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Spatial urban development and unpredictable consequences caused by citizens

Jakub ISAŃSKI, Michał BEIM

(Jakub Isański, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Departament of Social Sciences, Szamarzewskiego 89/91, 60-568 Poznań, Poland, isan@amu.edu.pl)

(Michał Beim, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Institute of Socio-Economic Geography and Spatial Management, Dzięgielowa 27, 61-680 Poznań, michal.beim@horyzont.net)

1 ABSTRACT

The aim of the paper is to investigate, analyze and discuss the neighbourhood spatial development and its relations to social environment. The field research, mentioned below, was conducted in autumn 2007, covering the whole area of Poznań and some surrounding communes (aprox. 700 thousand inhabitants in whole metropolitan area and aprox. 565 thousand inhabitants within the city border), one of the biggest cities in Poland. The main features, that were observed and analyzed, touched the problem of spatial arrangements' implications into citizens' everyday life. The first issue, as most of the relevant research is focused on, was identified at the level of city infrastructure planning, while the second practical, even more important, is concerned about the ways of using the space by citizens. Polish cities are developing – an enormous economic changes allow to revitalize, renovate and rebuilt many areas of city infrastructure, including public spaces, created for common usage. Investigating the city and its social relations is continued almost from the beginning of a sociology as an academic science. In this study the particular aspects of urban space and architecture was observed and investigated, to discover the changes that appear these days, almost one hundred years after Park's and Chicago School findings. This analysis, focus on the issue of spatial planning and development, and the ways of its usage in temporary urban life.

2 INTRODUCTION

The general aim of this study is to focus on urban space and its inhabitants, to observe, discover and discuss its relations. Contemporary changes in a city and urban space, might be depicts by a symbolic meaning of decreasing number of street benches in the urban landscape, related to the growing number of CCTV (closed circuit television) cameras investigating public space and citizens. I want to discuss a street bench as a symbol of changing urban public environment and social relations in the city.

Fig.1. Children's playground, youngsters' place of gathering in the landscape of Poznań

The former, relatively common, situation in urban landscape, like this one when everybody, with no charge, could seat and enjoy the city landscape, socialize with its neighbours, or just have a rest is not so usual in a present-day urban reality. On the contrary, there is even another, symbolic item of urban space these days – a growing number of a closed-circuit television cameras, automatically watching the public space, pedestrians, citizens and everything that might be somehow 'suspected'. Such, more and more popular artifact of city public space, seems to become an increasingly important part of modernization of a city infrastructure. Furthermore, a house behind the fence, guarded by private security company and surrounded by a few dozen cameras have become in last several years a symbol of social status. It is worth to notice, that although Poznań is here not the Polish leader, most flats offered by developers is in gated buildings. The question is –

how much does it influence the social relations and attitudes – making some of them more efficient, while others – less possible, time-consuming, or even not reasonable and possible at all.

The bench as it is widely presented in a urban landscape, starts to become an disappearing, vanishing, however still an meaningful item. The city is changing in many different ways, so the scientific discourse is about to investigate it. From the beginning of sociological analysis in Chicago in the end of 19th century (see: Hannerz 2006a), till the end of the 20th century and Blakely and Snyder (see: Blakely and Snyder 1999) diagnosis of present trends in residential arrangements, there were many academics' efforts to describe the city and its impact on citizens everyday life. There was also a meaningful Polish part in the anthropological research of the city, conducted by Florian Znaniecki, together with William Thomas in a famous field research *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1938) underlining the role of 'humanistic concept' in analyzing citizens' behavior and the meaning of the space, especially the urban space. Znaniecki was also analyzing the role of a space in creating and developing local communities. Farther descriptions were conducted by Wirth in *Urbanism as a way of life* (1938) developed in Park's and Burgess's way of watching the city (see: ed. Jałowiecki 2005). Today, what should be also pointed in the urban discourse, is globalization – the key word, that is mentioned in all the contemporary social processes. In the city as a place of multicultural contacts, it is connected with the huge migration flow, temporary as well as permanent, legal and illegal, internal and international (see: Sassen 2007), which is under the interests of many boards, like International Organization for Migration – with problems like the health, illegal migrations and trafficking and other pathologies connected with urban life in the beginning of 21st century. Cities are raised as centers of communication, mainly at an intercultural level (see: ed. Jałowiecki 2005). There are also some other features connected with a number of positive and negative effects of city lifestyles from the Simmel's point of view (see: Simmel 2005), till the present efforts to categorize and evaluate it (see: Tallon and Bromley 2004).

The general idea of a study was connected with the interest in functional redefinition of public space, and placing it in a global context, to compare the Polish case with others taken from a similar point of interests. We wanted to observe and describe the urban space, its changes, forms of usage and problems connected with the lack of neighbor's community coexistence and cooperation, replaced with the increasing number of situations, when different groups of inhabitants, i.e. children and youngsters, have to use the same place at the same time, and the difficulties caused.

Studying the literature, and discussing with students that took part in the field research as volunteers during the Institute of Sociology Summer Intership Programme, particular aspects of city's infrastructure were chosen and evaluated in the context of arranging *versus* using it. A great students' volunteers efforts allowed even to enlarge the results far beyond expectations. And aspects mentioned were connected with the main issue – neighborhood communities everyday life, focused across areas like forms of social life, street areas, playgrounds and city leisure areas, parks and other facilities.

3   THE STUDY

One of the main human in general, and citizens' in particular, desires, is safety. Even today, we lock our front door, to hale a quiet and safe family life. But what seems to be symptomatic for present-day social life, to lock ones door is not enough, as it is more efficient, to close and lock the surrounding area, as well. It is rather curious how the 'normal' life goes on in the small gardens, fenced and guarded 24/7. There are also many surveillance gadgets available for safety-seekers: CCTV cameras, PIN-code gates or a high-guarded parking areas, and many others. The level of isolation depends on ones will and economic status. Even lower class member try to make their place of living isolated from the external threats (real or imagined). One feels disturbed if is not sure about his or her own and the family's safety. For ages, a strong settlers group was a kind of a guarantee to survive in an inhospitable and unknown land. Today it seems to be similar, but with a one significant difference – we do not need any neighbors at all, and former unknown areas are replaced with no-go areas. Thanks to the new technologies, especially surveillance–oriented we are able to control the surrounding environment – the larger, the better. So that, nowadays, we see other people (neighbours, citizens, pedestrians, street mates) as a threat, even before we meet them, or even if we do not meet them at all. In example, using Google.Earth software, you can easily find any example of urban spatial diversity. However if you look closer and focus on nowadays outskirts of big cities in Europe, or in the United Stated, South Africa, China, and others – it is not so hard to identify many examples of brand new residential units –

colorful and located next to forests, lakes. So if you want to find such a district, it is quite easy – follow the highway in the outskirts of a big city, find the new, similarly looking small buildings, and search for a wall around it. It is more and more easier, when you will take notice to the surrounding landscape – hills or lakes, that are widely used for isolation, not only as a picturesque motif (i.e. in Nordelta in the Buenos Aires outskirts). Yet there is one thing, extremely interesting among others – surprisingly often, the buildings are surrounded with the walls, that are higher houses itself, as the shadow on the picture in longer. What is it created and constructed for? The answer is astonishing as it is for safety, but the main way to reach it, is the isolation from 'the others' whoever they are.

There is also an offer addressed to the rich – to spend their vacation time in *all inclusive* resorts (that means here mainly – safety resorts), or one can just rent or even buy a 'private island', and enjoy the leisure with no external disturbance possible. Another example of this process, might be identified while visiting one of many website DIY (do-it-yourself) kits 'how to improve your home safety' – i.e. there is an advice to 'put gravel' around your house, as this will make a quiet entrance impossible for burglars during the nighttime. Another advice is 'to light your house on at night', so everything around would be easily visible. Or one can defend its cottage house with 2m high concrete wall 'impossible to climb'. The web site, and many others, provide some 'ready to use' or 'instant' solutions, that can help you to feel safer by isolating from others, no matter who they are and where do they come from.

Edward Hall (2003) claims, that the space surrounding everyone's, might be called 'the living space', is strictly connected with a culture, as it is a result of culture. Yet what can be asked now, is – if the common desire of isolation is not only a symbol, but also a symptom of new culture approaching? Authors of 'Fortress America', Blakely and Snyder (1999), even mentioned, that we do not need any people in our place of residence, as we treat them as invaders. We do not need others in everyday life, we do not need them during the leisure activity ('bowling alone society' with the lack of social capital, as Putnam claimed, see: Putnam 2000). The isolation is one thing, but another, even more awesome, might be connected with the usage of remaining and fragmented pieces of public space. It might be observed, when the playground areas – as that is not unusual when kids with parents are using it since the morning till the midday, and after that – youngsters approach, while in the evening some groups or hordes of aggressive hooligans tend to use the same place for the similar purpose – to spend their leisure time. If the area is cleaned every morning, everything seems to work properly, however all the groups are playing somehow in a competition for the same piece of urban space, and these group should not meet each other, as the competition may become a fight. It can be even compared to the situation, that Hall (2003) mentioned as a 'territorialism' in animal social life. In this case, although it is human beings life, the cause might be very close, similar – the lack of sufficient space to enlarge social interactions. As the number of public space is diminishing, and no new places are appearing, the problem is enlarged every year, with the every single change in urban public space. Another illustration of this problem, might be connected with the growing number of urban surveillance gadgets, compared to the decreasing number of street benches, in the same urban space and enlargement these, that are not public any more. In general, gating and fencing the place of living, is usually compared to the examples of disappearing local communities (see: Volker et al. 2007), and it is usually analyzed as an adverse impact of contemporary urban lifestyles

4   FINDINGS

So, at first, we counted all the cameras and street benches in the city landscape. What should be pointed here, that 'Closed Circuit Camera' here, means a camera that is placed in the public space, watching it; we took notice to the streets, while other examples like private cctv cameras, or cameras placed in public buses were not counted. There was also another problem identified – many of them where extremely hard to find. It was because to serve their purpose it should not be easily visible, but the students were investigating the streets with a special notice, so we hope that the vast majority of cctv cameras were identified
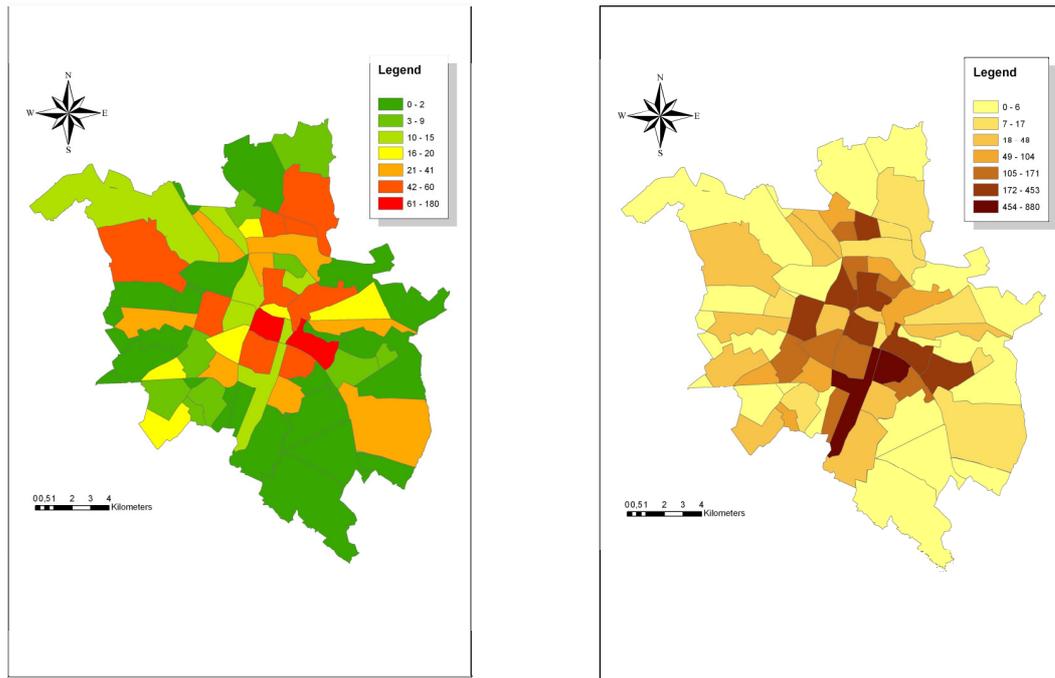
Fig.2. Number of cctv cameras (left) and street benches (right) in the urban space (divided into homogenous parts); all the cameras and benches were counted for each street of the city, and then the average for each part is presented above.

To sum up, there is possible to count about 1800 CCTV cameras in Poznań. The number is not really impressive, the more – many of them are not a part of integrated system, like the Police ones. Most of them are private ones. In the system of city monitoring works less then 100 cameras (it is not possible to let know the official data on it). Additionally the MPK (the Urban Transport Company) has installed in last years about 30 cameras on the stops of Poznań Fast Tramway. Additionally, since 2005 the monitoring have become a standard for new or modernized fleet of public transport. On the contrary to London experiences, with thousands of cameras linked and integrated in one surveillance system, in Poznan, there are many half-private investigation systems: all the city malls has it, some residential units too, and there are also particular examples of investigating city parks, few streets and urban recreational areas. Some shops, like Żabka (very popular network of small shops with grocery and alcohol) have integrated system of monitoring inside and outside shops, which allows for the people knowing passwords to observe the situation in the Internet.

Another important thing seems to be connected with the localization of benches and cameras – while, in general, cameras are located not only in urban pathologies' hot spots, but in the area of new residential buildings, street benches are more common in older ones areas. And another one is, that the number of cameras is increasing, while the number of benches – not so fast, if not decreasing. The relatively big number of street benches – almost 5500, is three times bigger than the number of cctv cameras counted. However, mentioning all the other aspects connected with its localization and management, it is not so optimistic, anyway. What can be observed at Fig.2, the localization of benches – in the center of the city, while the lack of it in the suburbs, especially in the north-west and south-east part of the city, where many new buildings are erected. The number of cctv cameras – relatively significant in the center of the city, is also at a relatively high rank in the suburbs, especially in the northern part of city. Observing articles in the local papers, there is possible to say that inhabitants are usually reluctant to benches. They associated benches with places where meet cheap-wine-drinkers or youngsters.
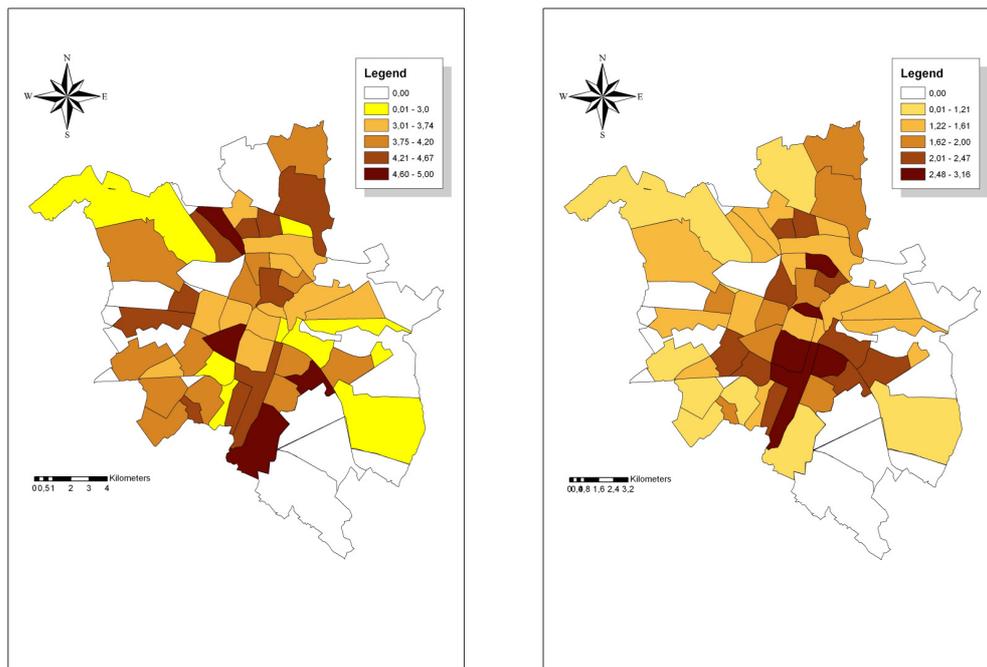
Fig.3. Questions about the public space available for citizens, especially with small children (i.e. playgrounds) – on the left (0 – no public space, 5 – a lot of public space and facilities), and the usage of it – on the right (5 – used according to the plan, 0 – misused, i.e. marked by hooligans devastating playgrounds). In the blank areas, no public space was arranged, or an existing areas were not used in any way

The similar conclusion come from the analysis of questions connected with the existence of public space, available for citizens (Fig.3, left), and the usage of it (Fig.3, right). The results prove, that the problem is not only on the side of arranging 'any' public space, but also approaches in the forms of usage.

5 DISCUSSION

'Streets of pathology' – seems do be one of present-day *cliché*. The motif of a street as an area of violence, disorder and crime is much more often, than as a place of neighborhood community life. Urban 'hot spots' of aggression replaces former neighbors' communities. So it 'naturally' implicates some safety strategies - like fencing the whole area, and guarding it to defend against threats.

In the discussion about *urban gated areas* in the literature, there are three main examples raised: *lifestyle GC,* connected with particular leisure activities regularly conducted by citizens, i.e. 'golf freaks resorts'; *prestige GC,* with the main purpose as 'enlighten' ones well-being, richness, and so on, like 'the million dollar resort'; and the last one *security zone GC*, with the primary goal to defend citizens surrounded by real or imagined danger (see: Blakely, Snyder 1999, see also: Rolnik 2001). And the last one is probably the most crucial factor in here. There are some arguments, that widely often appears in this discourse. One is about the sense of community among citizens – do the fenced environment raise the level of community life, or makes it possible? The question is important, as quite often, people moving to fenced areas pointed, that 'it was not possible to socialize with neighbors' outside the house before, while now – it is so, i.e. because of homogenous social structure. So do the community replaces anonymity? One of the issues that could help, are the architects efforts, at the level of plan, to 'find the atmosphere of Victorian times from the XIX century olde England', or just the village life conditions (see: Ghirardo 1999). But does it really works? The question is interesting, as some research data shows, that there is often an contrary result – and a neighbour is mentioned to be 'overinterested in my private garden'. There is also an interesting point, if such solutions help to create somehow the new, socially privileged, elite. While the unpredictable result might be showed with the isolation, not only from the external point of view (impossible to enter), but also from the internal one – impossible, or just unreasonable, to leave.

Sometimes, academics even rise a question about the future of democracy around such areas – as citizens pay for removal trash, upkeep of roads, guards, leisure facilities, so then what for pay the local taxes? Sometimes they even mentioned, that 'normal social life' was available only inside, among such private

governance areas. Anyway, such questions will be more and more often raised, as gated areas are relatively new so far (see: Hook et al. 2002, Nagenda 2004). An natural implication of the mentioned features, leads to the gettoisation and fragmentation of urban area (see: ed. Jałowiecki 2007).

'If he will not manage to bite you, I will manage to shot you' – such a sign-board, posted in front of a private possession in Poznan outskirts, illustrates the general social trend of isolation and treating the surrounding area as an uninteresting, inhospitable, and dangerous one. While my students were crossing streets, conducting the research, they realize, that some cctv cameras are watching their steps and taking some immediate actions, like observing, giving questions or even warning students 'to go away at once'. Although it is not clear if all the cameras were a part of a system, or just an isolated ones, but it is probably interesting from the sociological point of view. The topic is surveillance and visible examples of that. The number of places, guarded and surveillance is increasing. The social relation is such places is being redefined. But in what direction? The Fig.3 results' presentation, the general low and insufficient level of common public space available for citizens – especially, again, in the city suburbs.

To answer this question, I wanted to focus on the following issues: the first one is connected with the number of street benches compared with the number of cctv cameras, that can be identified across the city streets. The second issue is the arrangements of leisure areas – the number of playgrounds, city parks is one thing, but another, even more important is the way it is used, it means: according to the planned one, or not. We identified and investigated this problem watching the urban life that was incredibly flexible, i.e. different social groups used it in the mornings, and different in the afternoons. Mentioning Hall's (2003) experiment with rats crowded in a box, and forced to competing and fighting for their 'living space', one can wonder if it is not the permanent symptom of urban life – competing for a space not only for leisure, but also other daily routines.

Another interesting conclusion might be pointed at the level of redefining different aspects of social status – a characteristic symptom for urban reality – extremely expensive luxury cars parking in front of relatively budget houses, or second common picture, when luxurious residential houses enclaves are surrounded with examples of low middle class residential units.

So then, where to find a street bench to rest? Unexpectedly, it is widely visible across large concrete blocks units - as a part of post-socialism ideas of creating closed residential units, fitting most of citizens' needs. The former so called 'concrete deserts' are becoming more and more green (because of planted trees), and quite a citizens' friendly because of many benches available.

6   COMPARING THE RESULTS WITH THE PREFERENCES ABOUT RESIDENTIAL AREAS

The conclusions from the street surveys were compared with the results of research on migration reasons done in the suburbs of Poznań and in the one of old districts (Jeżyce) in 2006 (Beim 2007; Beim, Tölle 2008). The researches shows that the environmental aspects are very important factors taking into consideration during the decision on migration to the suburbia. The notice of environmental aspects is limited only to three main factors: acoustic climate, air pollution and proximity to the greenery areas. These issues are also push and pull factors – are very important for decision about leaving the city and for searching for a new place to live. Characteristic is that the aspect as playgrounds are completely unimportant, for people moving to suburbs and for people moving to the central districts. It seems that people moving to the city centre do not expect any infrastructure for the children and for integration with neighbors. Next, migrants to suburbs hope that theirs privet gardens solve the problem with playgrounds for children or meeting places. These expectation of customers meet the policy of developers which maximize its incomes and reduces the public space in new settlements to the necessary roads. It whole deepens the society atomization and makes difficult to develop good neighborhoods relations.

Reasons why Poznań's inhabitants have decided to leave the city and move to suburbs
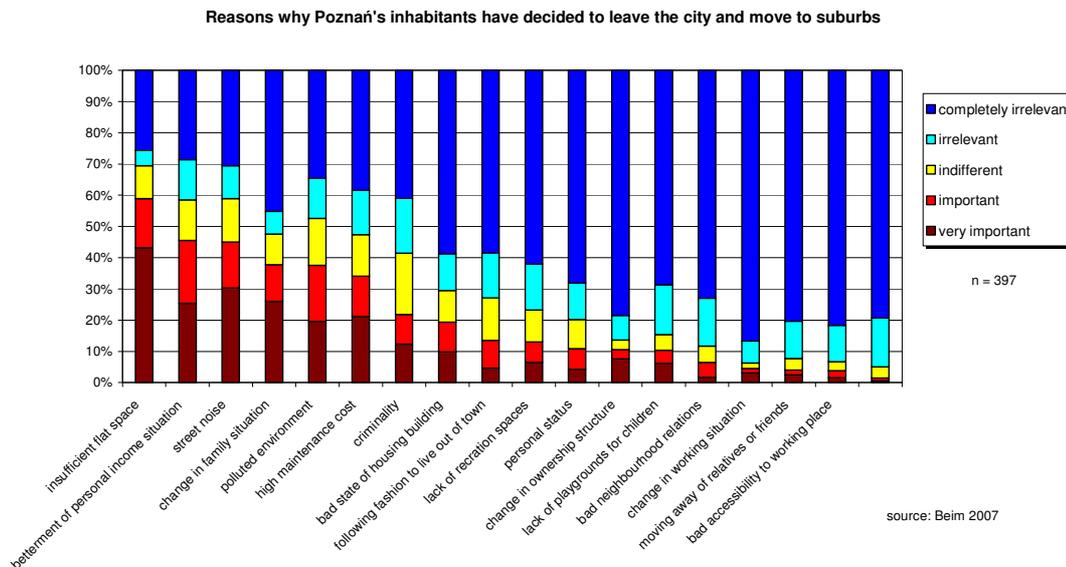

Fig.4. Reasons why Poznań citizens have decided to leave the city and move to suburbs

Interesting are opinions according the safety. These aspects play relative small role in decision for and choosing new flats or houses in the city centre and in the suburbs. Perhaps, solutions like CCTV, security-companies intervention or – usually in case of inner city flats – gated communities are seemed to be a standard offering satisfying level of save, independent on the part of agglomeration. Something strange outcomes of research is information that the – existing or potential – threatens are not the important reasons to change the living place.

7 CONCLUSION

From all the interesting findings and a conclusions, that appear from this research project, we wanted to underline to following, that should be developed:

1) the visible changes in city buildings, public sphere – these that allow to claim the city is permanently living and growing, however the question is about the shape and directions of the changes in terms of spatial segregation of urban streets should be pointed as well,

2) the appearing question of farther limits of such grow, limits connected with spatial segregation and problems at borders of separated areas, or the situation called 'no man's land' or 'no go land' that seems to replace the former public space, even in the historical centers of the city,

3) it is also connected with the question, if the public sphere is really public, or, better, who is the public (spectators and users, preferably 'heavy-users') this way – wealthy, and beautiful middle class young adults, or just consumers? The questions is also about social exclusion practices, on certain negotiated conditions, making the particular groups of citizens – the poor, immigrants, unemployed youngsters, and so forth, if needed, which seems to be a danger for urban life,

4) The problem, identified in polish conditions, might be called 'the fragmentarization': the streets are quite poor quality ones, but the cars parked in the drives, are rather new models, what else: nice-looking semi-detached houses often contrast with almost completely devastated old buildings around. The similar might be described about its inhabitants – a wide range of social background might be observed in almost every street in a city. What about the results – as it can be presumed, it leads to social disturbance rather than to peaceful coexistence of neighbours.

5) There is also a question of leisure facilities - as it is usually treated as a part of organizing the urban space according to citizens' needs, however, what should be also underlined, there is a wide range of other facilities, or recreational areas, that do not exist in social experience, but are 'very light used', i.e. national parks and nature reserves. Most of such areas are not so popular among people, that are used to 'the theme parks' and other similar areas. This seems to be, of course, a part of acceptable situation for those areas authorities, who are not for 'heavy usage' (i.e. national park rangers), but what should be also mentioned - a responsible usage. In example, in one of Poznan outskirts, youngsters were commiting many acts of violence, and devastating children's playground (as there was no 'playground' for them), while nobody saw

the surrounding forests as an interesting place for recreation. The lack of information, i.e. in schools' program, may lead to such attitudes and behaviours.

To sum up, a wide range of citizens' attitudes and public space was observed. In many cases, people try to take care and personalize the surrounding area, and some visible change approaches. On the other hand, there is often no possibility to do any changes, as many efforts do not complete with any successes. In general, people living in the suburbs, take a greater notice to their neighbourhood, but it is often marked with a great attendance to strangers, usually defined, *a priori*, as a threat. Some visible examples from the center of the city prove, that the increasing number of surveillance tools, do not lead to creating a social friendly environment. The results of the study should be deepen, and compare with the next part of field research, that is to be taken next year.

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