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## IS CITY A PART OF HOME? FORMS OF HOME PERCEPTION IN CONTEXT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

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### MIASTO CZĘŚCIĄ DOMU? FORMY POSTRZEGANIA DOMU W KONTEKŚCIE OTOCZENIA

#### Abstract

Home as a shelter, a safe and domesticated place, is one of the basic needs of man. However, its form and relation with the external environment may differ depending on the cultural context and personal preferences. Two general tendencies may be identified: *closed* home and *open* home of which the city becomes an extension. We speak here about spending time in a nearby square or an alley – a direct form of participation in the city life, or spending time on a terrace and balcony – the indirect form of it. An element of *home* in the metaphorical sense may also be lingering in restaurants and cafés, a walking route identified as *ours* and all other everyday routines transferred into the city space. Housing architecture may, through its form, inspire the inhabitants to become open or closed from the surrounding city.

*Keywords: home, city, open attitude, closed attitude*

#### Streszczenie

Dom jako schronienie, miejsce bezpieczne i oswojone, to jedna z podstawowych potrzeb każdego człowieka. Jednakże jego forma i relacja ze środowiskiem zewnętrznym bywają różne, zależnie od kontekstu kulturowego i osobistych preferencji. Można wyróżnić dwie ogólne tendencje: dom *zamknięty* oraz dom *otwarty*, gdzie miasto staje się jego przedłużeniem. Mowa tu o spędzaniu czasu na pobliskim placu, uliczce w formie bezpośredniej lub tarasie i balkonie jako pośrednim uczestniczeniu w życiu miasta. Elementem *domu* w mieście jako metaforycznym ujęciu może być również przebywanie w restauracjach i kawiarniach, trasa spaceru ujmowana jako *nasza* oraz wszystkie inne codzienne nawyki przenoszone do miejskiej przestrzeni. Architektura mieszkaniowa może swoją formą nakierowywać mieszkańców na otwarcie się lub zamknięcie na otaczające miasto.

*Słowa kluczowe: dom, miasto, postawa otwarta, postawa zamknięta*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Home as a shelter, a safe and domesticated place is one of the basic needs of man. It changes depending on the feeling of comfort and current lifestyle<sup>1</sup>. The discussion related to the issue of home in the city shall be commenced with an attempt to synthesise several broadly interpreted terms.

Apart from architects and urban planners, the city is also studied by researchers specialising in other disciplines: historians, philosophers of culture, anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists and others. It is a complex and intricate issue, therefore I decided to narrow the analysis down to a few problems. Jan Chmielewski identifies four elements of the city structure having a direct impact on its spatial structure<sup>2</sup>. These are: structure of legal organisation (administrative division), functional infrastructure (division into city zones such as centre, districts, industrial areas, etc.), social structure (division of space into public, private and all intermediate divisions) and physiognomic structure, extensively investigated by Kevin Lynch (elements which the city image is composed of<sup>3</sup>). All these elements impact perception of the city by its inhabitants and visitors. Depending on whether the aforementioned elements function well or not, the city may be perceived as: safe/dangerous, a well/poorly defined space (which in consequence impact the legibility of space), a place where we want to live or not...

Jan Gehl divided activities taking place outdoors into necessary, optional and social<sup>4</sup>. Cities that are well designed and well managed<sup>5</sup> stimulate their inhabitants to linger in public spaces. The approach according to which an inhabitant of the city spends free time within city public and semi-public spaces I have called an *open attitude*. Within this approach we find such behaviours as walking, observation of the environment and other users of the space, active participation in organised events and broadly interpreted *being* in the city (*optional activities*). An important role is played also by relations between people (*social activities*).

Interaction in public space with its other participants is a manifestation of openness. It applies both to contacts with strangers (for example eye contact, reciprocation of a smile, helping an elderly person to cross the street...) and to lingering in the city with friends. Necessary activities are those which people perform regardless of weather conditions, and quality of space they stay in – activities which they must perform, for example going to school. All three types of activities are comprised in the open attitude.

In opposition to the *open attitude* is the *closed attitude*. Behaviour characteristic for this approach is disclaiming shared responsibility for spaces which are under the collective rule.

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<sup>1</sup> L. Michałkowski, *O związkach mieszkania ze stylem życia*. w: B. Jałowiecki, A. Majer, M. Szczepański (red.) *Przemiany miasta. Wokół socjologii Aleksandra Wallisa*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar: Warszawa 2005.

<sup>2</sup> J. Chmielewski, *Teoria urbanistyki w projektowaniu i planowaniu miast*, Oficyna Wydawnicza Politechniki Warszawskiej, Warszawa 2010.

<sup>3</sup> K. Lynch, *Obraz miasta*, Wydawnictwo Archivolta, Kraków 2011.

<sup>4</sup> J. Gehl, *Miasta dla ludzi*, Wydawnictwo RAM, Kraków 2014.

<sup>5</sup> In my opinion both these elements are necessary for proper functioning of the city.

It applies both to public spaces and those which are managed by associations and communities. I understand *shared responsibility* not only as refraining from littering the pavement and collecting droppings left by a pet, but also as collective creation of that space and warmth towards its other users. It is an approach strongly focusing on an individual and his inner *I*, without the sense of community with persons from the outside. According to my observations, release from the closed attitude is a long-term process. Poles are still learning this approach, but a growing number of good public spaces and grassroots initiatives allow us to hope that progress in this area will accelerate. A closed attitude is demonstrated in public space through lack of optional activities and scant number of social activities.

## 2. ASSIMILATION AND CONTINUUM OF SPACE

Assimilation of space means conscious placement in a particular area and acknowledging such place as *one's own*<sup>6</sup>. This process involves many factors, among others cultural capital<sup>7</sup>, education, financial status and biological aspects of man (both mental and physical). Furthermore, the space itself and its characteristic properties impact our ability to assimilate it. The space of a square, which is safe, aesthetic and comfortable<sup>8</sup> attracts more interest to explore it than a narrow pavement along a busy street.

According to the academics, Elisabeth Rohmer and Abraham Moles, humans feel space like a multi-stage continuum<sup>9</sup>. According to our cognitive predispositions we participate in consecutive stages of space. The researchers divided the space into eight stages. The first one is self-awareness of one's own existence and separation from the outside world. The next one was called the zone of immediate gesture, constituting surroundings of man within the distance of the outstretched hand. Most often it is the space of work (professional or domestic, for example organisation of the kitchen space – layout of cabinets, countertop, etc.), where an important role is played by issues related to ergonomics. All equipment and furniture shall have defined proportions and relevant position in relation to one another. Whereas the proportions and aforementioned relations shall relate to the proportion and motor abilities of an individual.

Further stages relate more to the safety and comfort zone of individual persons. These are consecutively: a separated room (apartment room), internal space of apartment or house and external zone outside of apartment or house. Depending on how the space of an apartment is ordered (layout of separated rooms connected by a corridor, apartment on a few stores, transformable space...) the individual organises his intimate and semi-public zone inside it, shared with other occupants and visitors. The next stages mentioned

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<sup>6</sup> In symbolic sense (*it feels like home*) and sometimes literally (private property).

<sup>7</sup> Cultural capital means knowledge, memory, ethic and aesthetic values passed from generation to generation. This concept was introduced by Pierre Bourdieu.

<sup>8</sup> Properties identified by M. Szczepański and B. Jałowicki in *Miasto i przestrzeń w perspektywie socjologicznej*. 2010, p. 355.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 362.

by Rohmer and Moles are: district, city centre<sup>10</sup>, city, region (area within a distance of one day's travel there and back) and the last – space of travel. In my opinion one more stage should be introduced between apartment/house and district. This is the semi-public space belonging to the apartment, but outside its physical frames. I mean balconies, terraces, front gardens and home gardens, and all other spatial forms which may constitute an element connecting the inner and outer world of the apartment. These are elements important for building relations with neighbours and building belongingness of the individual to the surrounding environment. According to observations made by Jan Gehl<sup>11</sup> the architectural form of a residential building (encompassing the elements I mention by herein) and the quality of the surrounding space translate directly into quantity and quality of activities performed outside home.

### 3. PERCEPTION OF HOME

Nowadays, home as a place marked by emotions may take various forms. From mobile facilities, temporary facilities, to residential buildings<sup>12</sup>. The concept of *home* may be interpreted in a spiritual context (as an idea, adherence to place) or material (as a residential facility)<sup>13</sup>. I use the term *apartment* to denote a single residential premises in a multi-family building, excluding the interpretation of dwelling as a set of performed activities. In the classifications I use, *home* appears in a spiritual sense; however, many people taking the closed attitude identify home with the architectural facility where they live. Therefore, in some categories meanings may overlap.

In Polish cities the dominant form of home are multi-family buildings (with apartments as a specific form of *home*), detached single family houses (like city villas and houses in the suburbs) and residential hybrids. These latter may have different forms, from apartments above service establishments to complicated structures combining many different functions<sup>14</sup>. Multi-family buildings may be divided into those which are located in the city centre, housing estates situated in the districts outside the direct centre and the so-called “residential ghettos” such as housing estates built in isolation and far from urban tissue. In my analyses I decided to focus on these dominant forms of houses in the space of Polish cities.

Examples of the city residential houses referred to above may be classified into a few types. For development of characteristics of individual types I took several factors into consideration. These include: manner and place of spending leisure time, relations with

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<sup>10</sup> For some inhabitants a city centre is a district where they live.

<sup>11</sup> J. Gehl, *Życie między budynkami*, Wydawnictwo RAM, Kraków 2013.

<sup>12</sup> G. Nawrot, *O współczesnych formach zamieszkiwania w mieście*, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Śląskiej, Gliwice 2015.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 41.

<sup>14</sup> An example of a complicated residential and service hybrid is a complex of Linked Hybrid buildings designed by Steven Holl in Beijing and a market hall connected to apartments designed by MVRDV and located in Rotterdam.

neighbours, and transport. Three of these types are examples of a closed attitude towards the city, and one is an example of an open attitude.

### 3.1. “HOME-STRONGHOLD”

The first category comprises both detached single family houses and apartments in multi-family buildings. The basic criterion for belonging to this group is how the occupants of a particular facility spend their leisure time. In some cases, although the best conditions for recreation outside home are provided, people living in it will detach themselves from the environment. However, most frequently such an attitude is a consequence of unfavourable external conditions. A busy road, railway route, production facility, noise, traffic fumes discourage inhabitants from exploring the external environment. They spend free time inside the house<sup>15</sup>, and if they leave its physical boundaries, a dominant form of spending leisure time are visits to shopping centres or an *escape*<sup>16</sup> from the city<sup>17</sup>. In this case, the city is not perceived as a source of entertainment, an opportunity for personal and social development, but as a source of work.

The closed attitude is also transferred to interpersonal relations. Anonymity and poor knowledge of even the closest neighbours dominates. Leaving the physical frames of a house takes places only if it is necessary, for example to go to work, school, shopping. Interesting observations may be made analysing use of balconies in multi-family buildings. In places where a closed attitude is dominant, the balcony is unused or used occasionally – for instance as an additional space for storage (of bicycles, potato bags, useless or damaged objects<sup>18</sup>). Separation of the balcony zone by shielding an openwork balustrade is becoming increasingly popular. Such separation gives a clear signal of disengagement from the external environment and reluctance to integrate with occupants of the neighbouring buildings.

The architectural form of a residential facility may to a large extent contribute to the enhancement of such an approach. A lack of intermediate elements between the interior and exterior of the apartment and a lack of common spaces which somehow enforce contact with other people gives a chance of *sneaking* between home and means of transport. This is also a hindrance for persons willing to initiate some collective activity, but lack of favourable conditions is for them a psychological and physical barrier. And a good design for a multi-family building supports integration. A perfect example is the housing estate in Dziewięciu z Wujka Street in Katowice. It is a complex of multi-family buildings where thanks to widening and glazing of the corridor it became a well-functioning common space. For years the occupants have been meeting at common festivals on various occasions. Furthermore, the occupants

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<sup>15</sup> House as a residential building.

<sup>16</sup> This concept was used during the research I conducted on the issue *What do people need the city for?*. One of the respondents gave such answer to the question concerning the preferred form of activity in leisure time.

<sup>17</sup> City here occurs both in literal sense (administrative borders) and as an urbanised area.

<sup>18</sup> Author's observations.

equipped the common part with different plants which they jointly care for. Leaving the apartment is also impacted by its size. The smaller the living space is, the more often the occupants choose activities outside the building (or within one building in the semi-public space). In a large, spacious apartment with many rooms the willingness to spend time outside decreases. It is otherwise with people living in the old district of Barcelona, Barceloneta, where apartments are small – in the afternoons people leave their flats and spend time talking and playing between the buildings.

### 3.2. “GATED COMMUNITIES”

A specific example of home as a *stronghold* for its occupants are fenced *gated communities* outside the area of residential districts and city centre. I have used this concept to denote housing estates with limited, often controlled, access. These are spaces separated by fencing, cutting them off from other fragments of the city or district. Among them are both self-sufficient estates<sup>19</sup> and estates which were designed as mono-functional residential islands in suburban areas. An example of a self-sufficient estate is the Bazantowo estate in Katowice. Within its area, apart from apartments and houses, there is a nursing home, private kindergarten, primary school, junior high school, hotel with conference centre, sports facilities and shopping centre. The marketing slogan of this residential and service complex is “City within the city” and “We’ve taken care of everything”<sup>20</sup>. The message is clear – you can arrange all your daily activities without leaving the safe and known area of the estate. The city is no longer needed – it is only a source of work allowing a relevant standard of living to be maintained (unless work too is performed within the estate). The consequence is isolation from the external environment. A juxtaposition of artificially created division into *safe, fenced and secured world* and a city space suspected of being *unsafe* occurs.

Such isolation is not only bordering the estate with a fence. Such an attitude may become a lifestyle for some. The route between work and home is travelled in a car. It is a basic and in many instances the only means of transport. Walking on foot or by means of public transport becomes a considerable problem due to the distance to be covered. The world viewed from behind a window becomes something unknown and in consequence people feel uneasy, alienated in it. This *sterile* environment and careful selection of persons who are interacted with leads to development of the *we – they* approach, creation of artificial social barriers. With such an attitude building interpersonal relations is difficult, because the *we – they* division slowly begins to include also neighbours or acquaintances from outside the fencing.

In the other case, which is a complex of residential facilities without a relevant service infrastructure<sup>21</sup>, the inhabitants are also on a *safe island* isolated from the external world. However, they must leave their estate more often to satisfy even the basic needs (school, basic shopping) and search for entertainment. A place chosen most frequently to satisfy those needs is a space equally

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<sup>19</sup> Estate called self-sufficient by me is an estate which within its area provides not only basic services which is a positive issue, but also offers higher level services, in a way taking over *competences* of the city. If such an estate is separated from the city space, a negative phenomenon of isolation occurs.

<sup>20</sup> Source: <http://bazantowo.pl/>, accessed on 12.05.2016

<sup>21</sup> Lack of basic services, such as shops, greengrocers stands, kindergarten, hairdresser, beautician, etc.

as *safe and sterile* as a gated community, i.e. a shopping centre. As in the case of the self-sufficient estate, the city space is associated with something dirty and dangerous, because usually unknown.

Hypothetically, it may be assumed that in such favourable conditions of living and with a selected group of inhabitants interpersonal relations should develop well. Nonetheless, no higher activity of inhabitants of such type of estates was noted in comparison to activity of inhabitants of housing estates constructed of prefabricated elements, the so called *panelak*. According to my observations, the opposite is the case. The majority of people living in gated communities reproduce the pattern of *home-stronghold*. Nowadays, developers place a strong emphasis on quick profit and return rate on the investment. Such a hierarchy of priorities does not favour designing pro-neighbourhood places, savings are made on playgrounds for children, and recreational places for adults are not planned at all. Additionally, underground car parks with an elevator going directly to the staircase magnify isolation from the environment. In extreme cases occupants of neighbouring staircases may not even have a passing acquaintance with each other – they take another elevator and go straight to their cars.

### 3.3 “HOME IN CITY OUTSKIRTS”

The last category I distinguished as an example of a closed attitude is a home in the outskirts. I mean here especially the rural areas which in consequence of territorial growth of the cities have been incorporated within the city borders, but the locality of the place is still distinctly felt. In this context, I use the closed attitude in the *city – home* relation, as opposed to *home – home surroundings*. In this case deep relations between neighbours may occur and be maintained throughout long years of living in the same area. These relations, however, are totally detached from the city itself. It is only an artificial administrative assignment, and choices made in relation to workplaces, entertainment and education are in no way related to it.

Apart from the indigenous inhabitants of such areas of the city, a large part are exogenous inhabitants. They may be divided into two types – people brought up in rural areas and after some years coming back to such dwelling environment and those who were brought up in multi-family buildings and for long years cherished the need to build a house<sup>22</sup>. As long as the first group of inhabitants quite quickly adapts to new conditions, the other group is not always successful in this process. The long travel time to reach the city centre zone and entertainment facilities gradually become exhausting and in consequence this leads to more frequent decisions to stay at home and a reduction in out-of-home activities. The perspective of difficulties in leaving one’s suburban district (multiplied by a lack of road infrastructure sufficient to accommodate so numerous group of users) in combination with a feeling of alienation in a new place of living often leads to isolation. An additional difficulty in maintaining relations in a new place is lack of facilities and public spaces of a communal nature. In a district of detached single family houses, which still 10–15 years ago was accompanied by fields, meadows, there are no sufficient facilities for integration. The firehouse and the square

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<sup>22</sup> K. Kajdanek, *Suburbanizacja po polsku*, Zakład Wydawniczy NOMOS, Kraków 2012.

in front of the church have lost their old significance and it is necessary to supply such areas with new neighbourhood spaces or revitalise the existing ones.

### 3.4. “CITY AS AN EXTENSION OF HOME”

City as an extension of home is an attitude independent of place of living. It may be attained in any location; it requires, however, a relevant motivation and willingness to act. In places located at a considerable distance from the city centre using what the city has to offer is quite difficult, but not impossible. Such situations occur fairly seldom and a general assumption may be made that such an attitude appears if people live in the city centre or districts close to the inner centre<sup>23</sup>. Another way to demonstrate an open attitude to the environment is active participation in the life of the neighbourhood within the estate or set of buildings (the case of indigenous inhabitants of the suburbs). However, the subject I discuss includes the *city – home* relation, and hence the decision not to study this issue deeper.

An element characteristic of an open attitude is strong identification with the city as a place. Such a phenomenon may be observed when staying in Barcelona, in the old seaside district of the city – Barceloneta. Barcelona flags flay in many windows, and the inhabitants see themselves and primal inhabitants of this city. They constitute a hermetic community strongly attached to the place they live. And although antipathy to people from outside the city is nothing commendable, this exceptional cherishing of bonds with the home city lasting for generations is something worth notice and respect. Independent movements related to Catalonia are clearly visible in the whole of Barcelona, but only in Barceloneta do the inhabitants express their affection towards the city itself.

The means of moving in the city encourages an open attitude. Giving priority to pedestrians and bicycles over cars stimulates arranging things in service establishments located in frontages of streets and local markets, and not in shopping centres. With pedestrian and bicycle movement, people more often have the tendency to *linger* in public spaces of the city, which is mentioned by Jan Gehl in his publications<sup>24</sup>. In a way, lingering is also a form of spending leisure time. Observation of events taking place in the public space, staying in cafés, bars and restaurants, and sitting, meeting with friends create city life and are an inseparable element of the open attitude towards the city. Perceived from this perspective, the concept of home gains another rank. *Home* as a residential building becomes a space more intimate, specially treated. It becomes a place where it is possible to slow down and have a good rest. It may also be a stop between everyday duties (work, school) and entertainment and recreation in the city. On the other hand, the city becomes a part of *home* in the spiritual sense, an element of everyday life and domesticated space.

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<sup>23</sup> In case of Katowice an example *may* be living in the Gwiazdy Estate, 1 Maja Street or Gliwicka Street – according to administrative division they are district neighbouring the city centre but small distance and spatial bonds favourably impact adopting open attitude towards the city.

<sup>24</sup> J. Gehl, *Miasta dla ludzi*, Wydawnictwo RAM, Kraków 2014.

Such attitude towards life supports pro-social behaviours and creation of relations between people. Taking care of the common weal comes easier when everybody sees a piece of good for themselves in it. Leaving the physical borders of the home is very popular in South European counties (sitting on benches in the vicinity of home is a fixed part of the day routine in the already mentioned Barcelona and in Greek islands), but it also used to be the same in some primal rural customs. One of the examples I encountered during one of my journeys was a village bordering with the Exclusion Zone in Ukraine. It was a custom in this village to build tight, wooden fences, but a fixed element of a pre-entry zone to the plot was a wooden bench. Walking along the road it was possible to observe many people gathering and talking around the benches with colourful wooden fences in the background. It is a special case, however. The open attitude is most frequently developed if favourable conditions are created.

#### 4. ELEMENTS SUPPORTING OPEN ATTITUDE

A superordinate element in the development of the open attitude is the individual's willingness to participate in city and social life. Such an engaged attitude is the most desirable in city life. However, to encourage people to openness, such behaviours must be supported by an adequately designed social and architectural infrastructure. There are things which the urban planners may not impact directly. These are: severe weather conditions, the manner in which young people communicate that has moved to the Internet, prices in restaurants and cafés in the market square and others. But through forming the residential architecture and public space in an appropriate way we may encourage the inhabitants to participate in public life.

The basic issue is the introduction of intermediate zones between the apartment and the city. The number and size of windows, design of an entrance zone to the building and introduction of balconies and terraces favourably impact improvement of the zone directly neighbouring the home. Even a small square in front of the entrance, a bench with a flowerbed, bicycle stands and other elements of landscape architecture considerably improve the quality of public space. An element which has a positive impact on inhabitants of the cities is greenery in any size (from flowers in pots to trees along the street). It is an issue mentioned by the inhabitants during many social consultations and opinion polls. Greenery attracts people and encourages them to remain within. The city of Barcelona I have already mentioned consists of many neighbourhood spaces actively used by the inhabitants. In spite of dense housing, every now and then a palm appears or blooming bushes, and where administrative authorities failed to provide it, the inhabitants create greenery through plants in their balconies. Glazed, openable terraces are also a helpful solution. In Polish climatic conditions, the number of days with weather allowing people to stay in the open air changes, depending on the year, it is however much less favourable than in warmer regions of Europe. The introduction of glazed balconies or terraces as a permanent element of the apartment space will enable the inhabitants to become acclimated to using such an element, and when favourable weather appears – they will open the apartment to the environment. It is also a good way to encourage inhabitants to leave their *comfort zone* and enter the next stage of the space continuum.

## 5. SUMMARY

With a proper attitude on the part of urban planners, inhabitants and a proper vision from the municipality authorities, a city may become a part of home. However, without the contribution made by these three factors, the open attitude towards the city will still be an exception among the overwhelming closed attitude.

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