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APPLYING THE IDEA OF CREATIVITY – *CREATIVE SYNTAX*
AS A TOOL OF PLACEMAKING. CASE STUDY OF THE DOWNTOWN AREA
OF POZNAŃ IN POLAND

WDRAŻANIE IDEI KREATYWNOŚCI – *CREATIVE SYNTAX* JAKO NARZĘDZIE
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Abstract

The aim of this study is to draw attention to the necessity of creating places revitalizing social life within the downtown public space. It is to underline the necessity of creating the scenographic background of the city life, through the creation of specified urban elements which have an impact on the city’s choreography. The study employs a multicriterial, original research method which allows the subject matter to be examined within the following aspects: spatio-compositional, semanto-perceptive, and socio-economic. As a result of investigation, the desired direction of the development activities has been achieved within the scope of the utilization of the trump areas for the creation of a creative public space and within the scope of the utilization of the deficit space for the creation of places – focal points of spatio-social activity contributing to the revitalization of the downtown area.

Keywords: creative syntax, public space, spatial and social attractiveness

Streszczenie

Artykuł prezentuje badania dotyczące tworzenia miejsc aktywizujących życie społeczne w przestrzeni publicznej centrum miasta. Artykuł przedstawia przeprowadzone przez autorkę badania ścisłego obszaru centrum Poznania z zastosowaniem wielokryterialnej metody dotyczącej aspektów: przestrzenno-kompozycyjnych, semantyczno-percepcyjnych i społeczno-ekonomicznych. W wyniku badań sformułowano pożądany kierunek działań rozwojowych w zakresie wykorzystania przestrzeni atutowych do tworzenia kreatywnej przestrzeni publicznej oraz w zakresie wykorzystania przestrzeni deficytowej do tworzenia miejsc aktywności przestrzenno-społecznej. Działania te mogą wpłynąć znacząco na ożywienie przestrzeni publicznej centrum.

Słowa kluczowe: syntaksa, przestrzeń publiczna, przestrzenno-społeczna atrakcyjność

1. Introduction

Nowadays, in Polish development conditions, creativity, culture and art may be considered as important factors conducive to the revival of the downtown space, both in the spatial as well as the socioeconomic dimension. This research is based on the assumption that the creative space is to revive the downtown, providing an egalitarian, vibrant, friendly and changing public space, where the most important thing is to create opportunities for interaction and social contacts, as well as to educate and inspire through the development of creative potential¹.

Areas of creativity – *creative syntax* at work are understood as a planned spatial arrangement which favours the synergy of creative activities and increasing demand and supply in the field of creativity [14]. While designating areas of creativity, it is necessary to take into account functions related to culture and art, because the creation of enclaves in downtown districts, where culture supports creativity, is a significant opportunity for development, which supports the vitality of the Old-Town districts. Owing to the location advantages of the city centre, such as the proximity of public and private institutions, organisations or companies operating within the realm of art and culture, it is possible to increase synergy and exchange of activities and ideas, as well as co-operation between these entities.

When defining creativity, the author refers to Landry [4,10] who understands it as a readiness to unconventional, flexible interpretation and assessment of changing conditions and situations in which tradition is as attractive and desirable as modernity. Creativity can be an element conducive to the creation of public space that supports the exchange of ideas, resources and goods, and also provides a full spectrum of social interactions.

The importance of these aspects of public space is also emphasised by Rykwert [12, pp.25, 30], who claims that the climate and substance of the city are always perceptible to residents and visitors. Spatial resources, consciously or subconsciously absorbed, seen, touched, permeated, represent a graspable representation of something intangible, i.e. the identity and culture of the local community. Representation is understood as reflection, intention or project, because urban tissue and the image of the city are always the result of human will. The city is never passive. There is still a continuous interaction between man and matter and image – changing the space we change the society and vice versa. Each description of the physical shape of the city, which can be drawn up on the basis of a movement pattern, reflects a constant and subtle dialectic between the recipients of the space and the physical form that surrounds them, which affects the image of the city as radically as economic or political life².

This paper discusses the issues of culture and art in the urban space, which, in the author's view, constitute important elements of creative space equipment, balancing meaningfully between the real and the emotional world. The role of culture and art in city life and development can be summarised in four areas [18]:

¹ The author understands the creative potential as a functional basis, which can underpin the development of creative features, stimulating social change, and thus favouring the generation of economic benefits. Creative potential expressed spatially is the concentration of economic activity in the field of the creative sector.

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- ▶ Semantic – as a cultural offer contributing to the creation of the city’s image,
- ▶ Spatial – understood as cultural districts of high attractiveness for new residents and significant developmental and social dynamics,
- ▶ Social – in which culture is an important factor integrating the local community and strengthening the identity of the place, as well as
- ▶ Economic – according to which culture and art should be perceived as elements constituting a strong tourist magnet and of great importance in the context of promoting the city.

Perceiving the areas of creativity as a *creative syntax* was adopted in relation to linguistic meaning, in which syntax means a system of formal dependencies between individual elements. Syntax is a system composed of individual elements such as words, relationships and rules that allow you to create an infinite number of yet unknown phrases [20]. The area of creativity – *creative syntax* is defined by the author as a well thought-through spatial arrangement of surface character, characterised by concentration of creative potential and compositional values, as well as high visual attractiveness and emotional significance.

The assumption of determining the areas of creativity is to articulate assets existing in the downtown and indicate deficits, which owing to creativity have a chance for development and activation.

Deficits are considered in the context of the possibility of transforming them into assets, thanks to the synergy of activities, places and creative potential. The main goal of forming creative areas – *creative syntax* is to increase the attractiveness of the downtown space understood mainly as the attractiveness of the place, expressed by spatial, functional, social and economic qualities that form the basis of the placemaking idea. In this sense, the area of creativity is perceived by the author as a stage equipped with scenography, and people are participants who succumb to urban choreography.

In the context of the relativity of space with the recipient, issues related to the urban composition are essential. Searching for the right solutions, it is crucial to explore the existing downtown space in terms of the possibility of adapting it to new needs – playing a story of everyday and unusual life in a temporary urban theatre. In this sense, the role of an architect-urban planner is not limited to creating a scenography background for urban life, but above all, it is meant to influence the choreography of the city by creating specific affordances. Shaping the interdependence of participation in urban life, creating cognitive values of urban space, which are subordinated to the multi-sensory reception and interaction of space, affects the recipient’s satisfaction interacting with the city, providing him/her with a full range of positive emotional experiences related to comfort, convenience, security or pleasure. The concept of designating creative areas – *creative syntax* should be seen as a possibility to stimulate economic gains and downtown district activation³ because the creative potential on the one hand translates into direct financial effects for the city, and on the other hand – into indirect profits – understood in the context of the development of tourism potential based on

³ Hawkins [5] notes that in today’s world, people who own ideas have much more potential than owners of material goods.

the use of existing districts of unique character and constituting the basis for the development of the economy of experience, economy of sensations [5,8] The growing demand for experience goods is an opportunity to develop the cultural offer of the city centre, due to the special atmosphere, authenticity, uniqueness and sense of community with other recipients. An important factor is also the quality and aesthetics of public space, which together with a wide cultural offer can activate almost pro-consumer participation in culture [13, p.194-195]⁴. Throsby [16, p.73] emphasizes new orientations and changes in the modern economy, speaking of a departure from a standard model focused on goods for the sake of a new model focused on people.

The success of the experience economy depends to a large extent on the attractiveness of urban space, which is why in the research it is so important to provide space in the downtown area (placemaking idea), whose cognitive value will be interesting enough to attract new customers – residents and tourists – and thus affect the economic activation of the area.

2. Research idea – the role of culture and creativity in downtown development

The essence of these considerations is an attempt to translate the existing spatial values of a downtown area into desirable effects of social vitality and specific economic results. The research is to define the idea of creative syntax and introduce an original method of identification, assessment and promotion of creative potential located in the city centre to improve the attractiveness of spatial offer and to strengthen social revival and economic activation. Creative potential, which is defined as a concentration of economic activity of the creative sector, is understood as an opportunity to develop creative functions that serve to revitalize and increase the attractiveness of the city centre thanks to culture and art. In this approach, it is very important to articulate the individuality of places through the introduction of the urban equipment specially designed for the given space within a participatory planning process. This idea is close to the assumptions of design intervention. The aim is to individualize the place taking into account the function of time – the users change and so do the needs and visions, therefore the spatial equipment should alter in a certain scope as well. The temporal perspective of proposed urban furniture is short – up to two or three years. Nevertheless, it is crucial to ensure continuity of these short-term solutions' implementation and to understand it as an investment in the development of social capital, in which profits may appear on the longer time horizon. The key element of the work is to study the role of the identified creative syntax in the context of stimulating social activity, revitalizing the inner city space and providing the basis for the development of the innovative idea of an experience economy [8,17], the application of which can positively affect city economy.

The research concerns three problem areas:

1. recognition and spatial designation of areas of creativity – creative syntax, due to the presence of features recognized by the author's methodology,

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2. comparative analysis within the scope of the designated creative syntax and a system of their spatial connections,
3. designation of a sequential road offer system within the given creative syntax, for which the spatial and emotional value was evaluated in relation to the adopted compositional and visual determinants and distinguishing features, as well as the degree of road attractiveness in various ranges quality – instrumental, experimental and semantic – with reference to the marketing tool “AIDAS” – Attention, Interest, Desire, Action, Satisfaction [15, p. 58].

The starting point for the research was the diagnosis of the role of creativity and culture in the development of the analysed cities, on the basis of the European Union ranking – “Cultural and Creative Cities Monitor”⁵. For the author, the most important ranking of the tool “Cultural and Creative Cities Monitor“, is the index of cities of culture and creativity “C3“, developed by categories with regard to their size and population. It presents quantitative data on creativity and culture in cities, included in twenty-nine indicators relating to nine dimensions reflecting three main aspects: cultural, social and economic viability of cities:

1. The aspect of cultural viability – studied in the field of cultural infrastructure and participation in culture,
2. The aspect of creative economy – illustrates the role of the culture and creativity sectors in the economic recovery, through the creation of new jobs and the development of innovative potential,
3. The aspect of a favourable environment – identifies tangible and intangible assets that help cities attract creative talent and stimulate cultural involvement.

In her research, the author refers to all three aspects of evaluation included in the “C3“ ranking, which were taken into account and interpreted in terms of composition, offer and semantics, assessed according to the adopted, original method. The aspect of cultural viability is examined in the compositional and spatial layout devoted to the identification of the presence of creative functions within the city centres of the cities studied. The aspect of creative economy is included at the level of identifying a conducive *milieu*, which is a development potential in the field of creativity, resulting from accumulation of spatial activities related to the creative sector. The aspect of the desired environment is examined in the compositional-semantic layer of the selected, most attractive sequences defined within the creative areas – *the creative syntax*.

According to the adopted methodology, the *creative syntax* area is composed of linear systems and smaller surface elements that occur in specific spatial and semantic relationships. The author defines them in the following way:

1. rules: expressed in the form of linear connections of designated surface systems of creative areas – *creative syntax*, in order to ensure the desired compositional and offer gradation;

⁵ “Cultural and Creative Cities“ is a tool for monitoring and assessing the functioning of culture and creativity in European cities, using quantitative and qualitative data. Source: [19].

2. relationships: spatial, semantic, perceptual and sensory, underlying the designated sequential road offer systems, which serve to underline the compositional and spatial values of the system, as well as to clearly translate semantic values and aesthetic and emotional experiences into the spatial language;
3. words: individual elements delineated within the creative area – *creative syntax*, with free access to – creative public spaces or of local character – places understood as focal points of social activity that provide spatial flexibility, changeability of functions and attractiveness of the spatial offer to provide information about the social revival of the downtown areas.

3. Research method⁶ – *creative syntax* as a tool of the placemaking process. Case study of the Poznan downtown area

The city of Poznan was chosen by the author as the case study for detailed research. Poznan ranks second in the field of culture and creativity according to the “C3” index by “Cultural and Creative Cities Monitor” just after Warsaw which, as the capital of Poland, is of other scientific interest. Poznan’s position is strong especially in the aspect of the creative economy. According to the “C3” index, Poznan is shown to be the definite leader in terms of the number of new jobs in the creative sectors and it also has good grades for a creative environment, especially in the areas of human capital, education as well as local and external accessibility.

The research was carried out in three stages. The first stage is used to identify the existing situation regarding the occurrence and concentration of creative potential, as well as the identification of advantageous and deficit spaces and their compositional-spatial connections. The result is presented in graphic indications in the form of dots illustrating the spatial location of businesses provided with creative activities. About 4620 registered activities were identified on a surface of 812 ha, which makes approximately 48.6% of the entire downtown area (Fig. 1).

The second stage involves designating creative areas – *creative syntax*. Areas of creativity – *creative syntax* have been set within the city centre of Poznan, minimized according to the provisions of existing planning documents. In order to determine the areas of creativity – *creative syntax* – a business situation related to the creative sector was diagnosed, which, according to the author, constituted the desired milieu conducive to the development of creativity. Then areas of concentration of creative potential were indicated as representing the most favourable spatial environment conducive to activities serving the development of creative functions and, as a result, a social revival of the downtown space; thus providing the basis for its innovative economic activation. The combination of creative potential is, according to the author, a *sine qua non* condition for designating creative areas – a *creative syntax*.

In the next step, the spaces characterised with the desired features were indicated – built-up and undeveloped structure related to the existing creative functions as well as the deficit space – depreciated built-up and undeveloped structure. The elements identified are connected by

⁶ This research method is thoroughly presented in the book written by this author concerning this issue [11].

public spaces of a detaining or leading nature, both with hardened surfaces (streets, squares) and soft surfaces (squares, parks). By identifying these elements, it is possible to determine the areas of creativity – *creative syntax* (Fig. 2).

The third stage of the research concerns the designation and detailed evaluation of a selected sequential road offer system within creative areas – *creative syntax* (Fig. 3). The continuity of the picturesque sequences of the sequential road offer system was assessed along with the main distinguishing factors for impressions affecting the quality of spatial relationships, constituting the basis for qualitative assessment according to accepted determinants of spatial values in accordance with the perceptual-experience pattern of orientation / experiencing / remembering. Analysis of the selected sequential road offer system concerned accentuation and string rhythmisation (dominants, accents, directions), of sequential rhythms (urban interiors of leading and retaining character) as well as perceptual continuity and continuity of functions.





Fig. 1. Identification of the existing creative potential defined by research within the city centre of Poznan (author's own elaboration)

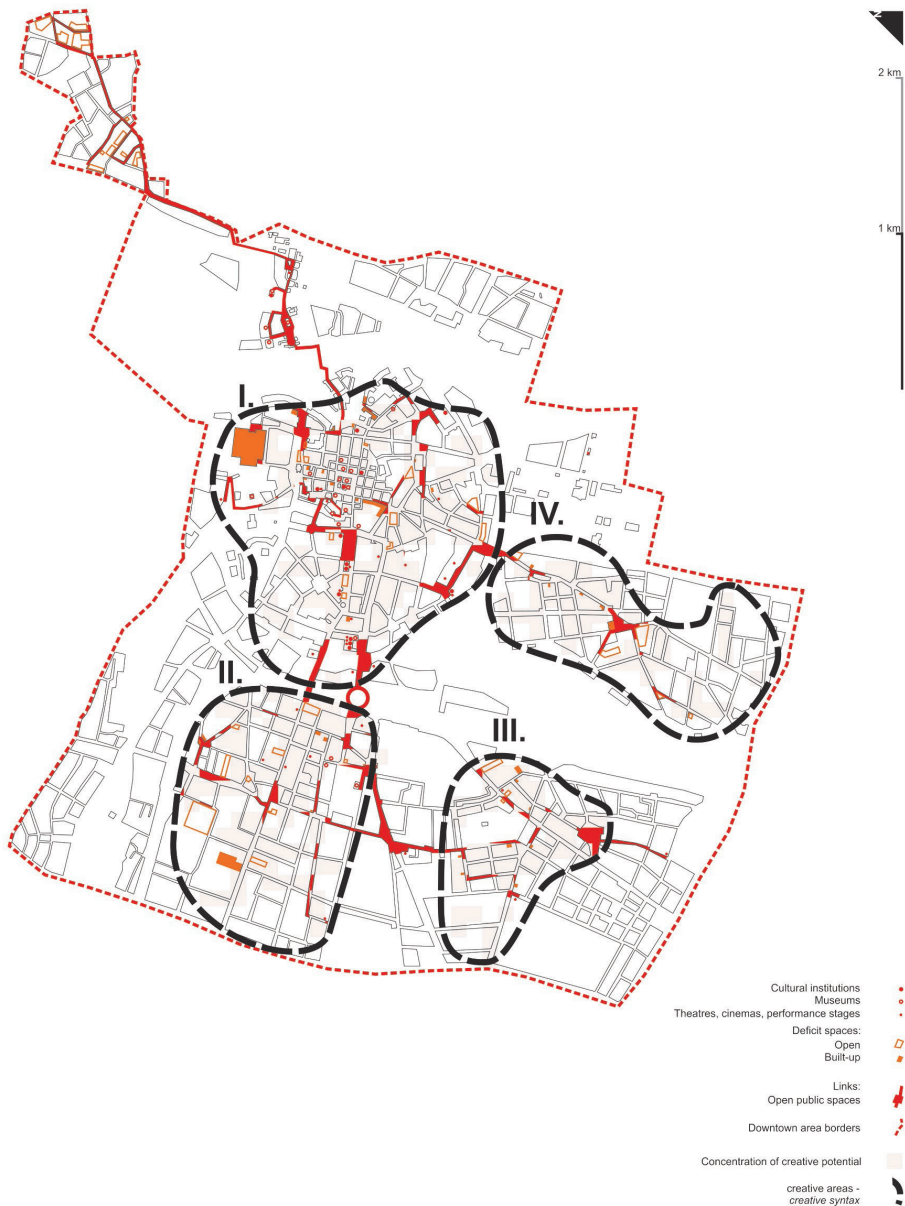


Fig. 2. Identification of spaces with desirable features and deficit spaces and their connections in relation to the concentration of creative potential, as well as designation of creativity areas – *creative syntax* within the city centre of Poznan (author's own elaboration)

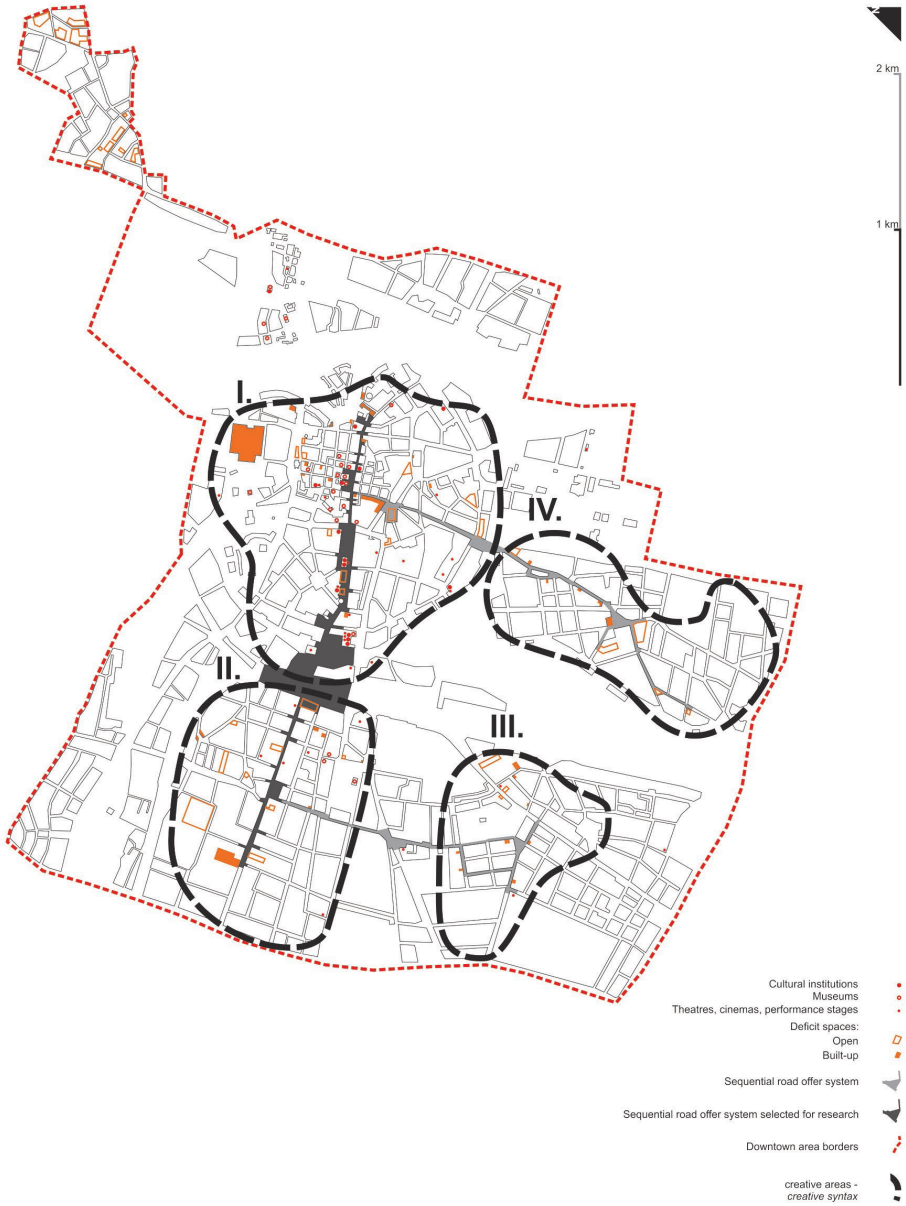


Fig. 3. Indication of the sequential road offer system chosen for the detailed research including Main Market Square (marked with black outline) within the designated areas of creativity – *creative syntax* within Poznan downtown (author's own elaboration)

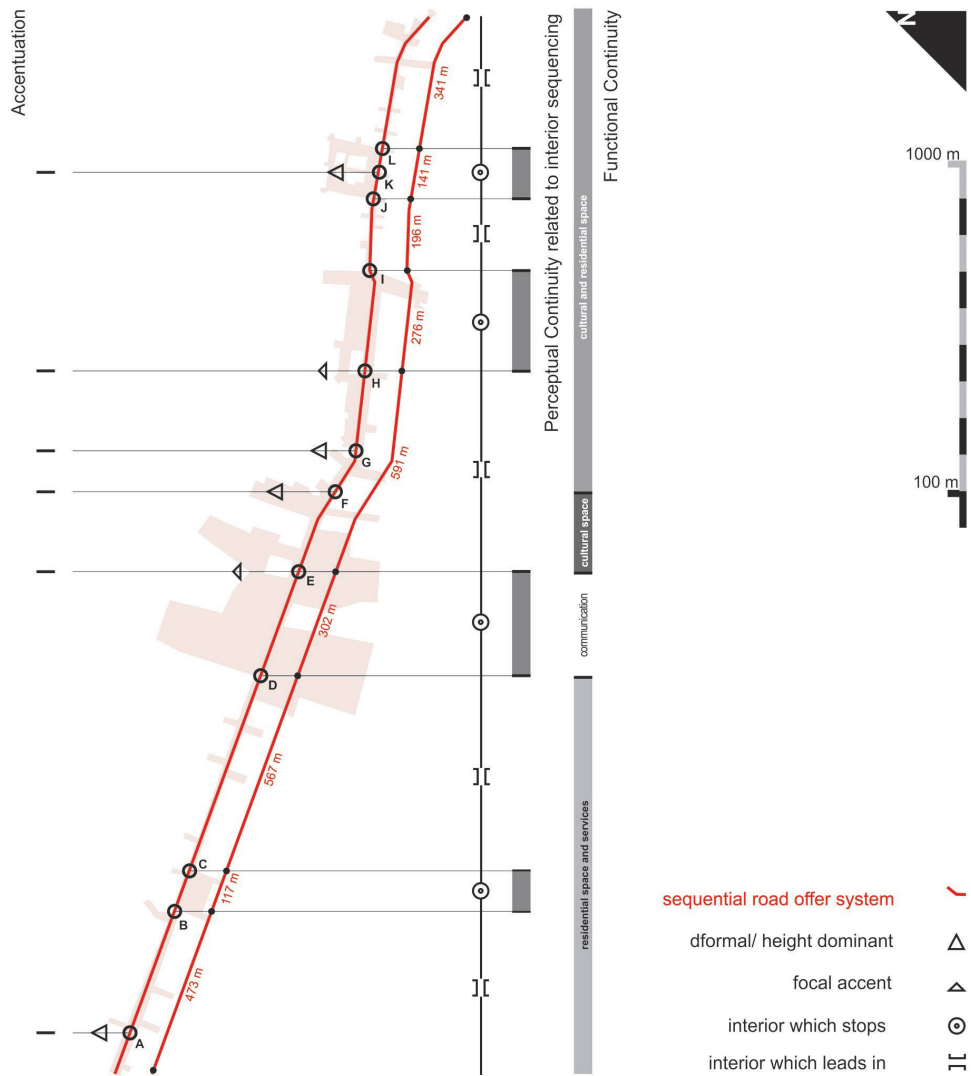


Fig. 4. Valuation rating regarding the continuity of scenic sequences and main distinguishing factors affecting the quality of spatial relationships of a selected fragment of the sequential road offer system within the designated areas of creativity – *creative syntax* within the city centre of Poznan. Road offer system including Main Market Square (author's own elaboration)

As a result of the research, at this stage, the creative area was assessed – *creative syntax* – using the semantic differential method to determine the degree of spatial stimulation according to the adopted classification. The assessment of the degree of attractiveness of the functional and spatial offer of the sequential road offer system with the use of a marketing tool which presents the emotional template of supply and demand for creativity and by creativity has also been carried out.

Following the author's method, the assessment was made of the sequential road offer system in terms of instrumental, sensory and semantic determinants of spatial values. The evaluation of separate fragments of road offer system divided by identified sequential views from A to K sections were done to valorize it in reference to three aspects: the spatial layer – orientation (intuitive or forced), the sensory layer – experience (stimulating or silencing), and the semantic layer – remembering (positive or negative) what is presented below in the graphic way (Fig. 5).

The result of the research are recommendations regarding actions that should be taken to revive the downtown space through creativity within indicated creative public spaces and places understood as socio-spatial activity focal points. The proposed directions of action are: preservation, development and stimulation of local values. The spaces marked with a black outline were selected for preservation or development (Fig.6). For the preservation there were intended those spaces for which the determinants of spatial values of instrumental, sensory and semantic quality were the highest rated, which means the following evaluation: intuitive orientation, stimulating experience, positive remembering. Spaces of desirable features in which there was identified the lack of one of the three components in terms of instrumental quality (orientation), sensory (experience) and semantic (remembering) were qualified for development. In these spaces, which are locally related to existing creative functions, it is recommended to introduce new elements of public space equipment that, through their artistic and creative value can provide new stimuli that increase spatial development.

Deficit spaces were designated for stimulation (marked with an orange outline in the case of spatial gaps and orange filling in built-up areas), the assessment of which showed the largest deficiencies in instrumental (orientation), sensory (experience) and semantic (remembering) layers (Fig. 6). These spaces were diagnosed as those with the highest development potential, in which it is recommended to create places that can be socially activated through the use of creativity, both at the level of function and urban equipment.

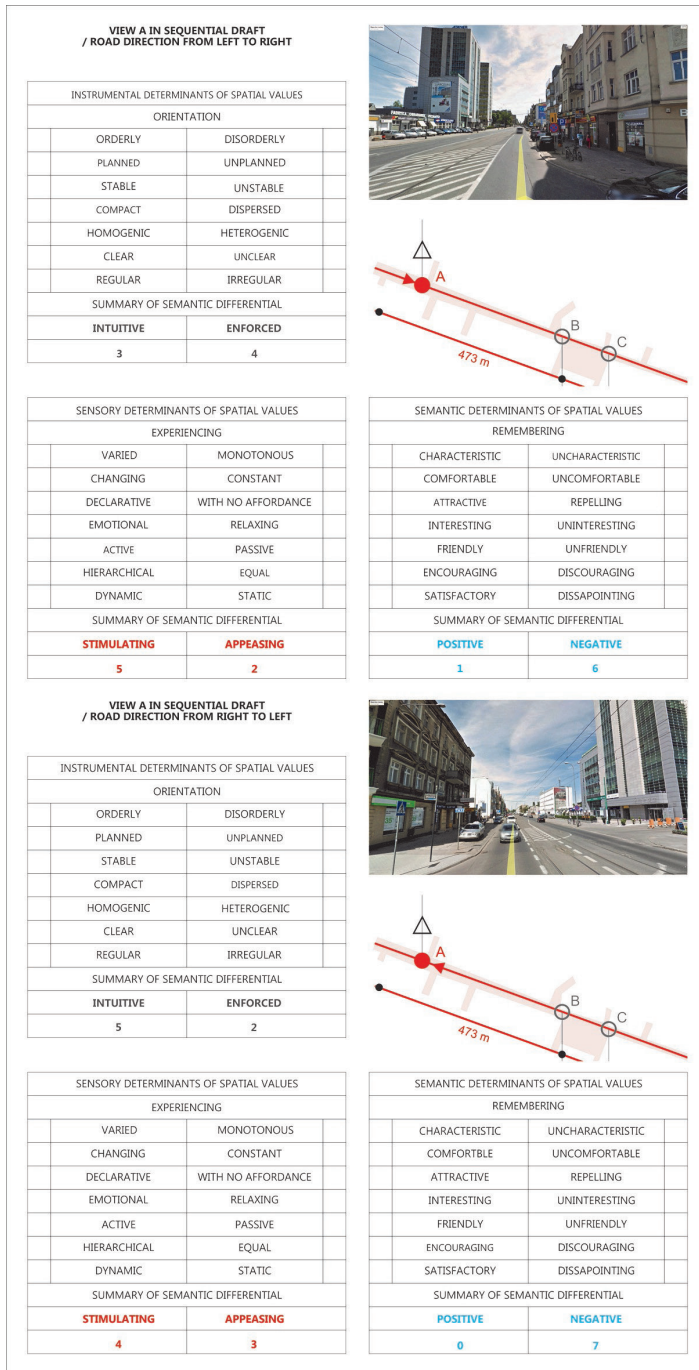


Fig. 5. Evaluation by means of the semantic differential method of a selected fragment of the sequential road offer system within the designated areas of creativity – *creative syntax* within Poznan downtown to determine the degree of spatial stimulation according to the adopted classification. Road offer system including Main Market Square – sequence A to B (author’s own elaboration)

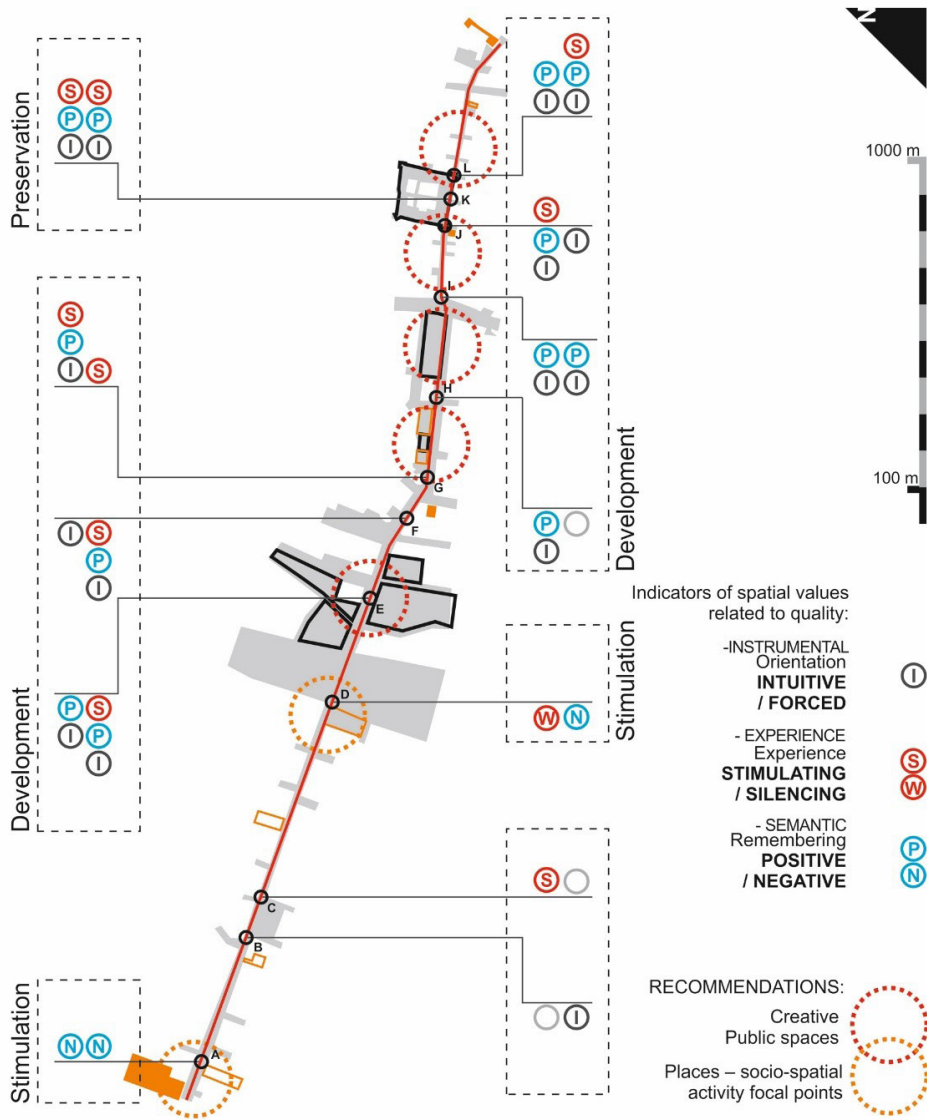


Fig. 6. Summary of research and recommendations – a reference to the most developmental areas of creativity in spaces of desirable features and deficit spaces within the designated areas of creativity – *creative syntax* within Poznan downtown (author's own elaboration)

4. Results and discussion

Determination of the degree of development opportunities in the field of creativity within the city centre of the examined cities follows from the identification and assessment of spaces of desirable features and deficit spaces, which were considered to be the most important components in this respect. According to the adopted research method, the more deficits in which it is possible to introduce the desired development trends and activities, the greater development of creative potential. The following principle was adopted: those spaces in which only deficit spaces or those in which both the spaces of desirable features and the deficit spaces were identified were accepted for detailed research, whereas the spaces with no spaces of desirable features or deficit spaces or those with only the spaces of desirable features were rejected.

The desired directions of development activities as regards the use of the spaces with desirable features to form creative public space contributing to the revival of the public space through creativity, culture and art were also formulated. The indicated spaces of desirable features are built-up spaces with a creative or undeveloped function located in their immediate vicinity. Identified deficit spaces are vacant or undeveloped plots, both in municipal and private possession. According to the author, with the appropriate organizational and financial support of the city and non-governmental organizations, they can be temporarily arranged and used for the needs of local communities before investment activities are undertaken within them, which may take several or several dozen years. Selected spaces with the highest development potential in terms of creativity can, with appropriate use, improve the offer quality, and also influence the revival and socio-economic activation of the city centre. According to the adopted methodology, a very important aspect regarding the desired direction of development is homeostasis, understood as balancing socio-cultural and economic forces. It is about finding a balance between development and protection, thanks to which space can retain its stimulating and inspiring character through some understatements. According to this principle, recommended for development in the field of creativity are those spaces of desirable features, which in the future may contribute to increasing the spatial and social attractiveness of the city centre, and deficit spaces that economically inactive, with appropriate stimulation, can become socially active.

Social benefits are long-term effects, such as education concerning responsibility for common space, building social awareness in urban coexistence, building social capital of the city by inspiring creativity, as well as increasing spatial attractiveness, perceived in the context of building the desired image and iconicity of the city, which can translate into specific economic results.

5. Conclusions

These considerations have been underlain with the idea that recommends appropriate use of current conditions conducive for the development of creativity understood as a high EU rating as per the “C3” index and conducive for the accumulation of creative function in



the downtown area. The author is of the opinion that we shall make good use of favourable conditions and aspire to expand creative activities into the area of municipal management. We shall, furthermore, strive to ensure the downtown space with its iconic, spatial meaning, which may significantly affect the quality of space and its offer and promote the downtown in a variety of aspects: spatial – attractiveness of downtown space, including public space; social – activation of local entrepreneurship, education and development of social potential; and economic – the economy of experiences, development of functional and spatial offer in the area of creativity and accompanying services.

The research has given a presentation of a method that can be used for the balancing of the spatial and social effects with the economic effects to preserve an appropriate cycle of creativity. The research was not intended for the purpose of defining detailed spatial decisions for obtaining defined spatial effects because these effects can hardly be unambiguously defined and generalised – therefore these decisions may differ depending on the local needs and conditions of development at a particular moment in time. The main goal of the author is to stress the fact that stimulation for development and balancing the economic factor, preventing its dominance, are the most important things. In the author's mind, for the downtown space to be creativity inspiring and stimulating, certain understatements and semantic openness need to be retained because space that is irresponsible and changeable can prove to be highly active from a social point of view.

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