Public Spaces – Coexistence and Participation

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Abstract. The paper is an attempt to answer two questions: (1) how to develop positive social relations and citizenship among residents of cities in Poland and (2) how suitable shaping of public space affects the activation and integration of local residents. The specificity of the post-war process of urbanization in Poland - a country traditionally agricultural - was its political dimension (forced 'nationalisation' of agriculture and industrialization of the country) ignoring the socio-cultural determinants and consequences of this process resulting in disappearance of traditional social bonds. According to forecasts, the number of urban dwellers is expected to grow by the year 2050 and increase up to 70 percent of the population. Such a rapid urban sprawl was not accompanied by appropriate social policies; the result was a low level of social organization and of a sense of citizenship. There are various attempts to change this situation. One of them is the development of a system of urban public spaces, according to the needs and preferences of residents (i.e. promotion of physical activity in public areas, introducing elements of art to the common external space, encouraging users to contribute to their surroundings and introducing the appearance of temporary, often cyclical, attractions). Regular interactions between people in public spaces are conducive to developing positive social relationships. Quality and development of the local community is dependent on the quality of space in which it is built. For this reason, attention has been paid to the factors influencing the perception of public space, i.e. geographical and natural conditions, cultural and architectural (arrangement, the availability and condition of these spaces). In the article, the examples of different types of Polish public spaces are described – permanent and temporal recreational spaces (including summer activities and winter attractions). Attempt has also been made to give an answer to the question: who nowadays is a citizen and how to assist in the creation of civil society with a system of public spaces with thoughtful application program. Currently the city, through its scale, deepens the alienation of residents, therefore appears a need for treatments favouring social interaction. The aforementioned spatial actions motivate people to go out and find themselves in the public space. Coexistence is the first necessary step to produce community. This relationship and the specifics of this co-presence may encourage citizens to return to the public space.

1. Introduction

The paper is an attempt to answer two questions: How can one shape positive social relations and social attitude among the inhabitants of cities in Poland, and how does the appropriate shaping of public space contribute to activation and integration of local residents affected by it.
2. History of public spaces
Before the World War II, Poland was an agricultural country – in year 1921, 75% of its inhabitants were located on the countryside, [1]. After the war, new government begun the process of industrialization and urbanization. The consequence of this forced “nationalisation” was the disappearance of traditional social ties.

It is estimated that the moment of equalization of the number of rural population to the number of urban population in the word fell on year 2005. Forecast indicate, that the moment of highest percentage of population living in cities will probably take place around year 2050 and reach up to 70%, [2].

Statistics released in October 2016 by Department of Economic and Social Affairs in United Nations (54.5 per cent of the world’s population lived in urban settlements [3]) shows, that most of the inhabitants of our planet lives in cities. Sudden urbanization occurred relatively fast, which resulted in a number of problems that required attention (like the disappearance of social ties between the inhabitants or even complete lack of them).

Architects, urbanists and social scientists discussed how to improve this new situation. First attempts of designing friendly space, which would boost the standard of living for urban residents, begun. At the turn of the 19th and 20th century, there were ideas of linear city by Artur Soria y Mata, city of garden by Ebenezer Howard, or industrial town by Tony Garnier. However, with such fast-paced development in the cities, in a short time, the basic assumptions of Soria y Mata, Howard’s, Garnier’s and many others became inappropriate for the current state of affairs. [4]

For nearly 100 years, theorists and practitioners are trying to heal social relationships through their actions. This theme returns in the publications and activities of persons engaged in work for the development of social life such as William Whyte, Jan Gehl or Charles Montgomery.

3. Civil society
For some time already, the society stopped being a civil society. Citizenship is noticing another man, taking interests in who he is, what can he teach us, and the desire to understand what we can offer him. It’s also an attitude of people that are actively participating in community life, taking care of their closest and furthest environment and actively engaging in the issues related to the matters of the community.

Results of the research regarding social relationships indicate that sense of connectedness with the region, state and place of residence is second only to family ties and friendship, [5]. It can be said that the social factor is one of the criteria when making decisions such as where to live. Nowadays, a noticeable increase in intensity of development in relation to what it was in the post-war neighbourhoods has led to the fact, that each square meter plot is busily used by the developers. At the same time, sites intended for recreation are limited. This has led to rationing of common spaces, such as parks, lawns, playgrounds, sports equipment, 6).

4. Elements shaping the perception of public spaces
The quality and development of local community are dependent on the quality of the space in which it is built. If public spaces such as parks and squares are well designed and carefully managed, an excuse appears for strengthening of old and the creation of new interpersonal ties.

The spectrum of activities and actors demonstrates the opportunities for public city space generally to strengthen social sustainability. It is a significant quality that all groups of society, regardless of age, income, status, religion or ethnic background, can meet face to face in city space as they go about their daily business, [7].

Many different factors are considered when choosing which space is considered attractive. Most important are geographical and natural conditions (the aspect ratio of considered space, lighting, vegetation, acoustic climate, adaptation to the prevailing weather conditions), arrangement (street furniture, location of sidewalks and bike paths, layout and type of greenery), availability (project compatible with universal design) and the condition of infrastructure, [8].

If the space will be used during periods of no natural light, it is important that artificial light will be adapted to the needs of users. It should not be too weak, but it cannot lead to the effect of glare. Street
furniture should be adopted to the needs of all users. Their location should encourage free conversation, while allowing users to observe the surroundings, [9]. Benches should have backrest and armrest, which significantly raises the comfort of use, especially by older people and people with reduced mobility. Maintained in good condition and adjusted to the needs of all users, sidewalks and bike paths allows all citizens to use the public space. The space that is adapted to the needs of its users, varied by a wide range of possible ways to spend time, makes people want to spend their time there. As a result of all these treatments, a space should be created that is available and tailored to the needs of intergenerational groups.

5. Forms of public activity

5.1. Physical activity (recreation)

In the interwar period, physical activity was an important consideration. Many designers thought about this issue. An example would be a project of housing estate by Le Corbusier from year 1925. The land was divided into different zones, among which one of the separate parts was intended for recreation. There were also sports fields and playgrounds, [10].

Voluntary exercise requires self-discipline, time and some money. Currently, public awareness of how important it is to keep your mobility at a high level is ever increasing. As Jan Gehl wrote, The invitation to people to express themselves, play and exercise in city space covers an important topic with the goal of creating lively, healthy cities. This topic of healthy cities is fairly new and reflects changes in society. [7]. However, more widespread is the problem of lack of physical activity among the youngest and oldest age groups.

Nowadays, cities that wants to encourage its residents to physical activity must have suitable spaces for this purpose. They should give the opportunity to the common experience of physical activity for all age and social groups. It is important, that they are easily accessible which means they are located in close proximity to the areas of residence, lie side by side with office districts. Spaces created in order to encourage the practice of physical activity can take many different shapes and forms. They often combine recreational, educational and exhibition space.

5.2. Creative activity

Widely understood art also has a big impact on building of the neighbourly relationships. It is a common good, which influence the quality of life of local communities and helps in the integration of residents. This was demonstrated by the professors of University of Pennsylvania, when they carried out research on the impact of art activity on society, [11].

Intensification of activities associated with an increase in expenditure on culture, started in the countries of western Europe, where the connection between the development of culture and an increase in quality of life in society was observed. Broadly understood culture was treated as an activating factor of society and thereby contributing to among others to the improvement of their health, [12].

Places that provides the ability to create and display art including the residents, are becoming more friendly and safer. Through participatory art projects, a dense social network is created. The more people interact with each other and co-create, the more open and connected they become, the more they trust each other, [10].

Art in a public space performs many different functions. It may be treated as a creative city asset, as a component in revitalization of neglected neighbourhoods or an attempt to activate local communities. However, it is not enough to display the so called high art to the community to make them feel associated with the place. There appears a need to define a program, that will be best received by the users, and one that will bring new quality to the space.

There is also the problem of funding of such projects. For city officials, the most important factor for investing public money in culture and recreation is the fact that art in public space attracts tourists, provoking economic activity and allows for the commercial and non-commercial forces to meet in
communal areas, [11]. New York is a good example, where the profit from ads is lower than the revenue generated by artistic solutions.

Despite the financial aspect, the most important fact should be, that art and culture helps in development of personal potentials, creating local ties, building the subject identity and strengthening social cohesion. [13].

6. The division of public and recreational spaces
Public spaces offer different way of spending time. The proposed division of physical activity associated with sports activities and creative activities aimed at promoting arts are dependent on the so-called-animators. Activities proposed by them are in large extent dependent on climatic conditions. Therefore, there are two types of actions in public space: permanent and temporary.

Permanent public space is characterized by the ability to use them throughout the year. On its area, there could be an occasional event, however, the offered functional program remains the same.

Temporary public space is characterized by the variability of the proposed attractions at different times. Those are the areas where volatility is their biggest advantage.

6.1. Permanent recreational spaces

6.1.1. The Młyńska Island in Bydgoszcz

Figure 1. The recreation area on Młyńska Island.

This historic island is located in the old town square in Bydgoszcz, it has a recreational space and cultural objects. For years, it was a place that was neglected and avoided by locals. The first plans for the revitalization of the island comes from the 70’s of 20th century. However, the whole project came to fruition in 2004. The whole water structure was rebuilt, giving it the form of a cascading waterfall. A large park area was designated where people can play volleyball, have a picnic or just lie down on the grass. A child friendly playground, small amphitheatre, beach with a view on opera building and water bus stop were created. There is also plenty of comfortable furniture and well-kept sidewalks for the residents to use.

Thanks to the good decisions and properly carried out revitalizing actions, the island is the most visited place in the city. Młyńska island was also appreciated by the Polish Tourist Organization, which in 2012 awarded the city authorities with the certificate of the best tourist product just for this project.

6.1.2. City Salon on the Town Square in Kielce

The city salon project was an attempt to answer the need of arranging newly created town square spaces in Kielce.

In order to engage the inhabitants in common creation of new quality space, the city officials conducted public consultation. The vast majority of votes was for creating space which would allow to spend free time in the greenery.
Following the needs of residents, designers from Institute of Design in Kielce, created a place referring to normal living space. Modular system was used, which is based on a flower bowls providing stabilization to the rest of the city furniture, which is friendly to both children, adults and the elderly. None of the elements are permanently attached to the ground, thanks to that they can be rearranged after some time. There are wooden chairs, hammocks, tables, benches and even suspended carpet.

Implementation has been welcomed by local community with large enthusiasm. It was also the winner of 2013 Good Choice contest in Public Zone category, created by Institute of Industrial Design.

### 6.1.3. Millennium Park in Chojnice

Slowly deteriorating Millennium Park in Chojnice was covered by the revitalization project in 2010, during which, 3 km of alleys were created, new benches were placed along with new pergolas, gazebos, lights and trashcans. New botanical garden was created, along with playgrounds and watercourse with gangway. The revival of space and adjustment of urban furniture to the need of residents of all ages with different mobility and creation of colourful fountain means that many people could spend time there, regardless of what time of year it is.

Park received award of „Green Cities – Into the future” given by Ministry of Environment, and also won first place in national competition “Modernization of the year 2012”.

### 6.1.4. Art Walk in Warszawa

In the place of neglected quarter of streets in Warsaw, in May of 2016, an opening of European Square took place. Space with fountains was created along with greenery and place for art, located on a private
property owned by the investor. Authors have designed an Art Walk specifically for this place, which is located outside of the art passage. It has a length of 57 meters and it’s composed of 20 segments.

![Art Walk installation at Europejski square in Warszawa.](image)

Each segment has one “window” on the inside gallery. Specific municipal art gallery is dedicated to displaying temporary exhibitions, and thanks to it being broadly accessible it gives a chance to commune with art to anyone who expresses such a desire.

The whole premise is consistent and aesthetic, it allows for a moment of relaxation in lively Warsaw. It attracts many people during the day and evening throughout the year.

### 6.1.5. Ronald Reagan Seaside Park in Gdańsk

![View on bicycle and walk paths in Ronald Reagan Seaside Park in Gdańsk.](image)

In 2002, on the area of neglected allotment gardens, city authorities decided to create Ronald Reagan Seaside Park. Resulting in the creation of sidewalks, bike paths, playgrounds, open air gyms, dog paddocks and all kinds of small architecture and comfortable urban furniture.

During summer, residents often organize joint exercises or running courses that are adapted to many different age groups. On warm days, especially on the weekends, many individuals and families come to the park, just to stroll around the ponds, let the kids play on fresh air or read a book.

### 6.1.6. Wrocław’s dwarfs

Since 2005, small sculptures of dwarfs begun to appear in Wrocław. Currently, there are over 300 of them and this number is still growing. They originate from graffiti that were painted in 80’s of 20th century, that had ridiculed the communist system.

Nowadays, sculptures are created by many artists from across Polish public institutions, companies and private individuals. Dwarfs are placed in public space in order to promote the city and advertise
private companies. To commemorate famous people or acts as a way of raising an awareness towards a problem.

![Wrocław’s dwarfs– Ciastuś.](image1)

Dwarfs and events related to them attract local residents and tourists and give some character to the city. There are many trace paths around the city to encourage people to search for dwarfs. They serve as a way of activating not only tourists but locals too.

### 6.2. Temporary recreational spaces

#### 6.2.1. Summer attractions

##### 6.2.1.1. Temporary space in Poznań

![Temporary space on Freedom Plaza in Poznań- rest area.](image2)

In the summer of 2016, on Freedom Plaza in Poznań, temporary public space appeared, created as part of Malta Festival Poznań 2016. The aim of the authors was to create lively public space that referenced traditional theatre. To do this, the whole plaza was divided into smaller regions. Each of those regions received a distinctive appearance adapted to the activities that take place there. Through the use of various types of urban furniture like tables of different shapes, benches and waterproof cushions, a children friendly area was designated along with temporary cafes, restaurants, music scene and workshop section. This resulted in great interests from Poznań residents and tourists.

##### 6.2.1.2. Micro installations in Wrocław

As part of Wrocław’s Museum of Architecture action – Archi-box during the Lower Silesian Festival of Architecture, simple blue deck chairs made of MFP type chipboard appeared on concrete stairs located next to the historic bridge Piaskowy.
The aim of the authors was to give this place a new look with minimal financial outlay, and hopefully boost functionality of forgotten and neglected areas in the future. Residents responded very positively, with the long since avoided places beginning to teem with life in the summer of 2016.

6.2.2. Winter attractions

6.2.2.1. Artificial Icerink near Sopot’s pier

Each year, from December to March, in the Kuracyjny square near Sopot’s pier, an open-air ice rink with sea view is opened. It can hold up to 100 people. There’s a skate rental nearby. During summer, the pier is rearranged into outdoor cinema where residents and tourists can watch movies lying on the beach loungers. Despite small usage fee, this area attracts many tourists and inhabitants of the Tri-City thanks to its aesthetics and health benefits.

6.2.2.2. Christmas market in Krakow

Every year during Christmas time, the Christmas markets appear throughout the country on the main squares. Good example is a Christmas market in Krakow. Despite low temperature on the outside, many city residents come to the market. They are attracted to festive atmosphere and beautifully decorated stands. One can buy many handmade trinkets there, eat warm food and taste mulled wine. Although it is a tradition derived from non-urbanized areas, it became an event that activates a big portion of city population.
7. Conclusions

Demographic and cultural changes, that have occurred in countries of western Europe in the late XIX and early XX century, began in Poland relatively recently. For our society, this transformation process still continues. Therefore, a question arises; do people that moved from rural areas to urban areas 25 years ago had enough time to acclimatize? Or do they still cling to the habits they brought from the countryside? An important question is also whether in cultural sense, the things that city can offer to its residents are properly read by them and therefore used properly.

We still know little about what do residents expect and how they understand the idea of public space. An equally important question is whether these expectations are closely linked with the history of their users. Also, new research problems seem to be determining how many generations have to pass in order to be able to fully call themselves city dwellers.

The city itself, if only by its sheer scale, deepens the alienation of its citizens. In a place where 500 thousand people live, it is much harder to establish long lasting, close relationships than in a 5 thousand communities.

Temporary, cyclical attractions encourage theco-presence and thus are the nucleus of social ties. Spatial activities, such as those, motivate people to actively participate. Cyclical nature lets the users become more accustomed to those events. For example, an event that takes place in the same area, at the same time, each year, motivates its potential users to revisit the area while it’s still possible.

A gradation of activities and gradation of possibilities in a given space appears. First condition for a community to be created in an area is a coexistence of its inhabitants. A group of people, staying in one place, can result in creation of relationships between the users of space and the desire to return to the site.

It’s worth noting, that some minor activities in the area in the future can lead to actions on much larger scale (for example Wroclaw’s dwarfs). Therefore, small incidental events from the past begin to exist as an important part of city history and a factor supporting the identification of its inhabitants.

Public space, whether permanent or temporary should be designed in such a way, as to support the integration of users, encourage them to be active (also during the winter period) and to help develop their ideas and creativity.

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