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The third space of civil activity

Abstract

The text invites the reader to reflect upon civil activity taken in unexpected places and forms, and going beyond its conventional notions. The first thesis put forward is that members of isolated homogeneous communities (young people in particular) rather than evading civil activity practise civil idleness, much in line with what society expects of them. From this stems our next thesis, which prompts to seek civil activity *somewhere else*.

Key words: civil activity, democracy, the third space, animation, education

Trzecia przestrzeń obywatelskiej aktywności

Abstrakt

Artykuł zaprasza do refleksji nad nieoczywistą aktywnością obywatelską podejmowaną w nieoczekiwanych miejscach i formach. Pierwsza analizowana teza głosi, że członkowie izolowanych homogenicznych społeczności (w szczególności młodzież) nie tyle unikają obywatelskiej aktywności, co praktykują obywatelską bezczynność, zgodnie ze społecznymi oczekiwaniami. Z tego wynika nasza kolejna teza, zgodnie z którą aktywności obywatelskiej należy szukać *gdzieś indziej (somewhere else)*.

Słowa kluczowe: obywatelska aktywność, demokracja, trzecia przestrzeń, animacja, edukacja

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Introduction

Complaints about the level of democratic participation are rarely countered with an encouragement to notice its less conventional forms and places. This is precisely what our text invites the reader to do. The article is focused on such places of civil commitment which have previously been overlooked, either because there was no commitment in fact, or because it was not expected.

The first point we wish to elaborate was put forward by Mendel (2014) in order to challenge the thesis on evading civil activity – particularly by young persons. This theory holds that the young living in isolated homogeneous communities rather than evading civic activity practise civic idleness, much in line with what society expects of them. Quoting Aneta Gulczyńska (2013), a researcher of high-rise block housing estates, we can describe it as *doing (nothing)* happening in space. The category of *doing (nothing)* includes actions which a person accepts as rational and important in the context of rendering alternative activities impossible. It also includes social reactions to them, constructed by persons who annul the importance and/or see the action as threatening (ibidem). It seems that young people, increasingly regardless of their environment, have nothing to do as citizens. In enclaves of wealth everything is already well-organized and functional, and every *extra* activity can threaten the *status quo* and weaken the achieved level of relatively satisfying stabilization.

By contrast, a prevailing belief in enclaves of poverty is that nothing is possible there anyway; that it is pointless to be active in places doomed to extinction, where improving the quality of one's life is equated with a liberating escape. Therefore living in enclaves does not create conditions for the activity of a citizen who, we may say, thrives on differences and develops through pluralism. From this stems our next thesis, which prompts to seek civil activity *somewhere else*, in other places and spaces, potentially free from the pressure forcing people into *doing (nothing)*.

The structure of our text arguing these points is build upon the following issues:

- 1) social isolation,
- 2) homogenization,

- 3) transferred civil activity,
- 4) third places and the third space as locus of civil participation and its meaning for guiding current animation work in the area of public life, which is also practised in civil education.

Conclusions of the text pivot on these meanings, emphasizing the current role of mobility in democracy.

Social isolation

A burning issue of today's social isolation is most often identified by numerous, visible in space, manifestations of creating distance and delineating borders between communities. As the distance deepens with the passing of time, the communities cease to interact (they *lose sight of each other*). This spatial polarization applies to both the rich and the poor. The former close themselves in order not to demonstrate their wealth, the latter are closed off to make their poverty unseen. Driven by mobility, the ever-increasing aggregation of individuals similar in terms of education and income further deepens the social-spatial segregation, emphasized by fences and walls of closed-gate housing estates.

As a result, it becomes less and less likely for separate classes and strata of urban population to interact closely with each other, which sharpens the mutual feeling of alienation (Jałowiecki 2010). The lack of direct contacts among all sorts of groups in expanded urban areas intensifies the feeling of loneliness along with all its social, cultural, psychological and educational consequences.

What is more, scholars researching this issue point out that the level of spatial concentration of poverty and wealth is rising, a phenomenon most easily noticed in ghetto-like districts crowded with poverty, as well as in richness guarded within the confines of elegant fences (Massey 1996; Lister 2007). Poverty and wealth, more and more concentrated, develop a chasm between the poor and the rich. The fear of the other spreading under such conditions, when people function with almost no links between each other, evokes distorted images of unfamiliar places and their residents (*Pedagogika miejsca* 2006).

It can be a manifestation of a certain social condition, a particular community's psychophysical state described by Stanley Cohen as *the state of denial*. It is a state which universalizes the impossibility or refusal of constant coping with the unpleasant truth and of having to live with awareness of it (Cohen 2001). Communities in this state, Cohen argues, can ignore local and supralocal problems, avoid them persistently, arguing that "somewhere else even worse things take place". This way the state of denial generates a relativistic atlas of fearful places and allows a reassuring attitude towards one's own community: "what happens here is not so bad after all" (ibidem: 20).

This state of denial contributes to ossification of social order based on social stagnation, and the lack of neither civil nor any other activity that could bring about a change. A reality of this kind poses a threat to the community members, their immediate and more distant neighbours alike. It intensifies xenophobia and erects more or less visible walls, making estates, entire towns or regions sink into provincialism, and limiting the chances of their development if they are affected by this refusal to acknowledge the unpleasant truth. And this is the truth about oneself: either being civically dumb, not finding the right conditions to articulate one's needs and claims, or turning a deaf ear to them and being concerned only about one's own good, understood as systematic support of civil deafness.

The situation has been continuing for years. According to Steven Flustry (Bauman 2003: 229), an American architecture critic, contemporary urban planning innovations are simply improved equivalents of moats, turrets and embrasures in city walls. Instead of defending residents from an external enemy, they separate people from each other, antagonizing them and shielding from one another. Spaces of limited availability are openly supposed to classify and exclude, instead of building bridges and creating places of inclusion. The isolation of social groups is not only of a physical (e.g. gated communities) but also of cultural nature, as represented by the demand for different kinds of entertainment.

The fact that classes drift apart and avoid any contact results from a fear plotted on a mental map of a metropolitan-class city in the form of prejudice and stereotypes, determining places where *better* and *worse* inhabitants dwell. While the latter serve as sources of fear of destructive behaviours, the

former become objects of jealousy and frustration because of status disparities (Skibińska 2011: 29). As expected, it intensifies negative attitudes on both sides.

Every now and then the news inform us that the situation described above have reached extreme levels, and the energy accumulated in concentrated enclaves exploded. To exemplify, we can evoke here the problematic suburbs of Paris being on fire in 2005 and 2007. Łukasz Jurczyszyn (2012), whose research was based on Alain Touraine's sociological intervention method, concluded that: firstly – it was “social in character in spite of its ethnic dynamics” (French citizens of foreign origin were involved in the riots); secondly – it “was a result of social, but also racial discrimination (often demonstrated by the police) towards the foreign-born part of French society and is, in a sense, an intrinsic part of the panorama of social disintegration experienced by some of those living in the suburbs of French major cities” (ibidem: 15).

Acts of destruction of property and other acts of violence characteristic of the riots were all expression of social upheaval in an environment made of enclaves. In such types of environment the accumulated aggression might erupt. Hence – and that is indicative of the policies working to preserve the order built on social inequalities – communities organized in such a way display an increasingly significant role of police forces, as well as disciplinary forms of welfare and social work, which act in favor of the prevailing order (Marynowicz-Hetka 2006).

Keeping the *status quo* is politically desirable and, indeed, is often achieved with the support of those who have a lot to lose in case the situation changes. But it simply cannot be the aim of independent social thought. On the contrary, by describing and explaining the state of things it is possible to generate drafts of solutions aimed at meeting the proper conditions for improving life quality. If these conditions are met, the betterment of the situation of social majority formed of persons and groups who experience the effects of social inequalities will be more than just a dream.

Further in the text, while remaining in this research stream, we argue for our thesis in a more direct manner, describing the process of social homogenization and currently increasing process of spatial polarization. Paradoxically, the processes of homogenization and spatial polarization seem to unite

the rich and the poor. This observation provides a somewhat new perspective and it may lead us to answer the question where civil activity is exercised.

Homogenization

Groups polarized in space live as islanders, only without bridges and boats. As they grow increasingly isolated, the inhabitants within the confines of the *islands* become more and more similar to one another, forming smaller or larger homogeneous local communities. Thus the isolation from outsiders translates into the progressive homogenization of local communities.

But one's local environment, being the most immediate public realm, is exactly where civic participation usually takes place, not unlike in ancient Greece. The Athenians had a number of problems to solve; *demos* was by no means a homogeneous mass, in which either everything was already in a state of perfect order and nothing was to be tampered with for fear of accidentally making something worse, or everything was so totally messy that any action was futile. Because both these options similarly imply that perhaps *demos* would not be needed there after all...

Democracy makes sense when *demos*, the people, is heterogeneous and because of that establishes itself as the scope of activity. Only in a many-coloured, pluralistic community can democracy be practised, can a process of building on differences and daily reconciliation between opponents rather than enemies occur (Mouffe 2005). When writing about democracy as a paradox, Chantal Mouffe points out that every social order, every group and policy that appears within it, is rooted in the inalienable antagonism.

But, Mouffe argues that under certain conditions antagonism can take on the form of pluralistic agonism. Agonism is a form of combat too, albeit a completely different one. Suddenly *they* are not enemies, who *we* should wipe out, but opponents, whose ideas we may counter, but whose rights to defend these ideas are not challenged. By situating ourselves in the realities of democracy we can see our opponent as someone having the plenitude of rights; an individual with whom we can unite on the common grounds, since we both share the understanding of principles of democratic order. The arena for contending opponents – not enemies – is made up of everyday life events and public practices based on equality (practising equality) (ibidem).

A homogeneous structure cannot provide any of these. A structure deprived of antagonism turns barren losing its fitness for being a core of democracy.

Therefore democracy does not and cannot be practiced in spatially polarized homogeneous communities, closed up in their enclaves. And it applies not only to young people, although in this context we often set them in the spotlight. It applies to every group, however it seems that the representatives of older generations try not to show it. Perhaps they pretend unceremoniously, using their experience and attitude fortified with their goal of defending the status developed over the years.

Transferred civil activity

From all this it follows that democracy can be exercised today, but it always happens *somewhere else*. Our homogenised local communities do not provide basic conditions for civil commitment such as diversity. Meanwhile diversity is a driving force of democratic activity, of practices relying – in short – on movement, in which demonstrations play a key role, bringing about changes in the structure of *demos*. We hereby refer to Jacques Rancière's well-known thesis about democracy: it cannot exist without *demonstrations*, i.e. without manifesting the claims by groups politically absent from the order which – if democratic – has mechanisms allowing to make the invisible seen and the voiceless heard (Rancière 2007).

And so democracy, as noted above, always happens *somewhere else*. On one hand, it can mean setting up catalogues of places where we think others made it, and that they, not we, achieved democracy and genuinely construct it day by day. On the other, it can be a sign that people are looking for gaps in the fences and holes in the walls of gated communities, sanctuaries for refugees and hospices for the poor; that more or less deliberately and intentionally they want to mingle already being fed up with living in enclaves of poverty or wealth. How awfully boring it must be from a citizen's perspective to be closed up...

Who knows if this *boredom* is not a dormant driving force of democracy, particularly after experiences with post-democracy. Let us remind here that post-democracy is no kind of democracy, despite being referred to as such

repeatedly. The term coined by Colin Crouch signifies a social order, in which institutions usually associated with democracy remain where they belong, but the essence of their functioning is somehow obliterated, annulled. It is in fact shifting a prime mover towards private sector, a kind of privatization (Lock, Lorenz 2007).

The authorities of modern cities are all too eager to implement discussed solutions, which – often spectacularly – put profits ahead of residents' needs. In the process of arriving at these solutions, the officials act in the interest of capital and market owners, behaving mindlessly in the social sense. Researchers describe these procedures as an extreme version of neoliberal urbanism, clearly directed against people (Lipman 2010, Harvey 2012).

In the face of these post-postdemocratic challenges it seems meaningful to carry out some studies which would address the following issues: who (the young?) makes the breach in these practices and – not only symbolically – opens the gaps in fences and walls separating enclaves from one another? what circumstances are needed for it to happen? where exactly, in what places outside the enclaves, do young people act by engaging in the public sphere and therefore become citizens (no matter the forms of this commitment, however surprising)?

Research projects exploring similar areas were carried out, among others, as part of the project called *Wspólny Pokój Gdańsk. Ku miejskim “modi co-vivendi”* [*Common Room Gdańsk. Towards an Urban “Modes of Co-Vivendi”*]¹.

Its idea came into being in the light of current conditionings of living in cities. Its aims were to form a new urbanity as well as a sense of subjectivity which, after the period of neoliberal training, could re-establish communal bonds and shape a space where people are important, rather than free market only; a space deeply humanistic, sensitive to women and men. Our project assumed this new urbanity will have a civil character and will be realized within the city understood as a *common room*; within the space shaped on the basis of a uniquely municipal version of education.

¹ A project by Gdańskie Towarzystwo Naukowe [Gdańsk Scientific Society] and partially funded by Gdańsk City Hall, prepared in 2012-2013 and carried out in 2014 by an interdisciplinary team of researchers from colleges, museums and other cultural, art, social help and social policy institutions in Gdańsk, under the direction of Maria Mendel (RWB-W/1299/BPK/90/U-W.BIEŻ./2014/MM).

The common room is a metaphor taken from Jacques Rancière's theory: when writing about *the sensible*, a load-bearing category that expresses the unity of what is *sensual* and what makes sense, the author associates it with such a distribution of people in their life spaces that is a commonly shared and accepted order (Rancière 2007). It is an order that people adapt, because they can see, hear and feel that it is sensible, so it allows them to preserve their dignity. It is therefore possible to understand Rancière's theory as an idea suggesting the opportunity of *sharing* rather than *dividing* our world, of co-inhabiting its space and in this way making it truly common. Diversity is still the case but divisions are deleted.

This notion and – in particular – the question of social equality involved in it, can be well expressed by comparing it to an act of co-habitation in one room. Equality and social justice are more of underlying assumptions here, rather than goals or final results of the actions we take. Having assumed that we are all equal, we can create a just world as we go about our daily lives. This assumption usually causes the inmates to negotiate with each other in such a way as to not devastate their sense of justice, when at a particular moment in time certain elements of space are used by one inhabitant, rather than by two of them simultaneously. All city users, irrespectively of their cultural provenance or social status can equally negotiate with each other while sharing municipal space. And – just like inmates in one room – they can make it their own at the same time remaining ready to change it accordingly to other people's needs, being ready to share the place, to give it up, to make it available for others, etc.

By contrast, metropolitan *modi co-vivendi* can be defined as changeable over time and space mutually satisfying ways of taking advantage of culturally diversified urbanised spaces. They formed the purpose of this part of the project's studies which was oriented for implementation, animation and education. On the one hand, the research brought into existence scientific descriptions and conceptualizations of such models of negotiating with other city-dwellers that they deem sensible and valuable (*Miasto jak wspólny pokój. Gdańskie modi co-vivendi* 2015).

On the other hand, these examinations sparked further projects, forming and invoking the knowledge of education and animation in the process of creating a city to which its residents have rights and where they can keep

their rights; cities which are “close to the hearts of its residents” (Harvey 2012), i.e. ones that constitute the space for people subjective and civil activity².

Keeping in mind these and other scientific, educational and animation actions that are able to shape the conditions for civil activity *between* the enclaves, (for example in the niches of new urban subjectivities), we now move on to seek another spaces of civil commitment.

Locus of civil participation: third places and the third space

Where is *somewhere else* where civil activity occurs, especially that concerning young people? Where has it moved to, if it has moved at all? It seems – and it is a claim possible to verify empirically – that it has moved to third spaces; these hybrids one can see through the *gaps in fences; the third space* springing into existence in homogeneous communities, somewhere in the space between them, sometimes literally in a wall separating estates, or in a fence restricting access to the enclaves.

Third places and *the third space* can be described in various ways. Appropriate theoretical suggestions will be given, as we approach the conclusions closing this text. But in this fragment discuss *third places* as an unofficial meeting space between people’s houses and workplaces, where they can fulfil their social, cultural and convivial needs. It is a neutral space in which people can regularly spend their free time with others, finding a rest from routine duties. These spaces strengthen a feeling of belonging to the neighbourhood and one’s bonds with others, either already known or only potentially close. These areas are vibrant with local community affairs, that is where new ideas are born and where values important in a given environment can evolve.

Although the concept of *the third place* understood this way was formulated in the eighties of the last century, it is still valid today. There is a demand, especially now, for such spaces, when the acceleration syndrome makes it difficult for people to interact in physical space. These places form a zone where people can meet friends, establish new relationships, muster or

² We refer here, among others, to a proposal by Gdańskie Towarzystwo Naukowe [Gdańsk Scientific Society] on partial funding of animation and educational actions, called *Gdańskie modi co-vivendi* [*Modi co-vivendi in Gdańsk*] and submitted to Gdańsk city hall in December 2014.

regenerate their energy, study or find inspiration, by interacting with others. It is a forum for exchanging ideas which provides an opportunity to reflect upon oneself to develop one's interests and stimulate the activity – all of which are particularly significant for how local communities function.

The Creative Mornings initiative is a fine example of practical use of *the third place concept*³. It is an international project of morning coffee meetings for creative individuals, during which they can share their knowledge, inspire and learn from one another. The idea arose six years ago in New York. Tina Roth Isenberg used to invite her friends to her studio in order to share ideas and experiences over a cup of coffee. At present, hundreds of cities in various countries are involved in this project. Once a month, each time tackling a different issue, a twenty-minute talk is held, then questions from the participants and a debate follow.

It is important that a global attention is paid to localness. This can be achieved by inviting various speakers and representatives of a given city. The idea of the project is to foster discussions between creative local communities, to stimulate reflection, and to help meet people who could help expand one's activities. In the Cracow-based edition of *Creative Mornings* workshops have been organized, and there are also plans of granting scholarships to the most talented local artists. Every *Morning* has its watchword, the same all over the world and invented by the citizens of one of the cities. There have already been *Mornings* devoted to the issues of art, heritage, freedom, future etc. Education is the subject of the forthcoming meetings that will be held in different cities, countries and continents.

The idea of *Creative Mornings* expands unofficial spaces of whole life education, with everyday situations gaining significance. Issues of learning include cognitive, emotional as well as social aspects; learning among others, in a complex, dynamic space of relationships; it is connected with human activity and with utilizing diverse experience. All that combined creates proper conditions for a number of civic initiatives taken in a multicultural community thriving on differences in roles, statuses, competencies and passions.

Sometimes *the third place* is literally a wall which separates housing estates, or a fence that restricts access to an enclave of poverty or wealth. In this context, what meaning may murals and other forms of graffiti have, as

³ See: <http://www.creativemornings.com> and <http://creativemornings.com/about> [27.12.2014].

they layer, sometimes densely, city walls, fences or parts of buildings that serve as borders between enclaves? Depending on their authors' status, we can say that they either represent both the included and the excluded. They revile, scorn or extol, becoming an expression of ambiguous glorification, a multiform of poverty or wealth.

Graffiti, too, drills holes in walls, equally creatively – though not in the same way – as *Creative Mornings* do. It does so by being a calling card that shouts loudly: *It's us, here we are!*, making those who live in this or that enclave vividly seen. It is a demonstration. It is not accidental that the overtone of this word is close to *democracy*. Thanks to demonstrations, a voice can be heard from behind the walls and fences, one that seems not only to transcend the borders of enclaves, but also to extend beyond the shallowness of one's subjectivity. It is this every move, a move towards others, a move of opening oneself to their existence and needs that constitutes the conditions for creating a citizen. After all, civil activity stems from relations formed on non-indifference and sensitivity to other beings, to their presence and needs – all of them characterise every communal life form.

Under these circumstances a “generation of change” has been developed, a post-transformation group of activists who choose collective actions, cooperation and exchange (Sapała 2014). The core idea of the movement representatives is that they disagree with competition, social exclusion, the dictate of consumerism and social polarization. The Believers in Change attach value to their everyday lives, ways of raising children, quality of food, an appropriate pace of life, modes of transport, and their responsibility for consumer choices. They believe that primarily joint small actions (not big expenses) are needed to introduce changes. In shareable cities day-to-day problems are mostly solved within social networks, which gives a sense of security to community. The number of networking tools which build up a platform for connecting people who want to exchange their time, services or unneeded goods is increasing.

In Poland these tools are part of the international *Community Exchange System*. Ideas cultivated in niche environments begin to penetrate the mainstream, and civil movements appoint their self-governing representatives who act in the interest of local communities. These individuals, even though they represent various environments and political views, have a number of

things in common: initiative, commitment and courage to make changes, confidence in their own capabilities, determination to break down the barriers, but above all they show others that a change is possible.

Similarly to graffiti authors, they step out into the space of *demos* by bringing the changes about. In a world of enclaves, behind walls covered with their murals and tags, this is the third space. What we mean by that is not *here* and not *there*; neither do we mean *either here or there*; we mean the third option – somewhere between walls and fences separating ghettos, sanctuaries and closed housing estates.

It is sometimes necessary to move beyond the confines of familiar cities, to set off to distant places, to experience different living styles and conditions, to change secure existence for uncertain migration to initiate civil activity.

As mentioned beforehand, people who live in isolated, homogeneous communities cannot be proper citizens. Isolated existence does not provide conditions for civil activity that stems from differences. In enclaves of wealth everything is already well-organized, and in enclaves of poverty there is an overpowering feeling that nothing can be done. So setting off on a journey allows you to suspend familiar knowledge structures, inflexible divisions, progressing isolation, and in a new, different place you can experience being a part of a specific community of equal individuals: *communitas* (Turner 2005)⁴.

In structured orders, people are separated from each other and create an internally divided community; their statuses are different depending on where they stand in the hierarchy. *Communitas*, however, is non-structured, has a consolidating influence, creates conditions favourable to being reflective. Individual journey may give opportunity to participate in a community (at least for some time). By allowing you to stand back, it makes the difference noticeable. Modern culture is – for many reasons – defined as a culture of differences; however, it is extremely rare for us to genuinely experience other people as Others. Most often we are able only to superficially tolerate ethnic, religious or social diversity.

⁴ *Communitas* is a known anthropological category first introduced by Arnold van Gennep and later developed by Victor Turner. This kind of community is formed under liminal conditions, in a ritualized process of going from one status/role/order etc. to another. It is characterized by suspending the hierarchy and by a climate of absolute equality – both circumstances occur under conditions of fluctuating sacram.

Our present social world is not simply divided into *us* and *them*, but into those who we understand and those we do not. It is more complicated than before, when possibilities of spatial mobility were limited. Presently, it is difficult to accurately determine socio-cultural borders between people, because their interrelations are based on attitudes and feelings, rather than knowledge (Golka 2010).

It is worth noting here that the distinctions: we – they, friends – strangers, are both complex and changeable. They extend from familiarity to strangeness and hostility is a variable one, and how it is perceived depends on a number of factors connected with a given situation, time and place. Somebody who was earlier regarded as a friend may turn into an enemy, or the other way round, someone previously unknown to us may no longer be an outsider once we have to get to know him better. A ratio of familiar to unfamiliar expresses the size of social distance and can be used to measure a relationship. The sense of familiarity is a feeling of being integrated with individuals who are seen as trustworthy and similar to us. The unfamiliar, however, is a kind of challenge as it confronts us with people different from us, those who do not belong to our group. If the right conditions for civil commitment are absent from our local communities, it means that they are *somewhere else*. These conditions can therefore have a global dimension.

Backpacking, understood as an individual, non-institutional way of organising trips to distant parts of the world, is potentially not only a form of travelling, but also a driving force behind civil commitment. Backpacking is a part of narration built around the place where many paths, goals and interests cross, a meeting place of what is local, national, or even global (Bushell, Anderson 2010).

An integral element of long-term travelling is to seek both oneself as well as peripheral places which bear the mark of authenticity. Backpackers form a social group temporarily tied to the representatives of a local culture, sometimes also taking actions to help the indigenous community. Thanks to such independent and autonomous travelling inspirations for civil participation are born. Narrative studies conducted among backpackers (Wiza 2013) reveal how diversified are the meanings the travellers attribute to their journeys. For some, backpacking is a way of broadening their knowledge, of studying the world or testing one's limits, overcoming psychological and physical

barriers. For others, travelling is in fact a way of giving their existence some meaning, or deepening mutual relations. And finally for those who give up their family life, backpacking is a way of running away from responsibility.

In contrast to this last group, another category of backpackers was singled out. These people do take up the responsibility for the world's issues and view travelling as a way to improve their attitude towards reality by initiating and becoming involved in various activities undertaken with others and for the sake of others. Betterment is always a result of a deeper understanding of the world, achieved by more insightful cognition. Members of this group demonstrate more acute consciousness and sense of responsibility concerning the things that could be done, both in their countries and in the world.

This is evidenced by the following statement of one of the narrators interviewed: "I hope that I've become more aware of things in general. No longer limiting myself to here and now, and to my country (...). Rather, there is a whole different world out there which needs our help, there are people who cannot cope with themselves and will not deal with their problems without us" (Wiza 2013: 222). Examinations carried out among travellers reveal different ways of so-called world's improvement, such as participating in organised forms of voluntary service or taking individual actions to protect endangered areas. Some support financially organizations located in remote corners of the globe, others seek contact with them through missionaries or doctors. Still others, while travelling, combine their work in ecological organizations with monitoring closely any signs of human rights violation or threats to animal species.

A sense of responsibility and readiness for civil commitment change as individual is gaining travel experiences. A characteristic progression can usually be observed, a shift from being concentrated on oneself towards thinking about other people. The narrator gives evidence for that when she reflects: "I think I am probably beginning to see other people needs, before that it was only sightseeing, finding pleasure and delight for myself and pretty much just caressing my ego. And now, this probably comes with age, your eyes gradually open, you see you are not alone, that is where this egoism, this egocentrism ends, only then you do start to see problems of countries struggling with AIDS (...). We also looked for some schools in Africa in which children are so utterly poor (...). And I guess that when you come back from such an

expedition, you feel this pressing need to change other people's lives a bit, you wish they could be educated" (ibidem: 252).

Responsibility for the fate of others grows with age and frequency of trips. Readiness to help is a result of dealing with difficult living conditions and meeting people struggling with everyday troubles. In this group of travellers a desire to do something useful for the wider community sparks after the backpackers realize how high their own living standards are compared with what people in other countries experience. Another backpacker's narration reflects just that: "One day I came to the conclusion that what I already had was good enough, and that I could use some of it to do something for others. And that moment I wanted to do all sorts of projects, e.g. painting routes in Ecuador. I thought I could do a project in Peru, an ecological one, I could join Kazimierz Nowak's campaign or fund the plaque that was later unveiled by Kapuściński, and so on and so forth. It was like awakening myself to the fact that I do not have to be focused on my little world only, and that gave me this chance to open myself to others" (ibidem: 252).

Civil activity is transferred to distant places, very unlike those we know so well from everyday life. A necessary condition for this activity is to withdraw yourself from your daily structures and roles, to suspend your routine activities, which in turn will allow you to see people's needs in a much wider scope. It is therefore typical that the commitment goes towards the macro scale, expands far beyond the local environment that the need of having a distant horizon arises. Being a citizen of the world is characteristic for this category of social commitment. The ability to notice the needs of other human beings develops with one's own experiences and thanks to a direct confrontation of personal conceptions against actual living conditions that people experience in different parts of the world.

This, in effect, stimulates reflectiveness and initiative-taking, and actions aimed at improving the world that can take many different forms of engaging in international issues, accordingly to individual abilities. There are people whose actions and initiatives go beyond any organised form of help, and they carry out great undertakings single-handedly. An example of this is a statement provided by one of the travellers: "He's a kind of person to do all sorts of interesting projects during his trips, for instance he organised this cam-

paing of cleaning up the Amazon river, which seems to me an awfully extensive idea, difficult in terms of logistic, but for M. there are no such problems, he simply prints five hundred stickers in Poland, takes them away and sticks them on ferries which ply the Amazon river banks, so that the passengers do not throw the rubbish away. He talks with captains in charge of these ferries, provides them with plastic bags to throw plastic bottles in them, rather than overboard. He organised the clean-up of the harbour in Iquitos, he persuaded city officials. You do not necessarily have to be a member of some organization, your own commitment simply attracts others” (ibidem: 253).

Revising your possibilities and ideas translates into real ecological or public activities which you can take up independently to provoke reflection and commitments in others. Backpacking of this kind is meaningful not only in from the individual’s perspective, but it causes changes in how people from different countries behave. The contact with these kinds of activities stimulates others to take actions together with those who need it and in their interest.

Every example of civil participation is an effect of encountering other person, culture or geographical surroundings. When a backpacker comes into contact with native inhabitants of distant countries, he or she always hold a status of the outsider. His cognitive relation towards the others is similar to what a researcher of the unknown does in order to examine its identity. For the outsider this poses a risk of becoming culturally alienated (he is not capable of understanding the new culture fully, because his socializing process did not take place in it, as opposed to the members of the native group). At the same time there is an opportunity for some cognitive freshness and one’s knowledge about others is not distorted by being that group member. The outsider can then observe how the culture functions and what the social structure is like more thoroughly than a native person can.

It may happen that a backpacker (an outsider) is in a pragmatic relation towards the others who he wants to reform. However, it does not have to be a relationship of dominance based on inferiority/superiority. The reformer can appear in various configurations and statuses, and feel that by changing other he changes himself. This change is fully expressed in a personality and co-creativity kind of relation, based on reconstructing one’s own identity. Whoever wants to change him or herself through learning, turns to others to

use their resources (Rutkowiak 1997). To make a personal conversion, an individual is getting used to new practices, becomes involved actively using his or her resources to transform oneself.

Changing the rhythm of everyday routine opens people to geographical and cultural diversity, and – by broadening their horizons – teaches them tolerance and appreciation of opportunities. Coming into contact with other behaviour models often makes aware of attachment to standards, sometimes generating the readiness to question them or accept them more fully. “It also teaches me this kind of patriotism (...) but sometimes when I’m out there, I feel I miss what I have back here, I couldn’t give everything up and settle down, say, in Africa or America (...) but it also teaches me some respect for these cultures, some understanding, and then it translates into better relationships here, since I am more gentle or more tolerant” (Wiza 2013: 221).

Having left their local environments to reach remote places, backpackers make bigger and bigger circles, thus gaining experience with which they return as competent citizens of the world, ready to take new initiatives. Direct contacts with members of all sorts of ethnic and religious groups, meeting people in their real-life complexity deepens empathy and broadens understanding of other cultures, but most importantly encourages to treat their representatives with due respect. As rightly put by Martha Nussbaum, “this understanding and respect entail recognizing not only difference but also, at the same time, commonality, not only a unique history but also common rights and aspirations and problems” (Nussbaum 2008: 80).

Final remarks

The third places of civil activity, those *somewhere else* places inhabited by the residents of the spatially polarized world, are – as we already pointed out – very diverse. We will find them, for example, in many forms of public life. One illustration of this is municipality management, in which – according to three-valued logic – participatory budgets are included. This is the third space of budgeting and communal problem solving which takes place in the *between* area⁵.

⁵ Numerous examples, regarding participatory budgeting as well as other types of third spaces of democracy, are provided by the results of *Decydujmy razem* [the *Let's decide together* project]. Many of them are described in reference materials on the project's website: <http://www.decydujmyrazem.pl/>.

In our search for civil commitment it is worthwhile to analyse the third spaces. In the light of what has already been said about the civil nonsense of living in enclaves, some systematic work aimed at developing the third places is also worth taking up.

One of the first steps towards it is to animate public life, which is at the same time a planned education oriented towards the rationality of third ways. It can open the doors to logic, thanks to which the dominating binary oppositions could be overcome. Oppositions which formed both of today's worlds: the good one and the bad one. As we know – both are walled off.

Every animation is a form of education and we should not separate these two. They are not identical, but intertwined processes, inseparably united by a common goal: to arrive at subjective functioning of individuals and groups within society. It means that animation and education share a common ground in that they both aspire to revive individual agency, to create or restore personal strengths allowing to create oneself, which is closely connected with transforming places of living (Mendel 2007).

The animation aiming to overcome the collapse of citizenship and resulting from the process of social homogenization, must unquestioningly emphasize the need for education towards trialectic forms of thinking about the public sphere and democracy. A book by Edward Soja (1996), a specific manifesto of *the third space*, propagates the concept of trialectics, which breaks open the closed logic of binary spatiality and transforms the *either/or* perspective into a more flexible and liquid one: *both/and also*. Soja is looking towards multidimensional solutions, both theoretical and social, located in *the third space*. He proposes a method called Critical Thirthing-as-Othering (Nacher 2014), which allows us to step outside the rigorous binarism and to create new ways of representation, new policies, etc.

A convincing example (referred to by Soja) is a postcolonial theory with Homi Bhabha's third place as a hybrid emerging when separability disappears and we open ourselves to new and better forms; better because standing above the divisions (Bhabha 2010). Soja himself uses trialectics – which are better than dialectics at describing and interpreting contemporary reality, no longer fitting in with binary descriptions – to *provide the third dimension* to a broadly understood social thought. In this text we are interested in how Soja deciphers the notion of *spatial justice* in a spatial way. It is arrived

at using practices well established in trialectics and associated with critical attitude, distancing yourself from the issue, and asking questions. Both symbolically and in the physical sense these practices provide the third dimension to our otherwise bivalent actions. Indeed, they work because they overcome the limitations resulting from trying to grasp the reality in dualistic terms and from subsequent attempts to change it.

Soja argues that justice is always *somewhere*, has a specific location in space (its ontologies could not do without places), and that it can be successfully analysed and – at the same time – achieved. It can occur if a three-dimensional beam of trialectically overlapping approaches exists, within which justice is:

- 1) a theoretical concept,
- 2) an empirical examination and
- 3) a strategy of public and political action (Soja 2010).

This way numerous dichotomies are broken down, especially the ones which traditionally, according to two-valued logic, defines the relationship between theory and practice. Justice makes no sense if it only remains a theoretical or research category, or a category that structuralizes political actions. It becomes meaningful when binary opposition of values: justice-injustice, is substituted with trialectics.

In this logic a third value appears, it is located between the other two and – by asking questions about itself – opens up to continual movement in the space of social life. This movement can be justice itself, transcending the *either-or* duality; or it can be justice which meets the conditions of liquid modernity, where nothing has a permanent form any more so nothing can be expressed in the binary logic either (Bauman 2005).

It also matches the understanding of democracy as a sustained practice of being a citizen. This is supported by a view of Gert Biesta, one of the most influential contemporary thinkers who analyses the relations between citizenship, democracy and knowledge. As part of an analogy with Jacques Rancière's thoughts, Biesta developed a concept of *ignorant citizens*: “[t]he ignorant citizen is the one who is ignorant of a particular definition of what he or she is supposed to be as a *good citizen*. The ignorant citizen is the one

who, in a sense, refuses this knowledge and, through this, refuses to be domesticated, refuses to be pinned down in a pre-determined civic identity” (Biesta 2011: 152).

Neither young nor old citizen would fence himself in a homogeneous vision of democracy. Civic subjectivity is born when one can free oneself from such a vision. Not in order to plunge in another, equally homogeneous one, but to act in third spaces. All the work towards creating them seems to be today one of the most important goals in civil education and animation of public life, which after all are democratizing practices in themselves. In the light of our text, the objectives of education and animation should include forming the right conditions for human mobility to understand and practise citizenship. It is all about a disposition to behave in a way which is conducive to social sensitivity and prompts reciprocity.

From our analyses it appears that currently these dispositions consist of the ability to notice and create third places, and to be mobile if it expresses the readiness for change, in it: changing your own place of living. On the one hand, in order to make room for others and to share our world instead of dividing it. On the other, in order to take the perspective of being *somewhere else*, the perspective gained at a distance, which is these days often reached by experiencing the world as an outsider ever on his way; then, with this perspective one can – just as a citizen would – hear the voiceless and see the invisible, thus building a dynamic space of democracy, where to become petrified in some enclaves would no longer be a threat.

Conclusions

Our first thesis was that members of isolated homogeneous communities practise civil idleness. In the light of our analysis this results from external pressures that intend to maintain the existing state of affairs. Under conditions of progressing spatial polarization, we find ourselves living in enclaves of poverty and wealth, and – paradoxically – in either of them we have less and less to do as citizens. In enclaves of wealth everything is already well-organized and functional, and every *extra* activity can threaten the *status quo* and weaken the achieved level of relatively satisfying stabilization.

By contrast, a prevailing belief in enclaves of poverty is that nothing is possible there anyway; that it does not make sense to be active in places doomed to extinction. Therefore living in enclaves does not create conditions for the activity of a citizen who, we may say, thrives on differences and develops through pluralism. From this we posted our next thesis, which prompted us to seek civil activity in other places and spaces – the third places and the third space described in the above – that potentially free from the pressure forcing people into *doing (nothing)*.

The structure of our text was built upon the issue of social isolation, homogenization, transferred civil activity, and the third places or the third space as locus of civil participation. We also discussed the meaning of three-valued logic for the knowledge that responds to contemporary challenges of animation work, which is in turn connected with civil education. Conclusions of the text pivot on these meanings, emphasizing the current role of mobility in democracy. Mobility understood as social practice oriented against homogenous social environment seems to be one of the most significant condition of democracy nowadays.

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