

In the era of investment haste in Poland, observed in the suburbs of large cities, and of defective legal status concerning spatial planning, there is a need to determine the conditions of enhancing the socio-spatial quality of urban areas. Public space has always been the domain of cities, which is confirmed by the studies, most of which refer to the specificity of urban space and communities. However, the question arises whether the conclusions of the studies on urban public space may be related also to suburban zone, which experiences dynamic changes – both functional and spatial changes (not always positive), as well as social changes. There is a need to examine what kind of public space is expected from the residents of the suburbs and on the basis of which places they want to develop local bonds.

Residents of suburbs do not look for complex local bonds, and do not engage in social life of the locality they live in, hence the question what their needs in terms of strengthening local ties based on local public spaces are, and what types of public space have the highest utility value for them. Places visited regularly by the members of a local community are conducive to community building. However, it is widely known that the residents of many bedroom localities spend the most of their day in the nearby metropolis. That is the reason why suburban areas are better in the role of the space for undertaking variety of recreational behaviours, often individual, than social behaviours

The project takes into account the assumption that the function of public space is fulfilled not only by places owned by the local community. This is particularly noticeable in the suburban area, in which more important role in providing residents with opportunities to meet and participate in the local social life is played by quasi-public spaces. They can be characterized by various degrees of “publicness of space”, understood as a multi-dimensional and multi-gradual feature of commonly used places. The role of suburban public spaces is often played by attractive private club spaces, which offer relatively expensive forms of physical activity, but at the same time, build up prestige and give the sense of belonging to the circle of people with a higher social status. It is particularly important for the so-called new middle class, representatives of which are willing to live in suburban zone.

This research project aims (1) to determine features that should have places commonly used by residents of suburban area, and (2) to create models of „good” suburban public spaces with the highest utility value.

The research includes localities of diverse urban structures, forms of development, location in relation to valuable natural objects, and offer of the local public spaces. All these localities are located in the suburban area of Warsaw. In each locality an inventory and classification of existing public spaces will be carried out, followed by detailed characteristics of features of each space, which determine its public nature. The utility value of individual places will be determined as well. In addition, there will be a survey, in which residents of the suburban area will express their opinions about particular characteristics of commonly used spaces, and indicate preferred types of public spaces and activities undertaken by them or such they wish to undertake in the public spaces. They will also determine the role of quasi-public spaces in meeting social needs. The final effect of the project will be models of “good” public spaces, dedicated to various groups of residents of suburbs.

The project extends the present state of knowledge about public space with the social perception and preferences concerning the places of public nature, and preferences concerning the places, where the residents of suburbs would be willing to build local social ties and undertake social behaviour. The research project enriches the scope of measuring scales and is the first to try to assess the utility value of public space based on objective and measurable criteria. The results of the study are of applicable character, because developed models can be useful for developing of a set of guidelines for land-use planning and for enriching service facilities of suburban area. Thus, the project will contribute to the deepening of knowledge in the field of geography, sociology, environmental psychology and urban planning, and in practical terms, to proper shaping of the living environment in the so far chaotic growing suburban zone.