer-walls, fountains, monuments, whatever that gives a seat not wondering about the local habits and social etiquette. Ethnic minorities take curbs which are pretty constant sitting-place for them. Youngsters or less formal tourists use curbs only temporarily. Beggars take building-corners and crossings - usually straight on sidewalk floor. Since years these places have been the medial (transition) and ambivalent place thus ideal for beggars whose status is highly ambivalent and medial (photo No 5).



left: photo No 5 - Bologna, Italy (Anna Rumińska)

Let's learn from all the countries and from our past old times. I can directly assume that the level of informal sitability - the numbers of informal seats in public spaces - in towns reflects their social capital, leisure categories. Public informal seat is the icon of the CITYING level. This kind of seat is the most direct symbol of social relations and importance of human communication. It generates the certain attitudes and is being

generated by them. It determines the way of understanding the public spaces - social and symbolic existence itself. Pro-social or off-social seats mean much for all - inhabitants, tourists and the town itself (photo No 6 and No 7).



Photo No 6 - Berlin, Germany (Anna Rumińska)



Photo No 7 - Wrocław, Poland (Anna Rumińska)

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