

Immigrant Life in an Artistic District. Polish and Ukrainian Immigrant Community and the New York Bohemia of East Village

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The paper is a case study and addresses the issue of intersection of the immigrant and artistic worlds, exemplified by functioning of Polish and Ukrainian communities in East Village in New York. The Author tries to show how ethnic can intersect with the world of alternative artistic and intellectual culture and what the consequences of such a phenomenon for the transformation of the ethnic neighborhood and its status among the diaspora can be. The analysis is embedded in the historical and humanist perspective, accentuating the “*longue durée*” process, emphasizing the importance of the area and the social relations going on there for their users. Such an approach allows to form a final question on the possibility of conceptualizing this particular ethnic neighborhood in terms of cultural heritage of the immigrant group.

Key words: immigrants neighborhood, artistic district, Polish immigrants, Ukrainian immigrants, New York City, East Village, cultural heritage of an immigrant group.

Introduction: the issue and the contexts

At least starting from the moment when Louis Wirth wrote *The Ghetto* in 1928, the immigrant life (understood here as the whole of social relations, interactions and practices undertaken by the immigrants in the hosting country) is most often described in the context of a life flowing somewhat away from the life of indigenous

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people, often in separate areas of the cities – the ethnic neighborhoods, where social relations are limited to the members of their own groups and where contacts with cultures different from their own is very limited. But as the history of American ethnic neighborhoods shows, immigrant life has not always been lived in areas filled only with ethnicities and immigrant cultures. There were places where the ethnic substance intersected not that much with the generally accessible mainstream culture but with the world of alternative artistic and intellectual culture. New York's East Village was such a place. It was an area where the world of immigrants intersected with the world of renowned artists and intellectuals. The purpose of the presented paper is to describe the presence of immigrants and artists within one neighborhood, to show the common grounds of relations between these groups and the ways of narration about the neighborhood resulting from such co-presence. An attempt will also be made to indicate the "white spots" in the field of research on this phenomenon, as well as the possible ways of its interpretation in the context of the duration and changes of the ethnic/ immigrant areas. The paper is a case study, and the description itself refers to the period of activity of Polish and Ukrainian immigrants and artists in East Village in the years 1950–2010.

I have based myself on the analysis of historical sources, literary works (in particular reportages), the research literature of the subject matter and the analysis of partially structured, in-depth interviews that I conducted in the community during the project *"Poles and Ukrainians in American Pluralistic Society"*². The paper is more of descriptive than exploratory character, due to (in my opinion) limited empirical material. It is actually a part of material collected during work dedicated to another issue: intergroup relations in conditions of diaspora. Therefore, some of the issues raised here will only be highlighted or will end up with question marks, which the sciences (sociology, anthropology, ethnology) will have to address in the future.

It was the feeling of cognitive insufficiency gained during review of the subject matter literature (mainly sociological and historical) that prompted me to take up this issue. What drew my attention was a kind of separation of these two plots from each other. And so: in urban studies dedicated to this neighborhood, researchers focus mainly on gentrification processes and their today's consequences, only mentioning the presence of representatives of immigrant groups³ and their businesses in this

² The research was carried out in 2006–2009 and was financed by The Kościuszko Foundation Research Grant and John Kusiw Fund of Shevchenko Scientific Society. Both qualitative and quantitative methods have been used, including: (a) data research (based on the US Census Data and other immigrant statistics); (b) content analysis of ethnic press, archive materials, documents and other emigrant publications; (c) individual in-depth interviews with ethnic leaders and ordinary members of ethnic communities (50 interviews, including 5 interviews with mixed married couples); as well as (d) participant observation.

³ An exception is the relatively comprehensive analysis of the district's changes made by a group of New York researchers led by Janet L. Abu-Lughod, which results were published in *From Urban Village to East Village. The Battle for New York's Lower East Side* (Abu-Lughod 1995). Abu-Lughod and her colleagues make the presence of one of ethnic groups located there and just arriving, the Puerto Ricans, the

area and focusing on the role of the artistic and economic context (i.a. Zukin 2010; Smith 1996; Zukin, Kosta 2004). Migration studies dedicated to this neighborhood, on the other hand, are mainly of historical nature, focusing on reconstruction of the history of individual groups, emphasizing what is ethnic and ignoring a deeper analysis of connections with the artistic aspect (e.g. Binder, Reimers 1996; Diner 2000; Anbinder 2017). And how promising a combination of these two plots may be has been shown by i.a. Lena Sze, who described the functioning of an ethnic cultural institution (a museum) in the New York's Chinatown in the times of intensive gentrification processes of this area (Sze 2010). The analysis led her to formulate the thesis on the existence of the *gentrification consciousness* mechanism, being the awareness of an ethnic cultural institution of its causative role in the gentrification process, and thus the opportunity to use its own capital for further development and stabilization. *"This consciousness – states Lena Sze – is a constitutive feature of the current institutional landscape of gentrifying and gentrified neighborhoods"* (see: Sze 2010: 512). Although the theses of L. Sze seem to me very apt and promising in the studies on transformation of particular ethnic neighborhoods (if such changes are generated by gentrification), the plot of immigrant life in an artistic neighborhood requires recourse to slightly different concepts.

In my opinion, the proper key to understand the phenomena indicated therein is to position the analyzes in historical perspective that accentuates the *"longue durée"* process, as well as in humanist perspective, emphasizing the importance of the area and the social relations that take place there for its users (Polish and Ukrainian immigrants in this case). Referring to the words of Kevin Lynch contained in his famous work *"Images of the City"*, Polish and Ukrainian immigrants were not only observers of this *spectacle*, but *"were part of it, sharing the stage with other participants"* (Lynch 2011: 2). Referring to the basics of contemporary relational sociology and the concept of agency, their impact on social reality and environment should be emphasized. This context of functioning of Poles and Ukrainians in the East Village is poorly described in the literature. It seems also important to define the basic concepts such as the ethnic and the artistic neighborhood.

Theoretical background: an artistic district, an ethnic district and the processes of their changes

Referring to classical literature in the field of urban studies, a city neighborhood/district can be described in general as a named (having a separate name) socio-spatial system, defined by demographic (social composition) and economic features, specific

context of the changes. Poles and Ukrainians, constituting the ethnic/ immigrant majority, for whom the East Village was the main cluster in New York at that time, are mentioned, but not included in the analysis.

social relations, functions, identity/ self-awareness (including, among others, the name) and everyday culture (Rybicki 1972: 184–191; Jacobs 2014: 215; Shils 1996: 47). Definitions of ethnic and artistic communities are also based on these definition elements. The former are usually territorially separated areas (or peculiar sub-districts within the wider districts of the city) and can be described as places of concentration of ethnic/ immigrant groups along with their institutional ethnic infrastructure (clubs, shops, associations etc.) and locally oriented social interactions (Alba, Logan, Crowder 1997; Mucha 1996; Morawska 1978). Ethnic communities usually act as a substitute for the world from which the immigrants have come, and their formation is influenced by a number of factors, including: a) the economic-rational (e.g. the situation of the real estate market, job opportunities, economic capital, professional status); b) the psycho-social (the desire to recreate “old” forms of collective life, similarity of lifestyle, recognized system of values, the need for a sense of security and belonging, individual expectations, social capital, family ties, preferences and group attitudes); c) the ethnic-cultural (similarity of cultures, language, customs, “willingness to be among compatriots”); and (d) the nature of immigration itself at a given time (e.g. Kantrowitz 1969; Breton, Pinard 1960). Recently, much attention has been devoted to analysis of ethnic changes in the neighborhoods, indicating that important factors in these changes (a kind of ethnic “fuzzing” of the area, the outflow of indigenous inhabitants, changes in the sphere of ethnic infrastructure) are the gentrification processes (Sosnowska 2016; Sze 2010). Such explanations, however, seem insufficient to me when it comes to Polish and Ukrainian clusters in the Lower Manhattan. Gentrification, although important, does not seem to be the only or the key determinant of changes in the nature of ethnic neighborhoods and the ethnic communities within them. The role of factors that take part in shaping the ethnic neighborhoods may be as much important in the process of their ethnic change. I consider the change of the nature of the migration process itself (in particular: the size of the migration flow and its intensity in the certain period, the background of emigration, the adopted migration strategies, the ways of integrating new immigrants not only with the hosting society but also with their own ethnic group) crucial. Only once these variables are taken into account, a holistic picture of the ethnic changes in the certain area (in this case: the East Village) can be outlined. Such studies, although pointed out by i.a. by Ewa Morawska (Morawska 1988: 375–376), remain a matter of the future.

Another concept that requires clarification is the category of artistic district. A fashionable concept, that has gained its popularity thanks to the intensity of research on gentrification and the concepts of creative city and creative class, developed by Charles Landry (2013) and Richard Florida (2010). It is designated nowadays by names such as: *bohemian quarters/ cultural quarters* (Evans 2005), *creative district* (Zukin, Braslow 2011), *cultural industry district/ quarters* (Landry 2013; Evans 2005) as well as *art district* or *cultural/ creative precincts* (Murzyn-Kupisz, Działek 2013).

In general, artistic districts are referred to as areas of concentration of artists, cultural infrastructure and activities of artistic nature and related to production of cultural goods and services (Murzyn-Kupisz, Działek 2013: 160–163). Such functional approaches to artistic districts are sometimes supplemented with relational concepts referring to the notion of social environment (based on such distinctive features as complexity, multidimensionality, relationality, culture (Kubiak et al. 2005)), and expressed in the terms of artistic/creative environment or *creative milieu*⁴, where the most important roles are played by social capital, social networks, interactions and interdependencies, as well as by creative capital⁵. This type of environment often creates a local community in the sense that Edward A. Shils gave it, being “*a phenomenon of collective self-consciousness and an ecological fact*” (Shils 1996: 16). According to R. Florida, artistic communities are established as a resultant answer to three basic questions: *what’s there? who’s there? and what’s going on there?*, and their main function is providing conditions for creative activity, both in infrastructural and institutional dimension, as well as through a “specific” atmosphere of diversity, freedom, independence, openness, tolerance and easy exchange of knowledge, thoughts, ideas, etc. (Florida 2010: 238). The subject literature describes quite well the life cycle of such an artistic community, depending on a number of urban social changes, and in particular on gentrification and its consequences in symbolic, social and economic dimensions (Zukin 2010; Zukin, Breslow 2011). As a result, the district transforms from a cheap area, inhabited mainly by the working class, immigrants and artistic bohemia, and distinguished by its café-like character and transgressive-ness of culture, into a fashionable, expensive zone fitted with fashionable boutiques and network restaurants, attracting tourists, hipsters and wealthy middle class. The artistic significance of the district decreases while its economic function gains in importance. The artists themselves are perceived as both pioneers of the change and the victims thereof, since they are resultantly pushed out of such an area, while the district transforms from an area of artistic activity into *an area of artistic memory* (Cameron, Coaffee 2005; Mathews 2008; Bowler, McBurney 1991; Murzyn-Kupisz 2013) and, as such – as Graeme Evans notes – it may become the subject of political instrumentalisation, reflected in *place-making strategies* developed by municipal authorities (Evans 2005: 91). Moreover, some neighborhoods, even if they did not previously represent clusters of art and science, can gain the status of artistic/creative districts as a result of proper policies and activities of municipal authorities.

⁴ The concept of *creative milieu* itself was introduced by Gunnar Törnqvist in 1983 and later developed by many social researchers, i.a. by Ch. Landry (2013: 160–164), J. Montgomery (2008: 299–322, 358–362), as well as by G. Törnqvist himself (2011: 104–129).

⁵ The concept of creative capital, consisting of i.a. talent, knowledge and creativity, was introduced by Richard Florida and is one of the main determinants of the creative class, comprising of “*a cosmopolitan mix of people working in the sectors of new technologies, bohemia, scientists*”; people of specific lifestyles, consumption models and passionate, creative attitude to their jobs (Florida 2010).

This process is perfectly described by i.a. Sharon Zukin (Zukin et al. 2009), and the fact is expressed in the best way by Ch. Landry, claiming that nowadays “any accidental cluster of cultural objects is named a cultural district in order to raise its status” (Landry 2013: 162). It seems that this phenomenon has affected many ethnic communities, including, for example, the Polonia-inhabited Greenpoint, described by Anna Sosnowska (Sosnowska 2016). It indeed was / is an ethnic district, yet not a place of concentration of socially recognized (in Bourdieu’s sense) creators (artists and intellectuals). This fact seems to distinguish the herein described East Village from many ethnic communities.

The character and the ethnic structure of East Village

Prior to going into details of the issue taken up here, I will first outline the location of the neighborhood and, in a very brief way, its character.

Figure 1

Location of East Village, 2019



Source: Neighborhood Map, NYC, Dept. of City Planning,
<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/planning/data-maps/city-neighborhoods.page#nycmap>

East Village, along with Lower East Side and Two Bridges, is nowadays part of the New York District No. 3, located in the eastern part of Lower Manhattan. The quarter extends from 14th Street to Houston Street and from 4th Avenue to the banks of the East River, covering St. Marks Place (considered its center), the so-called Alphabet City and the adjacent Tompkins Square Park. It has been functioning within such borders and under this name since 1964. Earlier this area used to be known as the Lower East

Side and its symbolic and, resultantly, institutional separation was associated with the presence of avant-garde cultures, thanks to which its character and atmosphere began to resemble the neighboring legendary Greenwich Village. This name quickly “clung” to this part of Manhattan, becoming part of the *collective self-consciousness* specified by E.A Shils (Shils 1996). Also my Polish and Ukrainian interlocutors, some of whom arrived into the community before 1964, used this term. Historical studies and non-fiction literature often emphasize that heterogeneity and diversity can be included in the history/ heritage of this area (Calhoun 2016, Moss 2017). Janet Abu-Loughd writes that it was the *diversity in physical space* and *diversity in social space* (Abu-Lough 1995: 17–38). Its first source was the history of migration and the migratory cultures: German, Irish, Jewish, Russian, Italian, Hungarian, Polish, Ukrainian, and Spanish. Secondly, the history of American civic and anarchist movements (Calhoun 2016; Reaven, Houck 1995; Chien Lin 1995; Abu-Lughod 1995). Thirdly, the history of artistic and intellectual movements as well as cultures of rebellion and contestation, which were alive in this area until 1990s. The character and atmosphere of this space are best expressed by J. Abu-Lough, claiming that *“Just as physical space is fragmented – block by block, building by building (...) the social space of East Village is fragmented. (...) These differences create interwoven networks of association, identity, and loyalty that cross-cross through physical space and that field a new type of neighborhood in which mutual tolerance and careful attention to social, physical, and temporal boundaries are required if harmony is to prevail. (...) that makes East Village the site of ‘contested turf’ (...) This is a neighborhood whose unity has been forged in contest* (Abu-Lough 1995: 28 and 37).

J. Abu-Lughod notes that the population living in East Village until the 1990s was the most diverse one in New York. According to the researcher, it was associated with the fact that new arriving groups (whether immigrant or of different cultural character) did not displace those which had settled there earlier (Abu-Lughod 1995: 36). In other words, the classic invasion-succession model of the Chicago school of social ecology did not quite work in the case of East Village for a long time. The ethnic structure of this area began to shape in the first half of the 19th century, when immigrants from Ireland and Germany settled at the Lower East Side. Then, after 1860, large numbers of immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe, as well as from Southern Europe, began to arrive. The then Lower East Side entered the 20th century already with 57% share of southern and eastern Europeans in its population structure (Chien Lin 1995: 54). A significant part of this group consisted of Poles and Ukrainians from Galicia. Quite quickly, immigrants created their own organised communities which, over time and with the influx of successive waves of immigrants, shaped their character and, at the same time, influenced the character of the whole district. At present immigrants make up a quarter of the East Village population (23.4%), with more than half of them arriving before 2000 (and even 1990). The majority of immigrants are Europeans (especially from Central

and Eastern Europe) (32.7%) and Asians (41.9%). The largest proportion of Europeans arriving before 2000 was from Eastern Europe, mainly Poles and Ukrainians⁶. Therefore, the Polish and Ukrainian community in East Village is mainly formed by post-war immigrants (mainly political emigrants and Displaced Persons) as well as, in the case of Poles, by the so called “Solidarity emigrants”, who arrived to East Village in 1980s. Although the last three decades were characterized by intense influx of these two groups into New York⁷, the newly arriving rarely targeted at East Village, choosing rather Brooklyn and Queens for their settlement (Fiń 2015). Demographic and social conditions resulted in decline of Polish and Ukrainian populations of East Village. This trend is reflected by data shown in the Table 1, referring to census tract No. 38.

Table 1

Estimated changes in the percentage of population of Polish and Ukrainian ancestry in East Village; Census Tract No. 38

| Year | 2010 | 2000 | 1990 | 1970 |
|--|------|------|------|------|
| Percentage of population of Polish ancestry | 6,2 | 5,6 | 7,7 | 9,6 |
| Percentage of population of Ukrainian ancestry | 4,8 | 7,8 | 7,9 | – |

Source: Author's calculations based on: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey; Population Division – New York City Department of City Planning US Census Bureau, Census 2000, Population Groups, Census Summary Files 4 (SF 4).

The latest estimates from the US Census Bureau from 2017 suggest that the number of people of Polish ancestry in East Village makes 2737 (about 6% of the total population) and the number of people with Ukrainian ancestry makes 929 (about 2% of the total population) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013–2017 ACS). The Polish and Ukrainian immigrants concentrated in the area of two census tracts of East Village: 38th and 32nd (from 4th to 14th Street and from 3rd Avenue to Avenue A).

East Village as an artistic district

East Village became a district focusing artistic and intellectual life in the post-war period, although already on the turn of the 19th and 20th century it was an area where

⁶ 2013–2017 American Community Survey, Social Profile: East Village, NYC Planning, Population Fact Finder, <https://popfactfinder.planning.nyc.gov/profile/180/social>

⁷ According to US Census 2010, Polish and Ukrainian immigrants are among the 20 most numerous immigrant groups in NYC, ranked at the 15th and 14th position, respectively (The Newest New Yorkers. Characteristics of the City's Foreign-Born Population, 2013 Edition).

a kind of “resistance culture” began to develop⁸. This period in the history of the neighborhood, along with the persons symbolizing it – e.g. Jacob Riss, Lillian Wald, Lev Trotsky, Alexander Berkman or Emma Goldman – defined it as a space of pro-revolutionary, pro-freedom, anarchist and contesting atmosphere. In the post-war period, this narrative was followed by another, the most persistent one, currently forming a peculiar core of the imaginary structure of the neighborhood, a kind of its *emploi*⁹: about artistic avant-garde and intellectual bohemia. It was connected with the influx of artists and painters gathered around the environment of abstract expressionists (including, among others, Willem de Kooning, Mark Rothko, Franz Kline, Joan Mitchell, Jackson Pollock), writers and poets (i.a. Allan Ginsberg, Frank O’Hara, Ted Berrigan, Frank Stella, Jack Kerouac), followed by representatives of the Beat Generation and jazz musicians, whose work at that time was considered as a part of social revolution. This group included the contemporarily well known artists, such as Charles Mingus, Charles Parker, Billie Holiday, Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane or Miles Davis (Calhoun 2016: 99–107). The activity of artists and intellectuals led to a kind of redefinition of the area. The immigrant neighborhood became a stage for music and literature, a space for expression of artistic lifestyle, open to various outsiders, where a specific community, called the “*underground community*” by Daniel Kane, developed over time (Kane 2010: 189). The 1960s and 1970s contributed to the preservation of such an image of East Village. During this period, the district became a target of influx of various contestants and subcultures: hippies, punks, squatters, admirers of alternative rock, described by Patti Smith¹⁰ in her memoirs as “*new immigrants invading East Village*” (Smith 2012:37). They were attracted by lower rents, free spaces and “*the historically progressive reputation of the neighborhood*” (Kane 2010:193) That’s how Patti Smith recalls the atmosphere in East Village at that time: “*What’s going on in St. Marks Place. Long-haired boys paraded in striped bell-jeans (...) the street was littered with leaflets announcing the arrival of Paul Butterfield and County Joe and the Fish. The White Rabbit roared from the open Electric Circus door. The air was heavy with (...) the smell of mold and hashish*” (Smith 2012: 36).

⁸ Its determinants were, among others: night disputes, held in local bars and cafes by European, immigrant intellectuals (e.g. Café Royal, functioning in the years 1908–1952 at 2nd Avenue 190, went down well in the history. It was a meeting place for local Jewish intellectuals, philosophers, writers and actors); women’s strikes (e.g. in 1902, female Jewish residents of the Lower East Side organized a boycott of kosher food price increase; two years later, they initiated protests against rising rents in the district; and in 1909, Clara Lemlich, a Jewess from Ukrainen, organized the biggest women’s strike in the USA at the time, gathering nearly twenty thousand people (Chien Lin 1995; Calhoun 2016); establishing trade unions and workers’ protests; as well as activities of various institutions aimed at improving the very difficult living conditions of the local population (mainly immigrants).

⁹ The term was used by the Polish sociologist Andrzej Majer to describe urban myths, “ghosts” and categories of *genius loci* (Majer 2005: 122).

¹⁰ Patti Smith: an American writer, poet and singer, who gained recognition in the seventies thanks to the pioneering combination of music and poetry; a resident of this part of Manhattan.

The character of the neighborhood and the specificity of the place were built on the biographies of people who lived and worked there. And the creators were renowned persons who entered on the pages of the history of art, music and literature, including Andy Warhol, Arthur Kopit, Truman Capote, Lou Reed, Nico, Jean-Micheal Basquiat, Laurie Anderson, Allen Ginsberg, Jimi Hendrix, Tim Hardin, Klaus Nomi, Patti Smith, Diane Arbus, Anne Waldman, Leonard Bernstein and many others, whose activity in the neighborhood is resembled in the studies/ reports of i.a. Daniel Kane (2010, 2017), Ada Calhoun (2016), or, in Polish literature, Jan Błaszczak (2018). Other aspects were the numerous creative initiatives, ranging from concerts of jazz, rock or punk music¹¹, up to literary and theatrical meetings, performances and lectures, etc. The most famous creative initiatives included the Poetry Project, organized in the church on the corner of 10th Street and 2nd Avenue, with the support of local parson Michael Allen; the Off-off Broadway theater performances including the famous La MaMa Experimental Theater Group; meetings of the group of Afro-American poets "Umbra"; activities of Nuyorican Poets¹² – the Puerto Rican literary community gathered around the bard Jorge Brandon; or the series of multimedia events "The Exploding Plastic Inevitable" organized by A. Warhol in "The Dom" club. In this context, the importance of the so-called third places (local clubs, cafés, meeting spaces), creative activity and exchange of thoughts needs to be mentioned. In East Village they played the role of prominent places, and today they are elements of local memory, in social and humanistic research often expressed by the metaphor of *genius loci* (Waniak 2014). I will give here examples of only some of them, namely the ones that are currently specific places of memory (*lieux de memoire* in the sense that Pierre Nora¹³ gave them) and which have entered the history of music and popular culture as places of activity of popular musicians and artists¹⁴. These include: The Five Spot Café, Slug's Saloon, Fillmore East, CBGB¹⁵, "Stanley's Bar", The Dom, Electric Circus, Kiev Restaurant and Club 57. At the beginning of 1980s

¹¹ The clubs of East Village hosted concerts of, i.a., Jimi Hendrix, John Lennon, Van Morrison, Frank Zappa, The Doors, James Brown, Iggy Pop, The Velvet Underground, Nico, John Cale, Patti Smith, Tim Hardin, Jackson Brown, Led Zeppelin, The Talking Heads, The Ramones, etc.

¹² The group's activity was related to the influx of a new wave of migration from Central America and the Caribbean to the USA and the formation of their immigrant community in East Village. It concentrated around Tompkins Square Park, within the so-called Alphabet City, between 10th and 6th Street ("Loisaid"). The main meeting place of the literary group was Nuyorican Poets' Café, open at the corner of Avenue A and 6th Street (Chien Lin 1995).

¹³ And as such they play a dual role: on one hand they are linked to the need of remembering the past, on the other they participate in the game of market and political interests (Kapralski 2011: 59).

¹⁴ Their significance in the area of popular culture and the history of popular music was described i.a. by David P. Szatmary in *Rockin' in time. A social history of rock and roll* (Szatmary 2010).

¹⁵ A cult club, a Mecca for fans of punk and rock music. It functioned since 1973 and eventually closed in 2008 due to a drastic rent increase. The closure of the club was widely heard among the New Yorkers and was preceded by numerous protests against gentrification processes and neoliberal urban policy (Moss 2017: 85-102). The time of club's activity and the associated people have been described in detail by i.a. A. Calhoun (2016) and D. Kane (2017).

particular places of artistic activity began to disappear from the map of East Village. It was associated with social, economic and demographic changes in the district, most often determined by gentrification processes. As a consequence, the area has become expensive, more friendly to tourists and young, rich professionals. And with time it became an *“artistic area of memory”*. In the scientific debate, such processes of district change are most often embedded in the political and economic transformation of urban space, and thus their dependence on economic changes, financial policy and development strategies is indicated (Aby-Lughod 1995, Zukin 2010). In non-fiction literature and social debate they are more often associated with the vitality of the idea of neoliberalism and a kind of “class struggle”, and described in metaphorical categories the loss of the “soul” of the city/ district or its vanishing or death (Moss 2017, Calhoun 2016). Extensive literature on each of the issues discussed here exists and its presentation significantly exceeds the scope of this paper. The area of my inquiries is restricted to showing the functioning of Polish and Ukrainian communities in this artistic neighborhood. Drawing a very general, sociological sketch of this immigrant life, I would like to draw attention to two main issues: identification features of ethnic community against the background of changes taking place as well as the contemporary beliefs of members of immigrant groups related to the area and its changes.

Ethnic communities within artistic neighborhood

In the area of East Village, Polish and Ukrainian immigrants created their own, local/ ethnic communities¹⁶, their own “micropolis”¹⁷. It was the first ethnic enclave created by these groups in New York and at the very beginning, as William I. Thomas, Robert E. Park and Herbert A. Miller point out, it was called *“okolica”*, while its territorial range was determined by the words *“as far as a man is talked about”* (Thomas, Park, Miller 1971: 145–146). The area inhabited by Poles and Ukrainians was most often referred to as *“the big Slavic ghetto”* or *“an old neighborhood”*, or, by members of the Ukrainian diaspora, as *“Little Ukraine”*. This is how one of my interlocutors described it: *“in this area there was once a Polish and Ukrainian quarter. Genuinely. It was a whole quarter, an enclave, so that all these houses were inhabited by Poles and Ukrainians, one next to each another”*.

¹⁶ I refer to the phenomenon of restoring European neighborhood in the context of emigration as “displaced borderland”/ “reconstructed neighborhood”. This category refers primarily to the description of the nature of mutual relations and is based on the assumption that relations between specific immigration groups are determined not only by the situation of collectivity in diaspora conditions, but also by the heritage of the European border neighborhood. See also: Fiń 2014.

¹⁷ “Micropolis” is a term formulated by the Polish urban sociologist A. Majer to describe the so-called “personal city”, which can be identified with the certain space (district, quarter), a place where one usually stays, knows best, has a personal attitude towards it (Majer 2005).

Over the years, both groups have managed to create an *institutional completeness* in the East Village area that includes parishes, institutions and ethnic organizations¹⁸, shops, restaurants, cafés, bookstores and other service places and thereby changed the space of East Village in both visual and cultural dimension. The most intensive development of the groups' ethnic institutional infrastructure took place in the interwar and post-war periods, and in the case of Polish group several ethnic places were founded on the initiative of immigrants arriving after 1980 or later. I will not write here in detail about the ethnic landscape of this area and the ethnic infrastructure of both groups. I will give here examples of only some of them; namely the ones that played crucial role in life of immigrants communities and that influenced somehow on the artistic world. An example of such an institution in the case of Polish diaspora is The Polish National Home, which functioned in the years 1920–1967 at St. Marks Place No. 19–25, along with several Polish associations, Polish restaurant and clubs including the legendary “The Dom” and the “Electric Circus” mentioned above. This is how one of the members of the Polish community recalls the activity of this institution: *“There was a large Polish National House there, just on St. Marks Square, there was a house of societies, we had clubs there ... (...) The Youth Union was there, other veteran associations (...) Many couples met by this Youth Union, I met my wife there (...) we had our own folklore band and a choir ... and we published a monthly magazine and had a theatre ... there were lots of interesting things happening, this organization had such an impact on our lives (...) and our headquarters were there, at St. Marks Square”*. The Polish Veterans Association, functioning at Irving Place, which rented its space to the legendary Club 57 and to the Polish American Artist Society active in the years 1986 – 1995 (Rudek-Śmiechowska 2018), should be also mentioned. The history of Ukrainian businesses in the district is also interesting. One of the oldest ones was the shop with ethnic products “Surma Book and Music. The Ukrainian Store”, functioning between 1918 and 2016. According to press reports, the store hosted many representatives of the artistic world and New

¹⁸ The Polonia parish of St. Stanisław the Bishop and Martyr's was founded in 1875, and the church built in 1900 is still located at 7th Street, between 1st Avenue and Avenue A. In the years 1885–1989, a parish primary school functioned there as well; it was closed due to the proximity of other schools and insufficient number of students. A number of smaller ethnic institutions have functioned by the parish: since 1940, the Saturday school named after Abbot Augustyn Kordecki, several societies of religious character, and, since 1992, the Youth Choir of Friendship, gathering about 30 people. In 1905, members of Ukrainian diaspora established their own parish. In 1911 they built their own church (*St. George Ukrainian Catholic Church*) located near the Polish one, also on 7th Street, between 2nd and 3rd Avenue. In 1978, the church was redesigned into a classic Byzantine style, thus changing the landscape of the entire area. In 1940, a primary school was established in the Ukrainian parish in East Village, right next to the church, in a place called nowadays *Taras Shevchenko Place*. It was later followed by a secondary school (*St. George Academy*); both institutions are still functioning. The parish also hosts a number of different ethnic societies, e.g. the “Ukrainian Kitchen”, where Ukrainian women prepare ethnic dishes for sale. The All Saints Parish Ukrainian Orthodox Church and The Ukrainian Museum in New York City are also still active nowadays.

York bohemia. Today this place is an element of the collective memory of the ethnic group, but also, because of the legends around it, it is also a specific element of the cultural heritage of the neighborhood, an element of its history and narratives about it, like the already mentioned “The Dom” or a “Club 57”. Another Ukrainian business, “Kurowycy Meat Products” operating in the years 1955–2007, is a similar example. It is worth mentioning that this shop, founded by Ukrainian immigrants from Lviv, was not just a salespoint. It also played the role of a “third place”: a place of meetings and ongoing discussions. Other important places for the Ukrainian communities included the “Stasiuk” shop and cafes: The Blue&Gold Tavern, Orchidia, Verchovyna Tavern, Leshko’s, Odessa Restaurant, the Stage Restaurant and The Kiev Restaurant. According to a local legend, Allen Ginsberg used to sit in the latter one and presented it in his poem “*Hard Labour*”, writing: “*the transsexual fluorescent of light of Kiev/ Restaurant after a hard day’s work*” (acc. to: Moss 2017: 25). As a result of socio-economic changes in this area (including the gentrification processes that started in the 1980s), many Polish and Ukrainian places disappear from the East Village ethnic map¹⁹. Nowadays, in the area of East Village one can still find elements of ethnic infrastructure of Polish²⁰ and Ukrainian diaspora²¹, although they are not as numerous as it used to be in the past. It can be also noticed that the described lifecycle of artistic district, along with the processes that determined it, was reflected in the functioning of the ethnic places of the area. Polish and Ukrainian immigrants adapted the space of East Village to their needs over the years. In this way, the area became not only the place of their residence or work, but above all the area of social life. Everyday life was going on in the streets, in clubs, ethnic bookstores, restaurants, nearby stores and in Tompkins Square Park. From the statements of the respondents one can conclude that the period of the most active life of both immigrant groups in East Village lasted until the end of 1980s. This is how they look in the memories of the inhabitants: “*Everything was familiar here, a lot of people knew each others, wherever we went*”

¹⁹ At the beginning of the 21st century, “Leshko’s”, Odessa Restaurant and Kiev Restaurant closed. The Stage Restaurant also closed in 2015. In 2016 the headquarters of the Józef Piłsudski Institute changed its location from the 2nd Avenue to Greenpoint. The First Avenue Pierogi & Deli bar founded by the Poles in the mid-eighties as well as the Amber Gallery, open in the nineties, were closed also recently.

²⁰ The remaining “Polish places” include: Klimat Bar and the associated art gallery; Varsovia Travel & Shipping agency; Polonia Restaurant; Little Poland Restaurant (operating since 1985); “Marysia Beauty Salon” founded in 1987 by an immigrant from Rzeszów; as well as a small grocery store “Polish Delicatessen” operating nearby since 1995. The Polish Veterans Association is still active at Irving Place and hosts the Polish Military Heritage Museum in New York. St. Marks Institute for Mental Health (UNITAS) continuously functions at St. Marks Place 57, offering psychiatric and therapeutic care in Polish.

²¹ The remaining Ukrainian firms are now: Veselka Restaurant, operating since 1954; the locally famous “East Village Meat Market” run by Julin Baczynsky (more commonly known as “Baczynsky Meat Market”), as well as Ukrainian East Village Restaurant and “Lys Mykyta”, formerly a meeting place for Ukrainian writers and artists (both seated in the building of the Ukrainian National House). Other components of Ukrainian ethnic infrastructure of the area include numerous ethnic organizations located along the 2nd Avenue.

(...) so it was easier to live here. I loved this place ... There is also a park, the Tompkins Square Park, and we went there for walks with children, all Ukrainians and Poles, we met together with the children"; "There was the "Warszawska" bakery at the corner of 1st Avenue and 7th Street, where it was so crowded that, especially on Saturdays, people were standing in long queues outside.(...) As a child, I often went shopping there and all the people around me spoke Polish". Although some of these meaningful places stopped to exist, they still function in collective memory (I have already pointed out at this aspect before), as well as in the so-called "collected" memory, being a manifestation of the spatial dimension of social memory; a sum of, sometimes different, visions of the past functioning in the certain group (Kapralski 2011: 48). Thus, I want to emphasize their historical, symbolic and cultural significance.

E.A. Shils, mentioned in the introduction to this paper, writes about urban local communities and neighborhoods, not only emphasizing their ecological, but also self-identity meaning, and claims that they are "a state of mind". (Shils 1996:15). This aspect of functioning of the neighborhood is expressed mostly in the semiotic sphere, associated with meanings, emotions and attitudes towards a specific space. Many of my interlocutors have spent all their hitherto immigrant lives in the East Village. "I lived nowhere else, only permanently in New York in this ... in this area that we call Eastside" says one of them. Another person, an Ukrainian immigrant, emphasizes: "I've lived my whole life here, I love this neighborhood and I love NYC, I have a house in the countryside but I can only be there a few days because I love New York and I want to be here". A Polish woman who came to East Village at the beginning of 1990s describes the area in terms of her "home". Another person emphasizes that after several years of absence, after the death of her husband, she returned to East Village because of the memory of the place, the ethnic affiliation and the opportunity to participate in community / collective life: "There are many opportunities here, there are various Ukrainian associations, I participate in all Ukrainian holidays and celebrations, sometimes we have concerts organized on the occasion of various festivities, that's when I go there". There were also those who spent a few or a dozen years here, then moved to other parts of the city or to its outskirts. Some people had a strong sense of identification with this area (for instance, they spent here every weekend and various festivities), while others referred to memories of places, people and events. Their identification was already more fragmented/incomplete. It is also worth emphasizing that, despite the transformations of the area and the ethnic communities themselves (their populations, socio-demographic structure, ethnic infrastructure), there is still a continuation of ethnic traditions and customs, and various forms of participation in the life of the ethnic community are practiced (though probably not as intense as in the past). An example of this observation are the following statements of the interlocutors: "In the Summer we have a Ukrainian festival here in New York by the church; there are dances, shows, you can eat Ukrainian food. I also come here"; "Poles have always lived in our neighborhood,

and now, like the Ukrainians, they moved out, but we go to Polish stores, to Polish beauty salons, especially on 1st Avenue, we go to Polish restaurants, on the 1st Avenue there's a very nice Polish store, it's very small, but I like shopping there"; "This Ukrainian community is still here, we meet, we have our own restaurants, we also meet here for example at bingo games, we also meet at the Ukrainian National House, in a museum; for example October was very busy in the museum since we had a beautiful exhibition then".

In urban studies, it is emphasized that the attitude to the city/ district can be revealed by pointing out at the most important reference groups and significant "others" that the individuals perceive in their surroundings. For Polish and Ukrainian immigrants in East Village, these groups were first of all themselves: Poles pointed out at Ukrainians, Ukrainians pointed out at Poles while describing elements of ethnic similarity, shared neighborhood, the nature of interaction and behavior. Subsequently, other ethnic groups were pointed out, emphasizing the conflict-free dimension of the shared neighborhood and a kind of symbiosis: *"We have such an old neighborhood here and no matter what nationality, we live here as a family, everybody knows everyone; even when I worked, it was always here, in the church on the 7th street and then on the 14th. When I worked in the church, there was such a girl, she was half by half, Ukrainian and Polish, but she married an Irishman; there was also a Puerto Rican woman here, she was very nice and we were all like one team."* When interpreting this observation, one can state that representatives of the Polish and Ukrainian diaspora perceive the area of the district primarily in ethnic categories. Its artistic dimension was mentioned much less often by my interlocutors. For Polish immigrants, especially the older generation, "The Dom" was/is the National House, a place of their activity and specific communication with the country of origin. A. Warhol is mentioned less often. For Ukrainian immigrants, "Surma Bookstore" was a Ukrainian bookstore and a shop where one could buy honey; not a place whose clientele were then personalities of the music world, including Janis Joplin herself. Therefore, the specific absence of the artistic element of the area can be clearly observed in the narratives of the immigrants. We can conclude that from their perspective the ethnic aspect of the heritage and the capital of the neighborhood, not the artistic one, is the most important. Nevertheless, ethnic institutions, especially in the recent years, try to emphasize stronger the intersection of the artistic and the immigrant world of East Village. An example can be the exhibition dedicated to A. Warhol *"Andy Warhol: Endangered Species"*, organized on the turn of 2018 and 2019 by the Ukrainian Museum, seated in the neighborhood. Such activities are part of the mechanism recalled in the introduction to the article as *"gentrification consciousness"*.

Basic areas of relationships between immigrants and artistic world

The description of the forms of relations and spheres of intersection of the immigrant and artistic world in East Village is not easy, especially due to insufficient sources. The analysis of the available material shows that these relations were very diverse and fragmentary: from spatial coexistence, which is associated with the awareness of the existence of “others” in a given area, to more regular forms of contact. Undoubtedly, the cafés and bars were key to maintaining social relations between immigrants and the New York artistic and intellectual bohemia. From the perspective of the discussed issue, the following places deserve attention: “Stanley’s Bar”, The Dom, Electric Circus, Club 57 and Kiev Restaurant. The first two of them, namely the Stanley’s Bar and “The Dom”, were run by Stanley Tolkin, who had Polish descent and was considered amongst the inhabitants of East Village as “*the owner of artistic bars*” (Moss 2017: 16), “*a philanthropist of the artistic community*”, and “*the hero of Afro-American activists and counterculture representatives*” (Błaszczak 2018: 71). Both the Stanley’s Bar and “The Dom”, located at St. Marks Place 19–25, in the building where the Polish National Home (“*Polski Dom Narodowy*”) had been located, became important places on the cultural map of New York (Błaszczak 2018). The first one was the place where the Umbra literary group organized their meetings, while in the second one Andy Warhol, jazz musicians, representatives of experimental music and avant-garde art located their activities. This is how “The Dom” is recalled in the biography of the musician Lou Reed: “*They chose a neglected Polish club at St. Marks Place (...) which was called the Polish National House and was commonly known as The Dom. (...) Entering the Dom in April 1966 was like a transfer to the world of miracles (...) thousands of people attracted to the Dom – ordinary New Yorkers, tourists, fashionists and celebrities – to dance to the music of Velvet Underground and Nico’s singing among strobe lights, colorful projections and black and white films*” (Soules 2016: 96–97). From 1967, the building of the Polish National Home hosted also the trendy and avant-garde night club Electric Circus. The Dom was finally closed in 1974, the Electric Circus three years earlier. Club 57, owned by Stanley Zbigniew Strychacki from Gdansk, was also an example of diffusion of the immigrant and the artistic world. It was opened at the end of the 1970s in the cellars of the building of the Polish National Church at St. Marks Place. The club initially offered exhibitions and concerts, but due to insufficient space, the concerts were organized in the building of the headquarters of the Polish Army Veterans Association (123 SWAP Center) at Irving Place. Club 57 functioned until 1983 and, like the previous ones, became part of the East Village artistic image and part of the cultural heritage of that time, nowadays treated as a peculiar resource or cultural capital of the city. Hence, the memory of these places is maintained as an element of cultural and urban policy; an example may be the organization of the show titled “*Club 57: Film, Performance, and Art in the East Vil-*

lage, 1978–1983” in the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2017. In turn, The Ukrainian Kiev Restaurant, hosted not only the already mentioned A. Ginsberg, who was a regular visitor of that place, but also photographer Robert Frank or the American composer Philip Glass. In the described aspect of mutual relations, immigrants created spaces in which cultural production and artistic consumption took place. Another sphere were the economic relations, usually limited to shopping in ethnic stores or other forms of using mutual services. J. Błaszczak, for instance, cites a fragment of an interview with a member of the New York bohemia who recalled the beginnings of the career of one of jazz musicians: “Parker used to play at Polish weddings and clubs, but I did not care too much about this” (Błaszczak 2018:125). One can also find examples of support or assistance provided by immigrants located in the district to hippies and squatters, thus including European immigrants in this part of the local community, described by J. Abu-Lughod in terms of “contesting community” (Abu-Lughod, 1995). However, these relations were characterized by a certain social distance. Firstly, it resulted from ideological differences, namely the lack of acceptance of (strongly anti-communist) immigrants towards the leftist and socialist worldview of the hippies. Secondly, it was associated with a negative opinion about the impact of these groups on the aesthetics of the neighborhood, which my interlocutors described in terms of “area dirtying” and “not good neighborhood”. Interesting information about the nature of the relationship between the artistic and immigrant world of the area could be provided by a detailed analysis of the links between immigrant artists and the local bohemia. And there were such among Polish and Ukrainian diaspora in East Village. Examples include Krystyna Jachniewicz and Krzysztof Zarębski, a couple that came to New York in 1981. Active in the field of experimental art, they quickly joined the anti-commercial and avant-garde activities of East Village artists, joining the artistic movement known as Rivington School (Piotrowski 2009). A member of this avant-garde group was also Jacek Tylicki, a multimedia artist who came to the USA in 1982. Tomasz Ferenc’s book “*Artysta jako obcy*” gives examples of Polish artists who lived in East Village during their first period of stay in New York and who were fascinated by this world (Ferenc, 2012: 203–312). One can also find cases when East Village became an inspiration for the artistic creativity of Polish immigration artists. Examples include, for instance, Janusz Głowacki’s play “*Antigone in New York*” or an object designed by Krzysztof Wodiczko (“*Vehicle for the homeless*”), both inspired by the history of Tompkins Square Park (see more: Abu Lughod 1995: 233–267). Another specific example of intersection of the ethnic world of immigrants and the New York avant-garde is the Yara Arts Group, founded in 1990 by Virlana Tkacz of Ukrainian descent and associated with La MaMa Experimental Theater Club in New York. According to the Yara Arts Group website, its goal is making “visually stunning theatre pieces that explore contemporary and traditional cultures of the East”. Unfortunately, there has been extremely little research on the activities of Polish and Ukrainian artists and their relationship with the bohemia of the 1960s

and 1970s in East Village. There is a lack of in-depth information about the forms and intensity of mutual relations and their impact on professional and personal life trajectories of immigrant artists. Such studies could bring a new perspective on how the ethnic districts and communities themselves function and change. Moreover, they would enable conducting an analysis of the poorly explored issue of processes of integration of immigrants with the host society through alternative cultures.

Discussion and final thoughts

In her manifesto *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs expressed the belief that “*the essence of the district lies in what it internally is*” (Jacobs 2014: 146). Over the years, the framework of thinking about East Village has been established, built on the canvas of the biographies of people associated with this place. Urban myths and legends related to the district have developed, it has acquired historical, cultural and symbolic meaning. This context inclines to reflect and ask questions about the status of the contemporary East Village for the Polish and Ukrainian diaspora. Being, as one can suspect, a combination of several factors: (a) urban processes and socio-cultural changes of the area highlighted herein; (b) changes in the nature of the latest transatlantic migration process from Central and Eastern Europe, generating changes in the nature and forms of participation of migrants in their own communities; and (c) the meaning and the status of the area in the broader society, resulting from the mentioned occurrences, narratives, images and functions of the district. On the basis of this description, several problems that require broader and more in-depth analyzes can be identified. However, the empirical material I have obtained so far has not enabled conducting them. They include:

- a) Analysis of the impact of changes in the nature of the latest transatlantic migration processes on the functions of immigrant communities and neighborhoods: this aspect could bring a new perspective to the relations between gentrification, transformation of ethnic neighborhoods and migration processes.
- b) Analysis of integration processes through alternative cultures: it would enable i.a. defining the role and functions of creative environments in the processes of integration and assimilation of immigrants, as well as indicating and describing alternative, poorly explored channels of immigrants entrance into the host society
- c) Answering the question if, going slightly beyond the usual interpretation habits²² and pointing out at the memory of ethnic groups of this area (along with

²² I mean here the usual ways of thinking about the heritage of immigrant groups, which, according to the conceptualizations set already by the Chicago school of social ecology, usually refer to the practices, values, attitudes and resources that immigrant groups have brought to America (Thomas, Park,

all associated narratives), we may treat an ethnic neighborhood (in this case: East Village) as an element of cultural heritage of the immigrant group. A heritage to which the immigrants (the old and the new ones) and their descendants can refer and which potential can be used by members of the diaspora.

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Miller 1971: 4), not to what they have managed to create in new conditions. And I am also referring to the common view at European immigrant communities, indicating their "breakdown", "disappearance", "decline", and treating participation in them in terms of "celebrating" or as a phenomenon of the past.

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