

## ARCHITECTURAL RESEARCH ON SEMI-PRIVATE SPACE IN MULTI-FAMILY HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

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### Abstract

The paper presents research on utilizing space in housing environment. It makes an attempt to identify problems arising during twenty years of utilization in a specific case. It points at positive and negative phenomena which influence the quality of dwelling. It analyzes a degree and type of residents' activity as well as that of outsiders from the point of view of such elements as: the method of shaping a development, accessibility, visibility etc. It raises an issue of appropriating a space which belongs to residents in the studied facilities.

### Streszczenie

Artykuł przedstawia badania dotyczące użytkowania przestrzeni w środowisku mieszkaniowym. Na konkretnym przykładzie podejmuje próbę rozpoznania problemów wynikających w czasie dwudziestu lat użytkowania. Wskazuje pozytywne i negatywne zjawiska, jakie mają wpływ, na jakość zamieszkiwania. Analizuje stopień i rodzaj aktywności mieszkańców oraz osób postronnych w kontekście elementów takich jak np. sposób ukształtowania zabudowy, dostępność, widoczność itd. Porusza problem zawłaszczania przestrzeni, która przynależna jest mieszkańcom badanych obiektów.

Keywords: Semi-private space, Quality of life, Residents and outsiders activity, Accessibility, Visibility.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The present times are characterized by: a crazy life pace, mobility, a change in the style and place of work, dwelling, a different way of spending leisure time [9]. Unlimited possibilities of communication, flow of capital, information, services as well as activities of stateless corporations influence our lives [7]. The described research refers to the issue of housing environment quality which is influenced by the changing factors mentioned above.

Cultural and demographic factors:

- the changing family model
- ageing of society
- the decreasing population growth
- population migrations

Social factors:

- inhabitants impoverishment
- unemployment
- hooliganism, pathologies
- isolation, a lack of acceptance
- migrations
- a lack of place identification, ties with the place, a lack of social engagement
- a lack of positive relationships among neighbours/ a sense of neighbours' community
- a lack of a sense of security

Economic factors:

- a poor technical standard
- a low standard of facilities and surroundings
- a lack of repair actions

Spatial problems:

- a lack of parking spaces
- a lack of places which enable socializing
- existence of useless spaces
- environment degradation

## 2. LITERATURE STUDIES

The problems mentioned above cause inhabitants' dissatisfaction with the place they live in both on the scale of a city and a district or housing estate. A lack of stability, deepening differences between the poor and the rich, increasingly weaker relationships among neighbors cause that inhabitants "withdraw" from the places used so far [6]. In such a case we are searching for determinants which will enable a design providing or enhancing good neighborly relationships as well as activating people in their closest environment. Literature studies refer to models of Christopher Alexander, who created the whole system of values connected with a friendly environment [1].

A specific attention was paid in the paper to safety, one of main needs in Maslow's theory [15]. Recognizing this issue started with the "defensible space" theory by Oscar Newman, who is the author of a programme of revitalizing dangerous districts in American cities by means of marking in them so-called "mini-neighbourhoods", which are areas recognized by a local community as their own territory [2].

One by one CPTED rules (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design), widely used in the USA and Canada, were studied. Then we became acquainted with OPDM programme (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister), which proposes Jane Jacobs' rules in the report of 2004 and concerns a system of planning and prevention in England [3]. The studies by J. Jacobs, O. Newman, CTEP concerned directly the problems of controlling space, territoriality, supervision, observation and activity in space [8]. The paper also refers to studies on environmental psychology, which perceives the environment as a determinant of human behaviour that touches upon problems of territoriality [5]. Because one of the elements of defensible space is an impression that it belongs to somebody, this element seems to be essential while determining the ownership of a given territory, which also means its boundaries, not only the physical ones. So how shall we "mark a space" so that it would be interpreted as someone's property?

## 3. APPLIED RESEARCH METHODS

In the paper there are applied:

- literature analyses
- analyses of architectural and town planning records
- "in situ" research – observation of changes in time /maintenance state, dangerous places, activities of inhabitants and people coming from outside, changes introduced by the cooperative and their influence on a current situation
- photographic analyses
- interviews with residents

The objective of the study was to evaluate a selected environment from the point of view of security sense and activities of residents as well as "strangers". The aim of the research was to recognize, register and monitor changes, behaviour and phenomena (problems) which appeared during a twenty-year-long utilization.

The research included selecting an environment and diagnosing a current state, defining problems connected with functioning and development of a described fragment of a housing estate. It described changes introduced during utilization time and their real results. It allowed us to determine problematic places.

The research is to create standards of a friendly space, to determine essential elements while taking suitable spatial and programme actions.

## 4. PRESENTATION OF THE STUDIED ENVIRONMENT

The size, shape and location were the main factors which decided about selecting the described fragment. As a mini-neighbourhood, that means a smaller part of a bigger project, but still constituting a specific identity with a space hierarchy around the buildings, it seemed to possess many positive traits which are supposed to provide good functioning of the space.

The housing estate is located in the town centre at the distance of 650 m from the Gliwice market square, 1.6 km from the railway station and is easily accessed by public transport. The buildings at Sobótki and Nowy Świat Streets are investments of the Gliwice Housing Cooperative. They form a complement to the existing estate buildings, multi-family residential blocks of flats and old tenement buildings at Nowy Świat Street.

They arose between 1990 and 1994. It is a building complex of three four-storey blocks. Two of them are detached buildings. The third one, which is a composition of several units – makes up a cohesive development formed in the shape of “U” letter. It closes in on a housing space and creates an internal courtyard. An element which combines the whole composition is a pedestrian lane which connects the area of the described fragment and other housing estates with the town centre (for a long time a pedestrian route, originally marked out by the residents). A quarter of the described development was filled up by successive multi-family buildings. While observing the grounds of the estate it may be noticed how it functions with the flow of time. The described changes developed during the time of less than 20 years.



**Figure 1.**  
Gliwice, the studied case. Distance 650 m from the market square, 1.6 km from the railway station



**Figure 2.**  
Gliwice – the selected case, Sobótki and Nowy Świat Streets

## 5. ANALYSIS

The analysis concerns a small space created between buildings which form an urban closure surrounded by housing blocks on three sides and a transformer station on the next, southern side.

Three entrances into the building are located from the side of exactly that “yard”. The area is closed in, visible from the windows of the buildings and a neighboring ten-storey block. In the beginning the greenery was tended: lawns, shrubs and trees. Architectural details were located. There appeared a hanging frame, small walls and benches. There was a passageway between the buildings. The benches were installed in the lit passageway.

There were obvious signs that the area would serve its residents, their meetings and would create opportunities to develop relationships.

### **PROBLEMS – NEGATIVE PHENOMENA**

It turned out that only few residents took advantage of the space intensively. From time to time youngsters used to sit on the benches, sometimes playing children were seen there. Different problems appeared during its usage. Firstly, the passageway between the buildings became a perfect place for gatherings of outsiders. The benches existing there were ideal for this purpose. The construction of the passageway itself, namely construction pillars, created an opportunity for hiding, became a comfortable place because they were lit and there was a possibility to rest on a bench. Additionally, the place was hidden from neighbors’ gaze.

The same problems arose in connection with the transformer station, which became a barrier behind which one could stand, hide and be separated from the street and pavement. The walls served as a place for graffiti. When the plants grew, the area between the hanging frame and benches was scarcely visible and became a place which was used by passers-by.

Apparently, the area was more frequently used by strangers than by the residents. Last year another quite disturbing problem appeared, namely a number of people rummaging through dustbins increased. There also arose a problem of homeless people who looked for a place to sleep and dwell in. The rubbish bin became a public toilet, an area where a fight for lodging took place. Constant brawls and dirt became an ordeal for the residents and cleaners.

**Table 1.**  
Activity forms occurring in the discussed urban interior

RESIDENTS	STRANGERS
entering and leaving flats	spending time on benches, drinking alcohol
passing/crossing	taking a shortcut, social gatherings in the passageway between the buildings
taking out rubbish, carpet beating (vanishing activity)	graffiti on the walls of the transformer station, also a place treated as a toilet
from time to time children playing, teenagers meeting on the benches	using the rubbish bin (used as a town toilet, sometimes as a bedroom)

**CHANGES INTRODUCED BY THE COOPERATIVE**



**Figure 3.**  
Passageway, original state (source: author's photo)



**Figure 4.**  
Benches in a passageway (source: author's photo)



**Figure 5.**  
Current state – the passageway built up (source: author's photo)

**Table 2.**  
Changes introduced by the cooperative

Originally	Currently
Benches	All removed
Passageway between buildings	Built up
Trimmed greenery	Overgrown greenery, often untended
Blank spaces under the stairs	Blank spaces built up

**Table 3.**  
Results of changes

Activity	Result
Removing benches	No changes
The passageway built up	Good visibility, more aesthetic qualities of the place, but no substantial changes because its arrangement does not allow for eliminating the main problems
Trimmed greenery	Overgrown greenery, often untended
Elimination of space under the stair	Positive – the homeless cannot stay there

**PROBLEMATIC PLACES**



**Figure 6.**  
Passageway between buildings (source: author's photo)



**Figure 7.**  
Architectural details (source: author's photo)



**Figure 8.**  
Rubbish bin, transformer station (source: author's photo)

**POSITIVE ELEMENTS:**

- refurbished buildings,
- half-closed arrangement, “U” letter shape,
- the area visible from the windows of the buildings,
- no cars,
- space hierarchy
- problems monitored by the cooperative (decisions that are made not always bring positive effects).

The described case has many positive traits. The buildings are subjected to renovations – there are no technical defects. This small space seems to be assigned to the surrounding buildings and people living in them because of its shape and the closing. The space gradation is preserved here.

Cars are not allowed in there, which is an additional advantage in a situation when they are everywhere else.

The façades of the buildings are active (there are a lot of windows), the area is visible, although not free from corners. In the evening the area is lit.

**NEGATIVE ELEMENTS WHICH APPEARED TO BE UNFAVOURABLE**

- a rubbish bin – its location, size and form,
- a transformer station – near the rubbish bin and liquor shops – a form of hideout,
- a passageway between the buildings,
- liquor shops in the close vicinity (there are already three of them),
- unfavourable arrangement of greenery and its configuration with problematic elements (a rubbish bin and a transformer station),
- poor transparency of the area, especially at the times of untended greenery,
- bad arrangement of the grounds (the greenery neither facilitates the beauty nor constitutes a barrier for people who use this place improperly),
- a lack of furniture which would facilitate the residents’ activities,
- too large accessibility – a possibility of a shortcut for outsiders.

## DIAGRAM CURRENT STATE



### LEGEND:

- - still unfriendly places
- P - parkings/ car park
- - shops (selling alcohol)
- - existings trees
- - the hedge (partly destroyed, shrubs)
- - pedestrian lane

Figure 9.  
Diagram – current state (the author’s own elaboration)

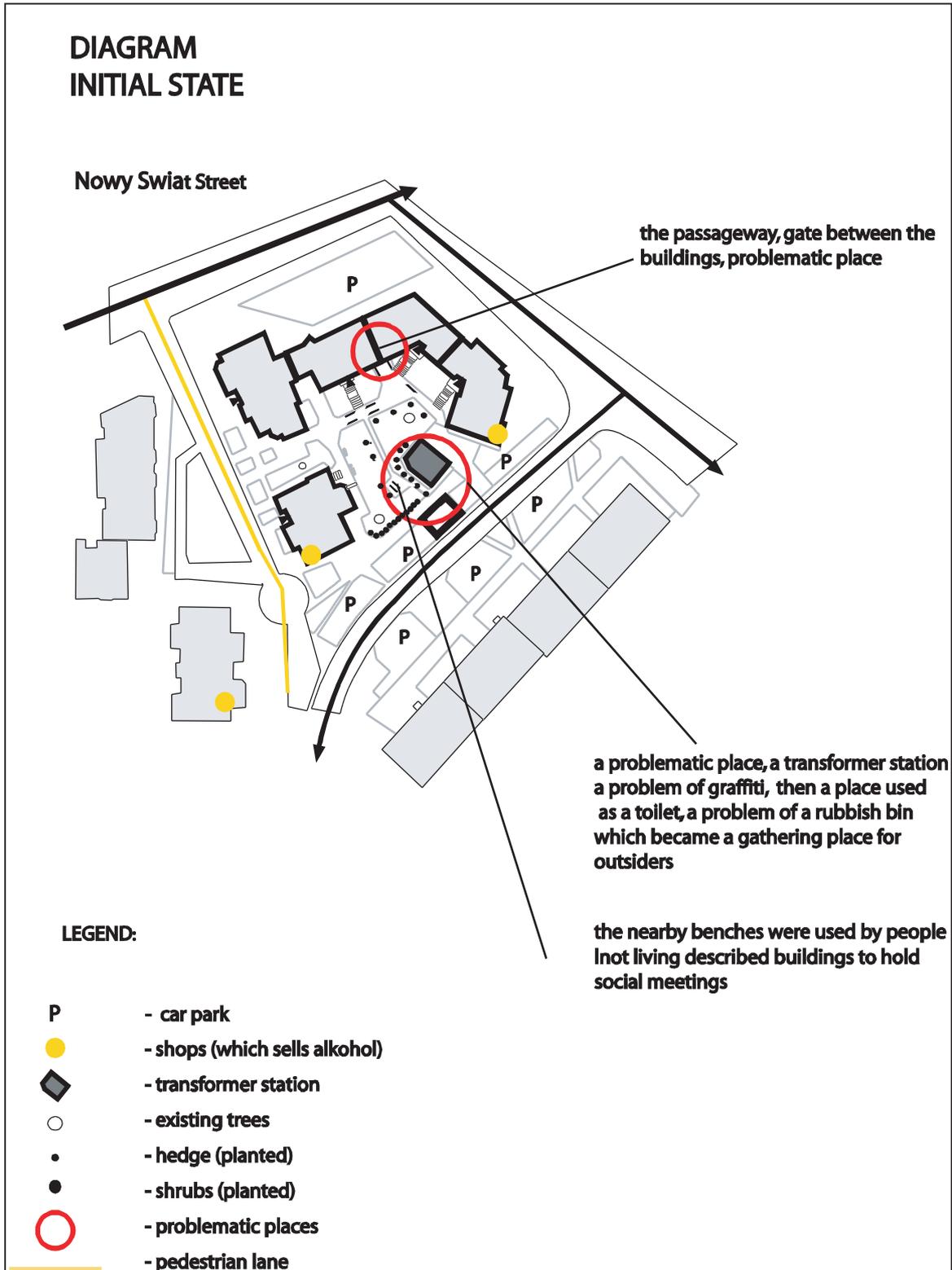


Figure 10.  
Diagram – initial state (the author's own elaboration)

**GREENERY – A CHANGE IN VISIBILITY**



**Figure 11.**  
Spring (source: author's photo)



**Figure 12.**  
The height of summer (source: author's photo)



**Figure 13.**  
Spring (source: author's photo)



**Figure 14.**  
The height of summer (source: author's photo)

**6. CONCLUSIONS**

The residents of the described buildings do not struggle “internally” with pathology or unemployment. Those phenomena touch them because they come from outside to their area.

In close vicinity there are numerous shops and pubs, many people with low incomes live there and many residents with dubious reputation used to live in this area. It turned out that exactly those people take the described space into possession. It has features useful for them – the place is closed in, distant from the street, cosy, green, not used by the residents, pedestrian traffic is scarce.

There is a possibility that one action might change a lot. Namely, we could prevent strangers from enter-

ing the space. Those strangers who after seeing the encouraging space take advantage of this green, usually empty place from the side of the rubbish bin or the street.

and does not have a sufficiently determined user, e.g. if the youngest had found their own place here, the disadvantageous situation would be limited or would not have appeared at all. Unfortunately, there was no place for a single swing, although the place, which was visible from the flats’ windows and free from car traffic, could have become a nice patch for a childlike activity.

The situation was healed by some actions of the cooperative, e.g. closing down the passageway helped to reduce the number of unwelcome guests. Removing benches did not necessarily influence the

situation positively because it caused that outsiders found a different location for their activities.

It is also clear that the arrangement of greenery, which may have a separating or inviting character, plays a huge role. Nevertheless, it should always be aesthetic. In the studied case there are high and low green plants. The shrubs were planted in such a way that they separate the pedestrian areas from the lawns, which means that they leave this space for outsiders (especially when they grow too luxuriantly and become both a visual and physical barrier). They should rather hinder infiltrating or passing across the area, separating the interior from the pavement, which would help to assign this area to the surrounding buildings. Poor arrangement of the greenery causes that the area has not taken advantage of it and what is more it creates opportunities for reprehensible behaviour.

The described research shows a great range of problems which require the improvement of the environment quality. This specific case makes it clear that in spite of good visibility of the area from the flats' windows and good relations among the residents there is no immediate reaction to hooligans' pranks. People are simply scared and do not react directly (it results directly from interviews with the residents). The only form of reaction was calling the cooperative or city wardens (in extreme situations, such as disturbance of quiet hours or sleeping in the rubbish bin) and it brought temporary positive results. It also shows how much the problems should be monitored and how complex they are. A simple action does not always bring satisfying results. The research shows that one cannot perceive a selected space at random, but always in a wider context of the surroundings, location and communication.

The problem shown in the paper is a fragment of a greater whole of the research which includes a broader perception of the entire studied subject.

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