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SOCIAL CHANGES OF CONTEMPORARY POLISH CITIES AND THEIR SPATIAL CONSEQUENCES

Abstract: In this article the link between most important social changes in Poland and trends in urban space transformation is being examined. Main aim is to present that processes and phenomena in social sphere generate the need for urban space modifications. Organization of this space should reflect the changes in attitudes and aspirations of given generation. Among this curtail social changes following processes should be indicated: globalization and metropolization, transition from socialist cities to post-socialist cities, demographical changes (especially ageing and depopulation of urban space); processes of creating and developing democratic procedures, formation of new groups and cultures in the cities, social polarization as well as changes in the lifestyles of city dwellers. The changes in urban space are the result of above mentioned processes and phenomenon.

Keywords: Depopulation, globalization of the city, metropolization, post-socialist city, urban space, urban sprawl.

Introduction

The contemplated subject matter concerns relations between key social changes in Poland and trends in urban space transformation. The starting point is the conviction that the way space is arranged and used shows the processes happening in all spheres of life – economic, social, cultural and political. This in turn generates many problems with harmonizing interests of individual social groups, the appearance and enforcement of the right to freedom of expression in public space, and other conflicts associated with the satisfaction of needs, a need to modify urban space and adapt its arrangement and equipment to the changing expectations and aspirations. The purpose of the study is to demonstrate such accumulated spatial effects linked to the changes mentioned in the first part of the study. Due to the limited space of the publication, the problems have been presented synthetically, without going into the details.

1. Key social processes in contemporary Polish cities

For the present social space of Polish cities, the main processes shaping our economic and social reality are of key importance. Some of these processes involve general global changes, and some are typical for Poland – its developments, historical circumstances and specific conditions. The first types includes predominantly all globalization processes, also metropolization, having various effects on all spheres of economic, cultural and social life. In the context of social changes in cities, one of the key characteristics of globalization is that cities enter global competition with all its consequences, both positive (such as the opportunity to use the hitherto underestimated resources and finding new investors), and negative (such as excessive commercialization) [Kochanowska, Kochanowski 2000, p. 50]. Other negative effects include deepening social inequalities and their perpetuation in the country, region or city. An important problem has been insufficient social capital, democratic procedures and other components of civil society, which makes it difficult for Poland to overcome various crises in effect of globalization, is also worth mentioning.

Metropolization is the next important process in the functioning of cities. The changes transform the cities in a particular way in all dimensions: social, economic, cultural and spatial. A typical thing is transformation of urban functions, especially departure from manufacturing in favor of services, production of information, creation and transmission of cultural values [Jałowicki 2005, p. 5]. A metropolitan city should offer high quality of services, institutions, spatial development, material objects, social, transport, and technical infrastructure. Another important characteristic is high innovation potential across all areas of functioning providing opportunity to build national and international competitiveness. A metropolitan city should also feature intensity of internal links between various areas of urban life, and also external links with other such centers in various countries. Last but not least, a metropolitan city is a place having exceptional spatial, social, economic, cultural, attractive and unique characteristics [*Zaktualizowana koncepcja...* 2005, p. 94].

A metropolitan city must strive to retain its position, increase and enrich resources and apply flexible development strategies since it is exposed to loss of competitive advantage [Furman 2008, p. 2]. Such actions include various urban life spheres and briefly speaking – reinforcement of the already performed metropolitan functions and also development of more functions, which calls for implementation of various marketing, organizational and investment initiatives.

The key economic process having major social implications for transformation of motivation and behavior in real estate investment or management is reinstatement of market mechanisms deciding about ownership changes. The number of micro and small enterprises is growing, and the range of goods and services is expanding and differentiating. Urban management is also changing, becoming more modern and

attaining the character of *urban governance*, which is joint participatory management where control is shifted from the central to the local level, and local government is becoming increasingly important. The number of actors in the game for space is also increasing, which in practice deepens the already existing divergent interests [*Rozwój miast w Polsce...* 2010, p. 13].

Demographic trends shaping modern Polish cities include mostly depopulation resulting from social and cultural changes involving later marriage, procreation and other trends typical for new lifestyles. These processes are associated with transformation of the functioning of cities, the weakening of the attractiveness of industrial cities, lack of satisfactory, new concepts for development of post-industrial areas, and finally suburbanization. The analyses of the Central Statistical Office demonstrate that the scale of depopulation of Polish cities is unequal and predominantly concerns middle-sized cities with population between 200 and 500 thousand. Among large cities, it is only Warsaw and slightly less Cracow that note increased population, while others are being depopulated, especially Łódź [Marciniak 2013, pp. 2-4]. Through depopulation the cities will suffer a shrinking real estate market, drop in consumption, and unfavorable changes in the labor market. Problems with maintaining the infrastructure may also surface.

Another characteristic of this demographic challenge is aging cities, which is typical for most developed societies, and in Poland additionally worsened by a high youth migration. Forecast for Polish cities is not very optimistic. By 2035, the number of population aged 75+ is estimated to rise [Marciniak 2013, p. 28]. Therefore, it can be reasonably foreseen that the urban social policy will have to change and there will be a need to undertake various investments to face demographic changes, which are vital for maintenance and improvement of the quality of life of inhabitants.

Other major social changes in cities involve development and reinforcement of civil attitudes, seeking to influence public affairs on a different scale (from local to macro-social), and increased social activity.

The analyses of Poles' participation in the elections, the use of civil rights and interest in public affairs demonstrate that the situation in Poland, despite its improvement (except participation in the elections) in this respect is still worse than in countries with longer history of stabilized democracy. The optimistic element is however that sensitivity to common good in Poland is slowly increasing. The rate of participation in organizations (persons declaring membership of organizations and associations), which in 2013 was 13.7% over 12.2% in 2003 is also worth mentioning [Czapiński 2014, pp. 303-306; Sułek 2014, p. 314].

The level of development of civil society is closely related to the actions and behavior of local communities that belong to participatory democracy [Praweńska-Skrzypek 1996, p. 99]. As far as the consequences for arranging and managing urban space are concerned, the key participatory democracy elements include public consul-

tations accompanying decision-making in matters such as regeneration of certain urban areas and the participatory budget, wherein city (area) citizens discuss and participate in negotiations on distribution of a certain portion of public funds. It is vital that the arrangements of participatory budget are binding (while those of public consultation are not), and also that at minimum one stage the participatory budget concerns the city as a whole, and not only the selected fragment of the space or an institution. Typical features of such participatory democracy improve the efficiency of the pursued urban policy. [Kębłowski 2013, p. 8 and 14].

The release from socialist heritage in Polish cities also resulted in emergence of new groups and social spheres. As globalization and metropolization progresses, new social categories (such as the metropolitan class) and new cultural circles associated with appearance of institutions necessary to implement the metropolitan functions emerge. There appear different groups using urban resources in a varying degree and thus having different needs and expectations with respect to urban space and its functioning. This concerns various groups of inhabitants and less or more regular users of the city.

From the urban functioning point of view, vital changes are happening in the social and spatial structure of the city, which is becoming increasingly often and more visibly divided into “good” and “bad” areas. Often the community inhabiting a “bad” area is overrepresented with unfavorable features: old age, bad health, no resources, poor skills, no opportunity or motivation to acquire higher qualifications. Albeit in large cities the socio-economic situation is better compared to smaller towns, there are still certain groups particularly at risk of poverty (single parents, large families facing many problems such as illness and unemployment at the same time *etc.* [Rozwój miast w Polsce... 2010, p. 70] Wealthy, educated inhabitants choose to live in other parts of the city, in enclosed camera-surveilled housing estates giving a sense of security and having developed infrastructure providing better living conditions. The study of social polarization in Polish cities demonstrates that it is reasonably durable and will rise if the pro-social policy is limited.

Lifestyle transformation following economic, social, technological, and cultural change is another area of research of contemporary Polish cities. It concerns the development of new and modification of current needs. A new situation of various social groups whose needs had not always been considered must be identified. This applies *e.g.* to children, the elderly, partially women (especially in the freedom of use of public space), and also marginalized groups. Considering those two areas in the light of the functioning of the city, increasing expectations from social and spatial environment, city institutions, formulation of their goals and implementation measures, availability and quality of various goods and services intended for various groups must be pointed out. Increasingly often it is about the choice, the “tailoring” of public space, meeting places, cultural offerings *etc.*, *i.e.* about all those elements of social life enabling real-

ization of the chosen and acceptable lifestyle. Progressing globalization is bringing cultural universalization which impacts the inhabitants' expectations and choices while at the same time contradictory trends such as resurgence of locality and a need of place identity emerge.

2. Directions of change of urban space in Poland

The above-described processes in Polish cities entail various consequences in managing and arranging urban space. It is not easy to separate the impact of individual social, cultural, political and economic phenomena, as we are having an overlap and alternation or mutual strengthening of effects. In consequence, the action of those various factors creates a complex spatial reality of Polish cities being a peculiar outcome of change in various spheres of urban life.

As globalization and metropolization progress, urban space is becoming universal, standardized, losing its "local" character. Dominance of repetitive infrastructure, similarity of buildings, also architectural pieces created according to widespread design, saturation of space with universal symbols, iconography alluding to global brands – all this forms part of peculiar "depersonalization" of the city, and even of the threat to the hitherto *genius loci*.

The very shaping of urban space is changing – the number of actors in the game for space such as planners, politicians, architects and inhabitants increases, among whom there may arise significant differences of ideas about the arrangement and equipment of the urban space, which often triggers conflicts, especially that some players have more impact on decisions. An important threat for the proper functioning of the city as a habitat is excessive commercialization of urban space generating economic benefits on the one hand and threatening universal availability of public space on the other.

In metropolization, as demonstrated by Markowski and Marszał, links between the city and the region change, which may reinforce development inequalities between areas situated closer to and further from the main centre. [Markowski, Marszał 2006, p. 10]. In this sense, metropolization contributes to the reinforcement of social and spatial inequalities, and perpetuates the division between better and worse areas of the city. The emergence of fenced housing estates, elite enclaves, both in residential and commercial consumption space on the one hand and a rise in degraded areas in Polish cities on the other hand¹ creates urban life dualism. One of major consequences of urban globalization and metropolization is the change of proportion between different types of social space, especially the shrinking of the manufacturing space in favor of

¹ As shown by the studies of the Institute of Urban Development in Cracow, the degraded areas are inhabited by ca. 25% city dwellers [Jarczewski 2009, pp. 15-23].

consumption, (incl. luxury residential and recreation space for new urban elites) and also a new type of multifunctional space. Various places for business activities, technology parks, attractive business space, leisure centers and places for major sports, cultural events or scientific events combining different types of activities, which are also flexible, are emerging. Another very important effect is increasing intensity of space use. Unplanned and uncontrolled amorphous urban sprawl contributes to chaotic space management around urban centers. This is associated with low population density, no compact buildings, no areas performing defined urban functions such as the center, public space. Such situation is at least partially an effect of insufficient proper management and weakness of public authorities [Gutry-Korycka, 2005 p. 10]. A typical phenomenon e.g. for modern post-socialist cities, i.e. “intercities”, transitional space, which has lost its historic importance (e.g. former industrial or military area etc.), and failed to acquire new significance is emerging [Keil, Young 2012, pp. 21-22]. The emergence of such space defined as “intercities” is also associated with the aforementioned urban depopulation. These unfavorable demographic trends reduce (the already relatively low) density in urban areas in Poland. In the future, progressing depopulation may create vacancies and undeveloped areas, and ultimately result in deformation of spatial structures, a drop in value of real estate and bring other unfavorable consequences both for the functioning of the city and the well-being of inhabitants [Czarnecki 2011, p. 17]. Within the space of cities freeing themselves from the socialist heritage, there are various changes related to new methods of shaping residential, service, and symbolic areas, relying more on economic than political criteria of the Polish People’s Republic. Public space, both its shape and significance, is changing. Increasingly often, active players deciding about its location and development are city dwellers associated in more or less formalized movements and organizations. In various parts of Poland, agreements between individual urban movements are becoming increasingly more effective. A recent manual for urban movement activists, and also all inhabitants looking for support in social empowerment, has a peculiar title: *Antybezradnik przestrzenny – prawo do miasta w działaniu* (Spatial Guidebook – The Right to City in Action) [Mergler et al. 2013]. Democratization of social life has released the latent potential of interest in spatial and social environment. The participation is not yet universal but the very appearance of the opportunity to influence local development on a large scale (in many cities) is of key importance. Since the participatory budget forms part of the city investment budget, investment proposed by inhabitants may support local entrepreneurship and improve the opportunities to satisfy local needs by resolving the existing spatial and social problems. Community building is especially important due to the aforementioned deepening of inequalities in cities, clear divisions between better and worse areas, and also other social disparities of increasing urban multiculturalism. Dialogue and integration are becoming increasingly important, both between generations (in aging cities), and the representatives of various differing by wealth,

customs and lifestyle. Dilemmas about defining priorities for the functioning and development of cities are appearing. There is a need to find an answer whose needs and expectations should be satisfied first, and the principles of equal access to urban resources, also to space for various groups, have to be formulated.

An important factor shaping Polish cities is the investment need related to the aforementioned necessity to satisfy the needs at an increasingly higher level. As PricewaterhouseCoopers experts point out, despite changes that occurred over the past two decades, Polish cities are still behind Western European cities *e.g.* in terms of satisfying housing and transport needs, and access to social infrastructure. The deficiencies observed by analysts hinder the achievement of a lifestyle and development of economic activity. [*Wyzwania inwestycyjne ... 2012*].

Final remarks

The contemplated subject matter is an attempt to present links between social and cultural changes in Polish cities and the processes in urban space. All the phenomena and processes across various spheres of life are always reflected by how space is arranged, evaluated and used. Only after some time can we see how much the city space in Poland has changed, and what new methods of arrangement and use have emerged and what ways of functional and non-functional evaluation have appeared. Some of the observed changes are the echo of global processes, others are brought by specific social life courses typical for Poland. With regard to evaluation, all of them paint a complex and mixed picture of modern Polish cities undergoing multidimensional social, cultural and spatial transformation.

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