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## Conference Paper

Place satisfaction as a component of city's image among its residents  
(in the light of student's opinion survey in Bia $\approx$ Çystok - the capital of  
North-Eastern Poland)

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**Place satisfaction as a component of city's image among its residents**  
**(in the light of student's opinion survey in Białystok**  
**– the capital of North-Eastern Poland)**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Cities and city life have always been studied by representatives of different fields and disciplines of science. Nowadays, however, of particular significance is the interdisciplinary approach to urban studies. It combines the application of classical analytical theories with modern, more practical fields of knowledge such as territorial marketing, a discipline involving the adaptation of marketing tools for the needs of management of territorial units. Territorial marketing, whose field of interest also comprises cities, uses numerous terms and methodologies developed in social psychology and urban sociology, and is particularly close to the interactionist theory used in urban sociology. This is especially true of those aspects of territorial marketing which relate to city's image as perceived by specific groups of the city offer's users.

Interactionists look at cities from the point of their experience, perception, understanding and evaluation by their inhabitants. Interactionist urban study describes not only its material and spatial components but also its images established in the minds of the inhabitants in connection with their views, feelings, perceptions and aspirations. Symbolist interactionism, one of the several streams within the interactionist theory, focuses on the study of people's mutual interactions, with particular emphasis on the spatial and architectural contexts thereof. Representatives of this stream attempt to represent each city in the same way as it is experienced, understood, felt and perceived by its inhabitants. This thinking orientation

in urban sociology has been strongly developed by K. Lynch<sup>1</sup>. In his work entitled "The image of the city" he stressed the importance of identifying images of the city or its components in the perception and awareness of its inhabitants; he also explained in what circumstances, and for what reasons, such images are classified as either positive or negative. According to Lynch's concept of the city, urban study includes consideration of the city's image as a visual quality present in the awareness of the inhabitants<sup>2</sup>.

The interactionist approach was further developed by representatives of the humanist orientation. The principle of "humanistic coefficient" formulated by Florian Znaniecki found its application in urban studies in which a city is understood as a complex spatial and symbolic structure which can be described only by analyzing the experience of individuals<sup>3</sup>.

According to the assumptions of humanistic urban sociology inspired by F. Znaniecki and M. Weber, the main research problem is to determine subjective meanings and images of the city as well as experiences and emotions that the city or certain parts thereof evoke in its permanent or temporary inhabitants. In humanistic sociology, the starting point for urban study is to understand a city as a non-spatial, humanistic entity consisting in "human experience and activity"<sup>4</sup>. According to Znaniecki, every and any social fact should be studied as a piece of human experience and activity. In each case, account should be taken not only of the material (objective, external, behavioural) aspects, but also of the internal (psychological, cognitive) aspects of the studied social phenomenon. The same applies to the study of a city as a social phenomenon<sup>5</sup>.

Another interesting theoretical inspiration related to the study of people's perception and experiencing of cities is the socio-psychological orientation<sup>6</sup>. This orientation comprises elements of the Chicago stream of descriptive urban sociology, and elements of cognitive psychology whose representatives focused on cognitive processes of individuals functioning within a given social environment. One of the key terms used in the socio-psychological orientation is "cognitive map". According to the concept of G.D. Suttles, a "cognitive map"

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<sup>1</sup> J. Turowski, *W poszukiwaniu socjologicznej teorii miasta*, In: *Teorie socjologii miasta a problemy społeczne miast polskich*, ed. E. Kaltenberg- Kwiatkowska, P. Kryczka, W. Mirowski, PAN, Wrocław, 1983, p. 19-21.

<sup>2</sup> K. Lynch, *The image of the city*, The M. I. T. Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1960, p. 2 - 3.

<sup>3</sup> B. Jałowiecki, *Stan socjologii miasta w Polsce*, In: *Stan i perspektywy socjologii polskiej*, ed. A. Kwilecki, K. Doktor, Warszawa- Poznań 1988, p. 117 - 119.

<sup>4</sup> F. Znaniecki, *Miasto w świadomości jego obywateli*, Publishing House of Polish Sociological Institute, Poznań 1931, p. 9 - 10.

<sup>5</sup> J. Turowski, *W poszukiwaniu ...*, op.cit, p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> In Poland this orientation is the most creative developed by B. Jałowiecki, A. Wallis and J. Wodz (P. Starosta, *Poza metropolią. Wiejskie i małomiasteczkowe zbiorowości lokalne a wzory porządku makrospołecznego*, Publishing House of Lodz University, Lodz, 1995, Łódź, 1995, p. 71).

helps people locate themselves in the surrounding physical space or, in other words, determine their territorial identity. "Cognitive mapping" is the process of identification with specific space in two dimensions: firstly, as cognitive identification and secondly, as emotional identification. By recognizing and evaluating space an individual determines his/her identity. This is done with the use of symbols as means of expression and communication. Cognitive identification and emotional identification are forms of learning about the surrounding urban space, and a basis for developing a specific attitude towards it. Daily interactions and social life practices experienced by inhabitants of a given city become a source of overall collective images which each individual develops in his/her mind as a stream of consciousness. This way the symbolic meaning, the cultural significance and mood of a given territorial unit is developed<sup>7</sup>.

**Municipal authorities' increasing involvement in activities aimed at meeting inhabitants' needs, as well as growing competition between territorial units to attract external investors, have led to a situation in which the relationship between an individual and his/her environment is very important for the urban management process. In the language of social sciences, the relationship between man and his living environment is categorised as "attitude". In the marketing language, the relationship is classified under the category "place image"**<sup>8</sup>.

## **CITY IMAGE VS LOCAL SATISFACTION**

M. Florek and A. Inch say that maintaining a stable, diverse and appropriately skilled populace is vital for a place's sustainability. Cities, by their very nature, depend on their residents for economic, social, cultural and environmental vibrancy. In turn, a resident's satisfaction with the city where they live is shaped, in part, by the nature or perceived quality of these interrelated environments. Outsiders, too, are interested in residents' level of place satisfaction. For example, in the competitive arena of business migration and investment attraction, a place manager needs to demonstrate convincingly that their city's residents enjoy a higher level of well-being and satisfaction than those of rival locations. This need is driven by the consideration of so-called "soft factors" during the business investment decision-making process.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> P. Starosta, *Poza metropolią...*, op.cit, p. 70 - 76.

<sup>8</sup> E. Glińska, *Zarządzanie procesem kształtowania wizerunku miasta wśród jego mieszkańców na przykładzie Zambrowa*, Publishing House Marszałek, Toruń 2008, p. 100.

<sup>9</sup> Inch A., Florek M., *A great place to live, work and play. Conceptualizing place satisfaction in the case of a city's residents*, Journal of Place Management and Development, 2008, Vol. 1 No. 2, p. 138-149.

In the perception of the inhabitants, their living environment is, in fact, their image of a given town/city. The term "image" is commonly used as an expression denoting the sum of opinions, attitudes and impressions which a person or group of persons relates to a given object<sup>10</sup>. Place image is defined as a set of experiences and interpretations spontaneously connected with a specific stimulus (physical or social), which generates in a given person a series of associations with a given place<sup>11</sup>. Authors dealing with the conceptualisation of the "image" category emphasise that it is a multi-dimensional psychological "structure" consisting of two main dimensions: the cognitive one and the emotional one. The cognitive element includes the beliefs and knowledge relating to physical (material) properties of the city, while the emotional component relates to the feelings and emotions connected with the city, its individual properties and its surrounding<sup>12</sup>. This structural definition of image is extremely important for the process of operationalising the "image" concept and, consequently, also for the process of identification of the city's perception by specific groups of users in the marketing research process.

The literature on the subject emphasises the primary role of affective factors, as compared with other components of image (attitude). The emotional and evaluative component constitutes the image in the definitional sense. It is expressed in the form of positive and negative emotions associated with the object behind the image concerned. From the point of view of the affective component, the images of a given object can be structured into a continuum, starting with strongly positive values (approval and positive emotions), through neutral (ambivalent) values, up to strictly negative values (disapproval and negative emotions)<sup>13</sup>.

Identification of emotional relationships between the inhabitants and their city is tested most frequently with the use of the so-called **local satisfaction indicators**. Local satisfaction is one of the most frequently used indicators measuring psychological and social connections between a person and his/her place of residence. The indicator represents "mental comfort arising from the person's positive strengthening by its residential environment". The presence of local satisfaction is a factor which enhances the tendency to preserve the adherence to the

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<sup>10</sup> A. Łuczak, *Wizerunek miasta*, „Samorząd Terytorialny” 2001, no 1 - 2, p. 83.

<sup>11</sup> Luque-Martinez T., Del Barrio-García S., Ibanez-Zapata J. A., Rodriguez Molina M.A., *Modeling a city's image: The case of Granada*, Cities, 2007, Vol. 24, No.5, p. 335-352.

<sup>12</sup> Hosany S., Ekinci Y., Uysal, M., *Destination image and destination personality: An application of branding theories to tourism places*, Journal of Business Research, 2006, nr 59, p. 638-642

<sup>13</sup> Por. S. Nowak, *Pojęcie postawy w teoriach i stosowanych badaniach społecznych*, w: *Teorie postaw*, red. S. Nowak, PWN, Warszawa, 1973, s. 33 - 38

place, while its absence may cause alienation<sup>14</sup>. In to-date empirical studies, satisfaction was analysed with the use of two methods. The first method consisted in asking the respondents about their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with living in a particular locality. The second method was based on determining the degree of satisfaction with various aspects of the functioning of the local system<sup>15</sup>.

## METHODOLOGY OF OWN RESEARCH

The identification of the local satisfaction level was one of the objectives of the research project entitled "Białystok and its promotion in the opinions of students". The project was carried out by the author of this paper in January and February 2009, using the technique of auditorium questionnaire among third year full-time students of the Faculty of Management of Białystok University of Technology.

Białystok is the largest city in the north-eastern part of Poland and the capital city of Podlaskie province. Among all provincial Polish cities, Białystok is the second city in terms of population density, the eleventh in terms of population, and thirteenth with regard to surface area. In addition, Białystok functions as administrative, economic, scientific, and cultural centre. The city location creates good conditions for economic and cultural development as it is situated in the vicinity of Belarus, Lithuania, and Russia. Due to its historical and geographical considerations, Białystok is a place where people of different cultures, religions, and nationalities have lived for centuries.<sup>16</sup>

There is a dozen or so universities in the city, where about 50 thousands students study each year. This means that the social category should be one of the most important target groups of the city promotion.

The survey was carried out among 191 students. The sample consisted of third year students as it had been assumed that based on their over two-year experience at the University they had already developed their personal opinions and thoughts related to studying in Białystok. The limited size of the sample resulted from the fact that the study was a pilot project constituting an introduction to a more extensive research project focused on the perception of the city. The project work also served the purpose of developing tools and hypotheses for further research related to the study of local satisfaction levels.

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<sup>14</sup> Starosta P., *Poza metropolią. Wiejskie i małomiasteczkowe zbiorowości lokalne a wzory porządku makrospołecznego*, Publishing House of Lodz University, Lodz, 1995, p. 129-130

<sup>15</sup> P. Starosta, *Poza metropolią...*, op.cit. p. 129.

<sup>16</sup> [www.bialystok.pl](http://www.bialystok.pl), date of access: 20 May 2010.

The survey questionnaire consisted of 29 questions and metrics. Most questions were ‘closed’ which means that among all given answers a respondent had to select the most similar one to his/her view. However, in the survey there were also 6 questions with the ‘open structure’, which was a deliberate intention indeed since it enabled to place some of the quantitative variables in the quality context.

The open questions focused, primarily, on the diagnosis of emotional indicators of Białystok city image existing in the awareness of the students and, more specifically, the diagnosis of indicators of local satisfaction or lack thereof. Only a part of collected empirical material was used in this article.

The main focus was placed on the cognitive and emotional components of Białystok city image among the students.

## LOCAL SATISFACTION OF STUDENTS IN BIAŁYSTOK

In the survey, both above-mentioned methods of determining local satisfaction levels were used. The respondents were asked about their general satisfaction with studying in Białystok and about their subjective assessment of the degree to which their needs as students were met by the city.

Almost 75 percent of persons participating in the survey admitted that they were satisfied with studying in Białystok. Less than 8% expressed dissatisfaction with this fact. A relatively large group of students expressed an ambivalent attitude to the fact of studying in Białystok, by choosing the answer "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied."

Table 1. Level of respondents’ satisfaction with studying in Białystok

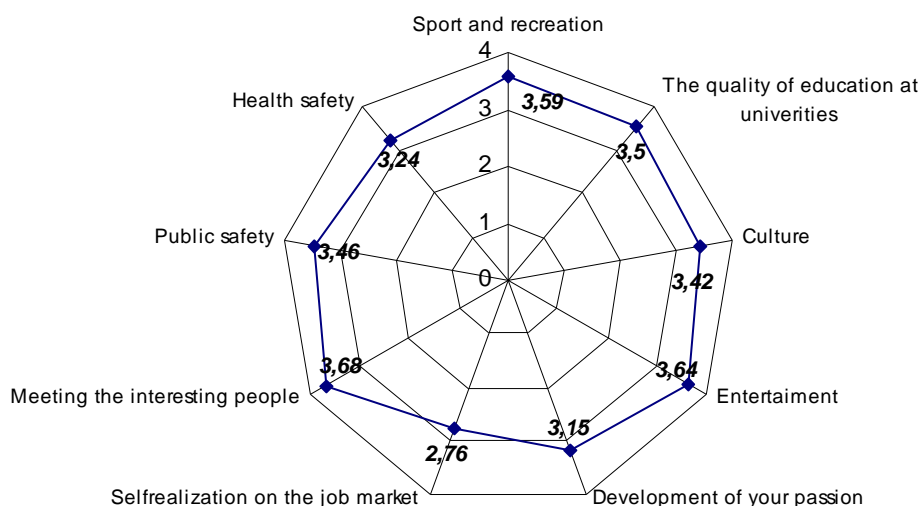
Are you satisfied with studing in Białystok	Percentage
Very satisfied	18,4
Rather satsfied	57,0
No satisfied, naither dissatisfied	16,8
Rather dissatisfied	6,8
Very dissatisfied	1,0
Total	100

Resource: own research

The students’ satisfaction with studying in Białystok city was also examined by looking at their subjective assessments of the degree to which the city met their needs as students. The respondents were ask to determine whether the city sufficiently met their individual needs in the fields such as sport and leisure, quality of university-level education, cultural events, entertainment, possibility to develop own passions, professional self-fulfilment, opportunity to meet interesting people, safety and healthcare. The adoption of this

catalogue of needs was determined by the specificity of the surveyed social category and its methods of “using” the city’s individual sub-products.

Table 2. Average level of students’ satisfaction with meeting their needs by the city



Resource: own research

In general, the respondents rather positively evaluated the degree to which their needs were met by the city. Białystok was relatively highly rated for the opportunity to meet interesting people, for entertainment and cultural events. The safety level in the city and the quality of education at the local universities were evaluated as above average. Particularly low evaluation was noted in the case of possibilities of professional self-fulfilment, and possibility to develop own passions.

In order to complement the "quantitative" information on the level of satisfaction with living and studying in Białystok, the respondents were asked an open question having the form of unfinished sentences (using the projection technique). They were asked to complete the sentences: “*What I most like about Białystok is ...*” and “*What I most dislike about Białystok is ...*”.

Almost a fifth part of the respondents appreciated the fact that Białystok is a city full of greenery, parks and places for recreation (this answer was given by over 16% of the respondents). In accordance with the initial expectations, one of Białystok’s most positive features pointed by the students was the city’s extensive cultural and entertainment offer.



Over 15% of respondents considered this aspect of the city's life to be its strongest advantage. The answers relating to this category referred to "student clubs", "cafes", "discothèques", "student events," "pizza places" and "pubs". Quite a large group of respondents (14%) focused on the category "the mood of the city", under which such components as "positive mood", "friendly attitude of the inhabitants", multiculturalism and coexistence of multiple religions were classified.

Despite the fact that only 8% of the respondents expressed their dissatisfaction with living in Białystok, the answers given by those surveyed indicate that life in the capital of Podlaskie Voivodship has relatively many aspects which are unacceptable for students. The study has shown that the most negative aspects, mentioned most frequently, are the poor organisation of the city's public transport and the related lengthy repairs of roads and streets in the city. These aspects were indicated by one in four students. In their answers they emphasised that what they most disliked about Białystok was: "public transport", "organisation of public bus schedules," "poor technical condition of buses," "bus stops," "crowded buses", "traffic jams" "road repairs", "poor condition of road infrastructure", etc. Another group of frequently given answers included those relating to issues connected with the students' assessment of Białystok's community and its inhabitants. One in ten respondents indicated that what he disliked about Białystok was: "people's rudeness", "vandalism", "aggressive, uneducated youngsters" and "sneaky people". A smaller number of answers (about 7%) was connected with the respondents' rejection of the attitudes of Białystok inhabitants. The respondents indicated that they disliked such characteristic features of Białystok inhabitants as: "backwardness", "provincial approach", "narrow-mindedness" or "complexes".

In order to measure the local students' satisfaction level in more detail, in the latter part of the questionnaire the respondents were asked to indicate the advantages and disadvantages of the fact that they had selected Białystok as a city in which they gain their university education. This technique made it possible to identify the factors determining the students' level of satisfaction not only with living, but mainly with studying in Białystok. To the open question "What are the benefits of studying in Białystok for you?", almost one third of the respondents gave answers which may be summarised as "proximity of family home". This was related to economic benefits ("reduced costs of accommodation/ food/ transport") as well as interpersonal/social benefits ("living close to the family", "living close to friends"). Quite frequently (about 15% of the answers) the respondents declared that they studied in Białystok because this gave them a chance for self-fulfilment, self-development and further

career development. Other benefits which, according to the students, were connected with their choice of Białystok as a city for university education, related to how Białystok compares to other academic centres. Białystok as an academic centre is better than other cities because of price levels: 7% of the answers ("an inexpensive city", "life is cheaper than in other cities," "living costs are lower") and because of the high safety level: 6% of the answers ("Białystok is a safe city," "it is a peaceful city", "I feel safe here", "it is a friendly place").

The respondents' answers to the questions about the perceived disadvantages/losses connected with studying in Białystok were interesting. Almost one respondent in ten admitted that the main shortcoming of studying in Białystok was the lower reputation of local universities in Poland as compared with those in the largest cities. This, in turn, is connected with lower chances for a good start into professional life. Quite often the respondents underlined the lack of job opportunities for students and the lack of interesting additional courses, training and apprenticeships to supplement their main university courses. The students also emphasised that in Białystok there are no jobs which would match the respondents' education profiles.

## CONCLUSION

The satisfaction and well-being of inhabitants, i.e. the main beneficiaries of urban space, is the key objective of measures taken by local authorities. By ensuring adequate quality of life of their local communities, cities compete for attention and trust of investors, tourists, students, highly qualified employees and the media. As a result, cities compete for people's positive opinions and feelings or, in other words, for appropriate image<sup>17</sup>.

The survey carried out among the Białystok students has demonstrated that the local satisfaction level of this group of consumers of the "city offer" is fairly high. More than 75% of the respondents expressed their satisfaction with having selected Białystok as a city in which they gain university education. However, as indicated by the analysed answers, their positive feelings towards the city most often result from a specific process of rationalisation of the decision to study in Białystok, rather than from the true belief that they have made the best choice. While referring to the benefits of studying in Białystok, the respondents emphasize mainly: proximity of the family home, lower cost of living and the extensive cultural and entertainment offer of the city. As concerns the losses associated with studying in

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<sup>17</sup> E. Glińska, M. Florek, A. Kowalewska, *Wizerunek miasta – od koncepcji do wdrożenia*, Wolters Kluwer Polska 2009, s. 7.

Białystok, the respondents indicate: provinciality of the Białystok University, limited possibilities of self-development and development of own passions, and lower chances for finding an attractive job. However, the losses are mentioned much less frequently than the benefits. This means that among Białystok students there is a group of persons who have high aspirations and are aware of the significance of getting properly prepared for entering the labour market to find a job which would meet their ambitions.

The municipal authorities of Białystok, being aware of the students' opinions about the city, may develop a list of activities necessary for increasing, among this category of inhabitants, their level of satisfaction with living in the Białystok agglomeration. Many of the shortcomings identified in the survey may be mitigated by the local government within its scope of responsibilities. This applies i.a. to the issues most significant for the students: the necessity to attract investors to create new modern jobs in the city, and the cooperation with other universities in the implementation of EU projects focused on investing in human capital. Thanks to such projects, the city might develop an attractive offer of training courses, apprenticeships and placements for students interested in improving their qualifications and acquiring new skills.

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