

Interpreting Contrasts of the Post-Industrial City: The Example of Lodz

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Abstract

Lodz – the third largest city in Poland in terms of its population, frequently referred to as “Polish Manchester”, used to be the biggest hub of textile industry in eastern Europe at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. The structure of the city, shaped to a large extent in that period, was preserved after World War II by the socialist socioeconomic system. However, irrespective of the political system, the city always had a markedly industrial economic structure and was characterized by strong social and spatial disproportions. Following a difficult period of the 1990s, the processes of transformations planned before have only recently begun to occur in Lodz. The nature of these changes is attributed to the fact that the development of the areas of growth under new conditions is a comparatively young phenomenon, while the areas of marginalization continue a certain path which has been present in Lodz for many decades. All of this makes the city of Lodz a fascinating research area in which disproportions occur in a microscale, i.e. in the social environment of both those who have won and those who have lost the process of political and economic transformation. The aim of this article is identifying and interpreting the disproportions in the urban space of Lodz from a perspective of individual experience with the use of photo projective method.

Key words: Photo Projective Method, shared image, place, transformation, evaluation

1. Introduction

The problem of the origins and the growth of disproportions in particular parts of the city had been a popular issue for social scientists around the world. During the last decade, the issue of urban disproportions has been supported with a theoretical background. One of the most distinctive conceptions, whose authorship is ascribed mainly to M. Castells (1998), is the so-called ‘dual-city’. This term describes the dichotomy of changes on urban labor markets and in the urban sector system, which is reflected in either the development or the crisis of particular urban areas. Much as this conception was built on the grounds of sociology, it has been widely commented on and applied in human geography, since it actually expresses the search for a relationship between certain paths of functional development of the city together with its parts, and the processes of social segregation, the emergence of new social behaviors and lifestyles or a change in the behaviors and lifestyles. A description of the ‘global city’ model, presented by S. Sassen (2001), is closely related to the conception of a ‘dual city’. Besides the functional aspect, Sassen’s concept also refers to the diversities within the city, emerging as a result of ‘capital mobility’. S. Sassen discusses the issues of ‘new geographies of centrality and marginality’ or ‘new concentration logic’ based on neo-liberal economics, deregulation of markets and consumption. Both theoretical conceptions emphasize the relationship between certain universality of globalization and specific local conditions for the development of particular cities. They also highlight the arrangement of social orders in urban space.

Globalization is responsible for incorporating the city in the system of flows of capital, goods, investments, cultures. From the intra-city point of view, globalization leads not only to the diversification of cities in the global network but also the emergence of and growth in disproportions within the city on various spatial scales. Since the beginning of the 1990s in Poland, we have been able to observe that the processes of transformation differ in the microscale, e.g. on neighboring plots, tenement houses, industrial plants, which is particularly noticeable in Lodz.

The universality of globalization is associated with local conditions which result not only from the process of transformation itself, much as it actually is the reason for many processes of urban space diversification, but also from such local conditions as history (the origins of the city, its functions, social and economic structures), culture specificity of citizens and their inclination to take up individual or collective actions, commitment to the city, valuation of the city and responsibility for the surrounding space.

This article presents the results of the research conducted within social interpretation of already existing and newly emerging urban space disproportions in the city of Lodz from the perspective of individual experiences of its citizens. This aim has been served by using photography as the research method. The photographs were taken in the springs of 2011 and 2012 by 2nd-year MA-program students of geography at the University of Lodz, within the framework of the project “My image of Lodz”, as part of the course on “The image of urban space”, this corresponding with the National Science Center funding scheme, “Social and economic disparities in the city of Lodz. Factors, mechanisms, effects”, which has been in the process of implementation since the spring of 2010. The students were asked to use their own cameras to present various places within the following categories being interrelated with the problem of spatial distortions in the city, i.e.: “beautiful places”, “ugly places”, “places in which one can see development”, “places in which one can see crisis” and “places where time has stood still” The photographs expressed and distilled individuals’ social reflection upon urban space, and constituted visual data for further quantitative and qualitative interpretation, as each picture had to be equipped with a caption of about 50-60 words – a justification for the choice of a given place or object. The analysis comprised 75 photo essays.

2. Photography as a research and education method in geography

The role of photography as a research method in social studies is becoming more and more crucial, which may be attributed to a growing interest of these disciplines in creating, interpreting and using visual depictions of reality. Our contemporary world is dominated by visual communication and visual culture, frequently referred to as iconology (Panofsky 2008). New terms have appeared in modern humanities, i.e. a graphic turn, also known as a pictorial turn or an iconic turn (Zeidler-Janiszewska 2006, Kawecki 2010). The growing significance of the visual in contemporary western societies constitutes an element of a wider analysis of the transition from pre-modernism to modernism, and subsequently from modernism to postmodernism, in which the visual sphere constitutes the focal point (the so-called ocularcentrism) (Rose 2010). Images convey information, knowledge, emotions, aesthetic experiences, values. They become the subject of conscious deciphering, at the same time being able to affect the subconscious. According to P. Sztompka (2005), they can be read like a text. It is often stressed that photographs can convey a great deal of information about the appearance of a place – far more succinctly than words (Sontag 1978; Prosser & Schwartz 1998). S. Griebing et al. (2013) emphasized that photography can be used by social sciences as a catalyst for participatory research and presented several roles of photography for communities participating such projects.

The relationships between the construction of geographical knowledge and the analyses of visual representations of place were discussed by M. Crang (1997) and G. Rose (2000) who highlighted the contribution that geographers have made to analyzing ways of visualizing ‘landscapes, places and spaces’. “Photographs have always played a major role in geographical studies. Ever since the invention of photography in the 1830s, it has been assumed that photographs are perfectly suited to help answer that eminently geographical question, ‘what is this place like?’” (Rose 2008: 151).

As is noted by J. D. Sidaway (2002), photography and photographic images have also a long history in geographical fieldwork and teaching, especially in the educational curricula of Western countries, and through the twentieth century their role grew, to some extent displacing or complementing the traditional ‘sketch’ and hand-drawn map. In the course of geographical fieldwork carried out in Barcelona, J. D. Sidaway (2002) asked his students to take photographs that could serve as “representations of Barcelona”, to select four, and to justify the selection in up to 400 words, explaining the criteria that had been applied in making the judgment. Research conducted in Japan (Noda 1988; Hisa & Utsumi 1992; Teramoto, Ohnishi 1995 – after Okamoto et al. 2006) using the so-called photo projective method (PPM), focused mainly on children, who were given cameras and asked to take photographs of the city in general, or some specific places they liked or disliked. T. Okamoto et al. (2006) asked students of one of the Japanese universities to take photographs of their campus, focusing on both its characteristic places and those places that were not characteristic of the campus. The students were also asked to justify their choices.

Among the numerous advantages of such a method, the ones emphasized most were freedom and the possibility of space being made subject to the individual interpretation, difficult to obtain in the course of standard social research. It was also concluded that, notwithstanding the subjective nature of the experiences and evaluations of individual persons, and the freedom offered by the photo projective method, the vast majority of images may be interpreted as reflecting typical impressions common to all the participants. Students asked about their opinions on such methods being used when experiencing urban space, considered the photography projects to provide a welcome contrast with the more standard individual essays or field notebooks typically associated with such courses (Sidaway 2002).

3. Origins of contemporary disproportions in the urban space of Lodz

A characteristic feature of Lodz – a city shaped by the 19th century capitalism and the 20th century socialism, was a markedly industrial structure of the economy with a significantly underdeveloped sector of services and high social disproportions. In the space of Lodz at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, inhabited by poor citizens living in characteristic forms of sub-standard buildings without any aesthetic values, places of growth i.e.: large industrial establishments with palaces belonging to factory owners, eclectic tenement houses in the city center as well as private parks constituted peculiar enclaves. Those contrasts in the urban space of Lodz – both economic and social disparities, sharpened by the emergence of industry – were depicted by Z. Nowakowski (1931), who described it as an evil city, ‘a prank of someone’s wicked fantasy’, ‘a creation of devil rather than God’.

“This city does not have any sense, and it persists without sinking only because it really is a tragic, monstrous boat, a true Charon’s boat, floating on a bottomless swamp, Well, Reymont must have been wearing his pink glasses while writing his ‘Promised Land’!...Lodz is an obvious absurd, thus when a man is strolling along these ridiculously long, caricatural streets, he has a feeling that it can’t be a [real] city but an unpleasant joke made by someone who was equally wicked and stupid...” (Nowakowski 1931, s. 111-113).

Between 1945 and 1989, during the socialist era in Poland, the historical value of the city was disregarded, and the entire heritage of the former capitalist era was adopted to the centrally-planned economy. Simultaneously, there were hardly any investments in the textile industry or other fields of Lodz economy, which led to their considerable deterioration and, in some cases, annihilation. Since the beginning of 1989, Lodz entered a stage of intense economic transformations which have completely changed the socio-economic face of the city. Changes in the political system created conditions for transforming this strictly industrial urban hub into a service-oriented city open to globalization and modernization. Lodz, being a product of industrial functions which created a peculiar, concentrated industrial complex, inherited its spatial structure from this former industrial hub. The evolution of this kind of settlement consists in a transition from the industrial function to industrial-service and service-industrial function to being a city with regional and metropolitan functions. At present, the main driving force of changes in the city’s functional and spatial structure are dynamic service functions, especially the higher-order ones.

At the same time, the above-mentioned transformation was particularly acute for Lodz. The textile industry, dominated by women, was actually defenseless against the crisis. Closing the eastern market completed the collapse of industry. Among large Polish cities, Lodz faces the greatest social problems – the costs of transformation – such as unemployment, especially among women, growing pathologies and increasing poverty-related problems. One manifestation of local patriotism in the 1990s was the development of entrepreneurship. Despite closing most of the largest textile and clothing factories, Lodz was and still is one of the greatest hubs of textile industry in Poland. Production has been moved from huge halls to small and medium enterprises, which frequently bought out the equipment from former factories. The centrally-planned trade system was replaced with the largest marketplaces in Central Europe. All of these vivid changes brought about a chaos in spatial planning, especially in the city center.

Only until recently the processes of planned transformations have begun to occur in Lodz, with the city looking for its new identity based primarily on culture. The nature of these changes is attributed to the fact that the development of the areas of growth under new conditions is a comparatively young phenomenon, while the areas of marginalization continue a certain path which has been present in Lodz for many decades.

4. Social interpretation of disproportions in the urban space of Lodz

When asked to indicate beautiful places in the city of Lodz, the majority of students frequently admitted in their essays that it was a difficult task:

“Looking for a ‘beautiful’ place in Lodz was not an easy task. My difficulties in finding such a place exposed my rather negative attitude towards this city. There are numerous interesting monuments worth seeing, but are they really beautiful?”

In the majority of cases, they described parks, paying attention not only to their ecological values but also to social values, as they serve as places for walking, meeting people and relaxing. Cultivated green areas highlighted as beautiful, were especially dominant in photo essays made by the students who come from outside Lodz, and who discovered the city during their 5-year course of studies. According to them, these parks, located away from the crowds and the city turmoil, surrounded by nature, offered a feeling of being at home.

“I have discovered this place relatively recently. Unusual paths, old trees, arbors, bridges, a pond full of ducks, all make this place very charming and uncommon. At night, the park is lit with old-fashioned lampposts, which give it a specific, beautiful character. And a frequently occurring morning mist gives this place a feeling of magic, as if from a movie frame.”

In their essays, students also emphasized the beauty of the monuments which evoke the period of industrial Lodz and the glory of Lodz factory owners. They paid attention to interesting and unique architecture and the greenery which enriches values of the buildings in question. The students who come from Lodz pointed at one of many yards in Lodz – the one located in 89 Piotrkowska street – as an example of the influence of private institutions on the shape of the space whose planning and aesthetic values differ significantly from those belonging to the neighboring houses (Fig. 1).

“The yard belonging to a tenement house located in 89 Piotrkowska street. You can find such institutions as the Danish Consulate, the British Consulate and the headquarters of the TVN television. I chose this place, because it shows that it is possible to turn these shabby, neglected yards into something beautiful. Entering from Piotrkowska street, I feel as if I were in a different city. I wish all yards in Lodz would look like this one.”

“Biderman’s Palace. Besides all the other tenement houses and factories in Franciszkańska or Kilińskiego streets, this palace seems to be a pearl in the miserable and humdrum city background. This effect seems even greater on a winter night, when the illumination is on and the snow is falling.”

“Villas in Wólczańska street may be deemed beautiful places in Lodz. The most beautiful one is located under number 243. Personally, I love glass and mirrors, and they abound in this place. Even as a young child I always imagined I would live in such a house. A palace... I am watching...admiring...envying...Besides the architectural shape, this place also benefits from the surrounding greenery.”

“The green color of grass and bushes stand here in contrast with the red color of former factory buildings, and the fountains located along the pedestrian track complete the sense of cohesion and harmony. It is a perfect example of how an old and dilapidated object can be turned into a beautiful and frequently visited place.”

Unfortunately, the number of places deemed by the students as ugly is significantly higher. The presented objects are most often identified through the prism of ecological, social and urban values. Lodz Fabryczna train station seems to be of particular interest in the students’ photo essays. In 2011, this place dominated the category of ugly places. However, after its closure and demolition, and in the prospect of building a New Center of Lodz there, the area surrounding the former station has become a synonym of a developing place in 2012 essays. The unfavourable place of the former Lodz Fabryczna train station has been taken by a fragment of Zachodnia street, also interpreted – just like the train station in 2011 – as a place where one can see the crisis. There is still hope that the rank of this place will change in future essays, following the latest plans devised by the local authorities.

“Getting off the train on my arrival to Lodz, I can always see this extremely ugly, dirty and neglected place. It is always full of the homeless pestering other passers-by. Just like that, a notorious landmark of Lodz. How long is it going to last? Apparently, an ‘open city operation’ is coming closer and closer.”

“Peeling facade paint, drunkards, bums and crowds of people. This is everyday reality in Fabryczna. Best advice is to limit your presence here to the minimum.”

Many a time the students highlighted contrasts in the urban space of Lodz, marking as ugly not only single tenement houses or their backyards, especially the ones situated along Piotrkowska street, but also entire streets located in the vicinity of Piotrkowska or Manufaktura:

“There are numerous ugly places in Lodz. Just stray from Piotrkowska street into one of the turnings, and the city landscape changes diametrically. The facades of tenement houses scare [the passers-by] away with falling wall plaster or decorative elements. The ugliest sight, however, is the yards, where rubbish is kept illicitly, and where the local ‘cream of society’ organize their get-togethers. Such a yard may be found in one of the tenement houses in Moniuszki street. Windows sealed with chipboards, otherwise broken, scribbled walls, empty vodka bottles – [you can see] the city rotting and decaying from inside. In everyday rush, we don’t notice this piercing ugliness, hidden behind a tolerable façade. Located merely numbers away, there is a beautiful, renovated building. Leaning through the yard, you can see Piotrkowska street, and a few steps further on, there is my favorite, climatic café.”

“It is the essence of stereotypical, neglected Lodz. I am aware that there are more examples like this in the city. However, what I feel particularly hurt by is the sight of Legionów street, since it is the city center, the immediate vicinity of Piotrkowska street, Manufaktura, the Old Town. What seems worst is the fact that individual houses are architecturally interesting, yet that are doomed to be demolished due to a complete lack of interest.”

“Kilińskiego street. One of the most important, yet ugliest streets in the city – formerly known as Widzewska street. Devastated, neglected and shabby all along, stretching from Północna street to Śląska street. It reflects best ‘the dark side of the city’, with its dilapidated tenement houses and broken tram tracks. The only thing it brings to my mind are constant traffic jams, delayed trams and peeling walls of old tenement houses.”

In their essays, the students also emphasized the existence of new architectural objects whose character was not compatible with the surroundings. It is an effect of many years of negligence in urban planning, following especially from a lack of current local urban development plans for the city of Lodz.

“New does not mean pretty. The complex of University Business Park buildings in Wólczajska street dominated the surroundings completely. As a result, the real estate market grew in yet another unused office space in a really hideous frame. Raw, sterile, heavy buildings have been put up, buildings which do not match the convention of surrounding buildings in any way.”

The places which the students identified as instances of development or crisis frequently overlapped with the examples of beautiful and ugly places. In this case, however, more attention was paid to the relationship between the standard of space – its ‘furnishings’, visual attractiveness, location – and the economic value. The places where development was clearly noticeable referred to the biggest investments in the city, which the students experienced directly in the space or knew from the media. The majority of students have pointed out at Manufaktura, Scheibler’s Lofts, developed areas of former factories within Lodz Special Economic Zone, Piłsudski alley (referred to as the ‘contemporary axis of development’ in urban development plans), and recently the surroundings of Lodz Fabryczna train station, where a New Center of Lodz is being built.

“It is probably the only place where one can see a real hive of activity. It is always full of noise and motion, with thousands of people going in and out of Manufaktura every day. Apart from a perfect idea for developing these former factory grounds from an economic perspective, this place has also began to play a unifying role for the citizens and a landmark for tourists.”

“It is a masterpiece of revitalization and renovation. It is undeniably an attraction of the city and its biggest success in the last decade.” (Manufaktura, editorial note by Tobiasz-Lis, Wójcik).

“Stylish apartments in old, abandoned factory halls and the warehouses of the former cotton mill in KsiężyMłyn. I think that this place reflects development best. From raw, abandoned factory walls to beautiful apartment buildings. A transition as if from an ugly duckling to a beautiful swan. Impressive. (Scheibler’s Lofts, editorial note Tobiasz-Lis, Wójcik).

“Textorial Park office center located in KsiężyMłyn is an investment which serves as an ideal example of a very successful combination of modern architecture and old postindustrial construction.” (Lodz Special Economic Zone, editorial note Tobiasz-Lis, Wójcik).

“For an example of a developing place, I chose a stretch of Piłsudski alley between Piortkowska and Kilińskiego streets. Glass and steel skyscrapers, offices, a shopping mall, an amusement center, cinemas, cafes, world corporations, banks, fitness clubs, discos, hotels...I myself am stunned by the fact that all these things are squeezed in such a small area. All of these modern, effective buildings give an impression of development.”

“The so-called ‘Lodz Manhattan’ is a place where one can see development. We can notice some of the most important investments in the city along its major artery. The presence of the highest buildings in Lodz, both corporate and residential, may also reflect the high rank of this part of the city.”

“Not original...But the place where once can really see development is Fabryczna train station. (...) There is always one element which accompanies an initial stage of development – an excavator.”

Unfortunately, also in this case, most places have been identified in the essays as examples of a crisis rather than development. A striking majority of the buildings in question are located in the very city center, many a time in the nearest vicinity of places regarded as those showing development, which again points out the existence of disproportions in the urban space of Lodz. Every one in four photo essays prepared by the students coming from outside Lodz points at Piotrkowska street – the unquestionable symbol of the city – as the place where one can see crisis. Moreover, even the students whose origins are rooted in this city notice negative changes occurring in the area of Piotrkowska street; yet, writing about crisis areas, above all, they focus in their essays on the decapitalization of former industrial areas, which are contrasted with new industrial investments in the city (Fig. 2).

“Neglected, dirty, mostly abandoned, tenement houses with smashed windows, haunting in the commercial center of Lodz. The nearby Staromiejski Park and Manufaktura pose as a huge contrast to these buildings. Walking by, I always have a feeling that one day soon, one of these houses will collapse. They just ask, scream, beg for revitalization.”

“If you want to see crisis-stricken places in Lodz, just enter the closest backyard. These places leave no room for comments. Old tenement houses, scratched walls, smashed windows...During the day there is nothing to look for there, at night it is dangerous to go there.”

”Wschodnia street is a synonym of old, collapsing buildings, run-down tenement houses, poverty and deterioration. This street reflects best the character of Lodz and the problems this city has to face. The only thing which seems to flourish here are liquor shops and cheap, second-hand clothes shops.”

”An obvious crisis in this city may be exemplified by numerous devastated buildings of former factories. One of the best instances is the building of Scheibler’s New Weaving Mill. The only remnant of the then enormous plant is now the circumferential wall (...).”

“Factories – once the symbol of the city’s power, now they symbolize its great decline after 1989. Abandoned and neglected, they tell a story which by far foreshadows an imminent doom.”

The following map (Fig. 3) contains places which have been evaluated as positive and negative by the students and interpreted in their photo essays as beautiful places identified with the city’s development as well as ugly places, frequently cited as symbols of crisis. The character of this outline is strictly synoptic. Not every case described by students could be located exactly on the map. The students often generalized, writing about “tenement houses and yards in the center of Lodz” or about entire housing estates. Nonetheless, there is a noticeable concentration of both positively and negatively evaluated places in the city center, especially along the borderline of the peripheral railway track which delineated the area of the 19th century industrial Lodz. Apart from city parks, the area of the New Center of Lodz and Manhattan – identified with service-related buildings along J. Piłsudskiego street rather than with a housing estate, positively evaluated places are located in spots, often as enclaves inside crisis areas or in their closest vicinity (Manufaktura, StaromiejskiPark). On the other hand, negatively evaluated places are linear in their character – they form long stretches of streets situated in the very center of Lodz (Tobiasz-Lis 2010). Photographing and writing about these streets, the students highlighted their poor condition, decapitalization of buildings, social problems.

A counterbalance to these negative examples is J. Piłsudski alley, which is perceived in the citizens' eyes as not only an area of contemporary development of the city but also as a contemporary center of Lodz. The following outline, which corroborates the existence of disproportions in the contemporary urban space of Lodz, especially in its central parts, also serves as an inspiration to undertake profound research in the micro scale on the social environment of the winners and losers of transformation processes.

The places where "time has stopped" presented by students in their photo essays encompassed among all the 19th-century residential areas for the workers of former K.W. Scheibler's factory in KsiężyMłyn and I.K. Poznanski's factory in Ogrodowa street. An interest in this area may be explained by the recent emergence of large investments in the form of Manufaktura and Scheibler's Lofts, which have been created in the immediate vicinity of the above-mentioned places. Dynamic changes of these objects stand out in the background of some fragments of former industrial conceptions which have not been subject to revitalization. Among other places listed in this category, there are: Old Cemetery, St. Joseph church, tenement backyards. In all of these examples the students highlighted the fact that the places and objects did not undergo any changes in time, which makes them good 'storytellers' of the city's history. „Places where time has stopped”, are also – according to the students born and brought up in Lodz –the parts of the city which have not changed significantly over the course of their lives, and which they remember from childhood, e.g. Lunapark, zoological gardens or trade and service buildings erected during the times of the People's Republic of Poland.

“Peering into some backyards, I often feel as if time had stopped there many years ago. One step is all it takes to move back in time.”

“A street which is characteristic of Lodz, a street which used to enchant with its stylish tenement houses, today symbolizes the enclave of poverty and social pathology. It seems that time must have stopped there sometime in the 1980s, with the only thing different being the cars parked along the street. There have been no renovations – the pavement is full of potholes, the railway line is twisted and plaster falls from building walls straight on pedestrians' heads.” (photo 5b).

“Walking into KsiężyMłyn, I have a feeling as if nothing has changed over the years, almost as if time stopped in this place. Cobble alleys, family houses lined up along the street and the red color of omnipresent bricks offer a chance to travel in time back to the end of the 19th century, like in Reymont's 'The Promised Land'.”

“Can we stop the time? Obviously, the answer is yes. The best example of this in Lodz is St. Joseph church in Ogrodowa street. This old, quaint church is itself a travel in time. Being there, one might forget about the present, about what is going around. People just stop as if there was no future. Time stopped in this place many years ago, and I hope it will not start passing again...”

„This stretch of the street has remained unchanged since the Times of my childhood. It is ruled by absolute stagnation. Even the Społem grocer's, an incredible relict of the past, is still in the same place.”

5. Conclusion

The space of every city is not homogeneous, which makes its particular elements to be perceived differently. Social evaluation of urban space is multifaceted in its character and may serve as significant broadening of traditional urban analyses with scenic-landscape, aesthetic or economic perception of space. These values frequently translate into an economic value of space and shape a person's emotional attitude to particular parts of the city.

The image of Lodz, obtained from the students' photo essays, shows an extremely diverse city, which is a mosaic of beautiful places and the places which symbolize deterioration and are embarrassing to its citizens. These diametrically differently evaluated parts of the city are many a time located in the closest vicinity of one another, which makes the perception of beautiful and well-kept or revitalized buildings to be distorted by their repulsive surroundings. Places defined as beautiful or places where one can see development are spotted (marginal) in their character, and although being promoted, they exist mainly thanks to foreign investments. The students paid attention mainly to the buildings which have been created as a result of the revitalization of post-factory areas or in their close vicinity, yet with a properly-matched form and attention to architectural detail. They also evaluated positively the investments located at the junction of Piotrkowska street and J. Piłsudskiego alley, where the citizens see the place of a new Lodz city.

However, what may be concluded from the photo essays is the fact that the citizens do not want their city to be a huge, global metropolis, but to offer space for “everyday life”, they want a clean, friendly and well-kept city. That is why the vision of the city written down and accepted in the latest strategy for development, which says “Lodz – the most dynamically developing Central-European metropolis”, does not seem to be quite credible, since the citizens can hardly imagine their Lodz to be such.

The photo essays used for the purpose of this article present a certain subjective image of Lodz, on the basis of which one can draw conclusions concerning social evaluation of both the entire city as well as its individual parts. Despite a subjective, multifaceted and varied experiencing of space, a common image of the city has been obtained, an image that connects people with similar social features. The explanations for choosing certain places or buildings which accompany the photos allow for a more complete interpretation of meanings attributed and read by the citizens of the urban space. In conclusion, the method presented in this work may be said to broaden current standard social studies conducted on the basis of a survey questionnaire, as well as enriching traditional methods used in the course of students’ geographical fieldwork. Evaluating the whole course on “The image of urban space”, students seemed truly satisfied with the outcomes of their project papers, highlighting that it was “something different than what they had done before”.

It was not the aim of the article to compare student comments on the city presented in papers from 2011 and 2012. However, as some places switched from the category “ugly” into “beautiful” or from “place of crisis” to “place of development”, it would seem that people are capable of very rapid reactions to changes in the urban fabric. It may therefore be concluded that these kinds of study, i.e. ones concerning emotional attitudes to urban space, should be regarded as crucial when it comes to devising strategies and planning local development, and indicating problematic areas which require protection, renovation or deeper functional and spatial transformation. Finally, it should be noted how the photo essays prepared by the students and commented on in this article reveal at least five functions of photography in social research, i.e.:1) stimulation of the attention and imagination as a city is explored with a camera and certain topics are selected with the intention of photographs being taken;2) inspiration as regards the discovering of something behind photographs, as these are continuous invitations to deduce, speculate and fantasize; 3) documentation of externally observed visual facts as “each photograph is a certificate for something” (Barthes 1981, p. 87); 4) trigger for discussion or debate within a focus group allowing different individual perceptions of situations presented in photographs to be confronted; 5) illustration of concepts and categories for their better understanding. As visual representations and interpretations are eagerly used by sociology, ethnology, architecture and urban planning, on account of their multifaceted character, they should also be recognized by urban geographers, especially when it comes to the description and analysis of a very complex and continuously changing city landscape.

Figures:



Fig. 1. Disproportions in Lodz urban space – beautiful and ugly places: yards in Piotrkowska street, tenement house on the corner of Piotrkowska and G. Narutowicza streets.

Source: self-prepared.



Fig. 2. Disproportions in Lodz urban space –places where one can see development and places where one can see: new and old industrial buildings– Dell and Wifama.
Source: self-prepared.



Fig. 3. Disproportions in Lodz urban space
Source: self-prepared.



Fig. 4. Places in Lodz where time has stopped: CmentarzStary [Old Cementary], Legionów street, Księżymłyn, St. Joseph's Church
Source: self-prepared.

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