

New urban recreational spaces. Attractiveness, infrastructure arrangements, identity. The example of the city of Łódź

Abstract

Services related to leisure time are treated as an important factor in the development of cities - a factor creating urban recreational spaces. It is also important to provide such spaces with appropriate elements of infrastructure, which would contribute to increasing its attractiveness. Urban recreational spaces gain more and more experimental and unique forms and are more and more defined in terms of functionality, aesthetics and identity. This article includes three examples of this type of spaces in Łódź. On the basis of conducted research, there was presented the importance of infrastructure arrangements that are thought-through and "well-anchored" in the urban tissue.

Keywords

Recreation • urban recreation spaces • infrastructure arrangements • aesthetics • identity • Łódź

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Introduction

The phenomenon of 'beautifying' and 'refining' public spaces in cities (including recreational spaces) has become more and more common in recent years. This is mainly related to investments in architectural tissue and elements of small architecture, the arrangement of urban greenery and the introduction of public art. The background for these activities is formed by the social, economic and cultural changes taking place in the globalizing world. Direct interpersonal contact, along with the exchange of ideas and values, are undoubtedly important functions of modern cities with recreational spaces that should be open and accessible to everyone, thanks to which they become valuable themselves. It is in these spaces that the everyday life of city inhabitants takes place; they provide the possibility for various forms of recreation. More and more often, the unique, functionally-defined and well-thought-out arrangements of recreational spaces in cities refer to the identity of given areas, stimulating and developing their users intellectually and emotionally. Thus, they improve the quality of life of city inhabitants. Recreational spaces, as public spaces, constitute a common good, a scene of everyday life of urban communities whose needs should be taken into account during their designing and planning. Among these needs, apart from a sense of security and identification with the environment, there is also a need for aesthetics. The improper development of public spaces for the needs of rest, a lack of care for continuity and reference to the tissue of historical places, as well as a lack of care for aesthetic values, make these spaces neglected, chaotic and incomprehensible to recipients.

The main goal of this article is to assess new urban recreational spaces, both through the theoretical approximation of issues related to their infrastructure arrangements and identity, and hence their attractiveness (studies of literature), as well as by showing examples of the above phenomena in three

selected spaces in Łódź. The following methods were applied in the research: analysis of existing data, inventory of recreation management, and surveys. The surveys were aimed at analysing users' perceptions of the management of the selected spaces.

Urban recreational spaces in terms of various forms of recreation

Recreational phenomena have a spatial character – they take place in recreational spaces, which constitute a part of leisure time spaces. Having features that are beneficial to leisure time activities, such spaces are characterized by the existence of recreational processes in socially and spatially significant dimensions (Toczek-Werner 2007). Recreational spaces are a human product that uses geographical and recreational infrastructure for leisure purposes. Thus, every area where a phenomenon of recreation (physical, social or cultural/ entertainment) takes place is a recreational space. Tourism spaces (where tourists can be observed) are also recreational spaces.

Therefore, urban recreational spaces mean any part of a city used for recreational purposes during leisure time and appropriately developed for recreational purposes. Urban recreational spaces include parks and urban forests, sports fields, beaches and bathing areas, sports and recreation facilities, playgrounds, as well as facilities or areas where cultural, entertainment and social activities take place (including restaurants, clubs, cinemas, theatres, art galleries and museums). Such a broad approach to recreational spaces suggests that the concept of recreation is very capacious, and its significance is very broad – while primarily identified with physical recreation, it is currently gaining more and more forms and meanings.

In the Latin language, recreation means repeating activities and returning to the original state (prefix *re*), as well as the process of creation (core *creo*). Recreation means "rest, relaxation,

entertainment". Wolańska (Toczek-Werner 2007) defines recreation as a variety of activities undertaken in leisure time, voluntarily, for pleasure, self-expression, the formation of one's personality, renewal, and the multiplication of psychophysical forces. In turn, it is a form of action that creates an outlet for physical, mental and creative forces. Therefore, recreation is a form of activity that fills leisure time, but is not limited to physical recreation – it is also a creative entry into the world of culture (based on: McLean & Hurd 2015, Meeras 2010, Toczek-Werner 2007, Słownik języka polskiego 1981, Demel & Humen 1970, Napierała and Muszkieta 2011).

It is also worth addressing the ambiguous meaning of the word recreation. In the broad sense (*sensu largo*), recreation refers to all kinds of activities undertaken in leisure time (Bończak 2013), including sports activities undertaken recreationally in free time, as well as all forms of tourism (not only active tourism). Thus, it is a concept superior to tourism. On the other hand, the understanding of recreation in the narrow sense (*sensu stricto*) refers to the place of residence of the person who cultivates it – recreation understood in this way is cultivated without the need to travel outside their permanent place of residence, which makes it opposite to tourism. In this case, a recreant is a person who performs recreational activities in their place of residence, which generally points to activities after work, other obligatory training, and classes at sports facilities and outdoor areas (for example, jogging or attending fitness classes).

Recreation is very broadly classified depending on form: physical, mental, social, preparing the body for physical exertion, age, sex, interests, the area where it takes place, purpose, type and form of exercises, as well as motives (based on: Napierała & Muszkieta 2011, Meeras 2010, Hall & Page 2006, Tribe 2002). Due to the wide variety of recreational activities, no permanent classification exists (Torkildsen 1999). A conventional classification of activities which are included within the term recreation is presented by Winiarski (2011), on the basis of which the following forms can be distinguished:

- sports recreation (recreational sports disciplines, such as golf, tennis, horseback riding, beach volleyball, cycling, running),
- tourist recreation (practicing all forms of tourism – in the sense of recreation *sensu largo*, as superior to tourism),
- cultural and entertainment recreation (including visits to cinemas, theatres, museums, participation in workshops, reading books),
- social recreation (meeting other people, social trips to clubs, eating venues, cooking and eating meals together),
- virtual recreation (using the Internet – social media, browsing, playing computer games, e-tourism).

As described previously, tourism, recreation and leisure are overlapping concepts. According to certain criteria, leisure includes a discretionary time, recreation is an activity in leisure time and tourism is temporary visiting (Meeras 2010). As G. Torkildsen (1999) emphasizes, play, recreation and leisure have many similarities and a common core. They are integrated and appear collectively.

Referring to the understanding of recreation in the narrow sense, functions in the areas of culture, art and sports can be treated as endogenous factors in the development of urban space (Kowalczyk & Derek 2015). Therefore, they play a significant role in the development of recreation *sensu stricto*, satisfying the needs of urban residents. In the value system of residents of large urban centres, the needs associated with entertainment and visiting restaurants, as well as with sightseeing, are gaining more and more importance.

Attractiveness and identity of urban recreational spaces

In recent years, the changes taking place in urban spaces in terms of the expansion of recreational management have been characterized by rapid development dynamics (Mokras-Grabowska 2017). The creation of recreational areas in cities is no longer limited to the creation of parks or sports pitches – recreational spaces in cities are gaining increasingly diverse forms, and are therefore no longer based only on functional, but also on aesthetic aspects. The need for aesthetics and order in public spaces lies deep in human nature and should not be underestimated. Urban compositions, relationships between buildings and devices, their form and scale, the distribution of accents, proportions, the background and rhythms – all of these elements are becoming important. Small architecture and light illuminations, which form a complementary whole and shape the aesthetics, identity and uniqueness of public spaces, are gaining importance (Porębska 2010).

As a result, daring projects are created in the form of vertical parks, recreational terraces, viewing platforms, creative playgrounds, marinas for boats, beaches on riverside boulevards and parks over streets, built on former railway bridges. In order to increase their attractiveness, interesting solutions appear, such as innovative surfaces and topographies, original forms of lighting, urban furniture with ever more interesting design, the use of interactive installations and street art, the introduction of water elements such as water curtains, artificial rivers or street hydrants, and creative playgrounds. These are examples of the so-called artistic aestheticization which dynamizes the repair (revitalization) processes of spaces through the reconstruction of the visual-image layer (Palicki & Stachowska 2016).

Examples of such projects include the Superkilen Park in Copenhagen, Paley Park (pocket park) and The High Line (a linear park on a former railway bridge) in New York, Park am Gleisdreieck in Berlin, the Bloomingdale Line in Chicago and Reading Viaduct Park in Philadelphia (parks in former railway areas), Waterfront Toronto (recreational development of the Ontario lake shore) and Raiffeisen Platz (downtown square) in Sankt Gallen in Switzerland. Increasingly in Poland, bold solutions can also be found for relaxation in urban spaces, which are exemplified by numerous parklets, woonerfs, pocket parks, sensory gardens and riverside boulevards. The following examples are worth mentioning: the Vistula Boulevards in Warsaw and the Nadodrzańskie Boulevards in Szczecin, the Culture Zone in Katowice, 'Butterfly Garden' pocket park in Kraków, the waterfront on the Paprocany lake in Tychy, and the marina on the Ukiel lake in Olsztyn.

There are also new creative spaces that are provoking surprise and stimulating interaction between people and spaces. Such spaces are multifunctional and open to various activities and events, concentrating physical, intellectual and creative energy. Artistic, cultural or educational functions develop in such spaces and the spaces themselves stimulate the need for their exploration. Among many examples from Poland, projects, creative zones and social spaces such as the OFF Piotrkowska project and the UNIQUA Art project in Łódź, *Plac Społeczny Przestrzeń Kreatywna* in Wrocław and the Bezogródek Food Truck Park in Kraków should be mentioned. Recreational spaces in cities are becoming differentiated, taking on unprecedented and experimental forms and meanings. Increasingly, they refer to the urban tissue, the cultural heritage of the city, existing in numerous material and immaterial contexts. As a result, it seems important to create identity and identification with places (dialogue with the environment). The symbolic dimension and intangible features hidden in the physical form of buildings are also important here (maintaining the historic continuity of public

spaces). City landscape design should be connected with what is contained in cities, not only on the physical but also the perceptual and imaginary layer (meaning and values) (Skibińska et al. 2017). This ensures the easy identification of users with places. Thus, urban spaces have not only a technical (urban) aspect, but also an immeasurable one, associated with the city's *genius loci*, its history and culture, and even the lifestyle of its inhabitants.

Preserving the identity of spaces means referring to the spatial values of given places. It is the maximalization of the value of places, giving spaces their individual character, highlighting their local specificity. As a result, new spaces are a considered continuation of the environment (Mokras-Grabowska 2017). Among many good practices in the creation of urban recreational spaces relating to the cultural and natural heritage of a place and taking into account its original character, one can note the aforementioned High Line in New York – a linear park which is a continuum of the former railway tracks. Many noteworthy solutions were applied, such as the use of old railway tracks and raw steel structures for recreational purposes (mobile urban furniture) and the cover of natural plants which grew on the track after the cessation of its use (strip of natural meadow). The use of spot lighting exposes the former steel structure and greenery, as well as elements of small architecture. The special planting of grass, perennial and shrub species which are resistant to the difficult growing conditions is combined with natural vegetation. In this way, through the use of a specific material and colour code, the former industrial district gained a powerful identity and image.

In conclusion, urban recreational spaces should therefore meet several basic criteria:

- be unique, stand out from other spaces and be consistent with current development trends,
- constitute a thought-through continuation of the environment, taking into account the local heritage,
- have an individual functional programme,
- have easy and subtle access for people with disabilities,
- be divided into leisure zones for various social groups,
- be activating – provide the opportunity for developing various forms of psychological and physical activity,
- be interestingly designed in terms of architecture, urbanism and aesthetics (including layout, surface, colours, lighting, and elements of small architecture).

Through management and localization in the urban structure, public spaces affect the quality of interpersonal contacts. In numerous spatial planning documents (development strategies, local programmes, conditional studies), it is important that cultural and natural heritage are taken into account, being the basic carriers that maintain the form and identity of a given place (Palicki & Stachowska 2016). Urban recreation spaces arranged in this way make passers-by stop, reflect and feel an interaction with the elements of the space, and even with their creators. The synthesis of spatial values creates the identity of places. Together with the layer of the past and the future, they determine the *genius loci*, whose identification should constitute the basis for designing and drawing up a good project for the development of socially friendly spaces (Skibińska et al. 2017).

Selected recreational spaces in Łódź – characteristics and research results

As already mentioned, an important part of this article is constituted by the results of empirical research. The research was carried out on 9th and 10th May 2017 (weekdays, afternoon hours) in three subjectively selected, new recreational spaces in Łódź: the Alternative Łódź Creative Zone at Piotrkowska 217, two woonerfs at 6 Sierpnia and Traugutta Streets, and in the brine leisure park in the Retkinia residential area (Polesie



Figure 1. Creative recreational zone at Piotrkowska 217 in Łódź
Source: photo by author

district). Although the places for the investigation were chosen subjectively, a very important role in the selection was played by their novelty. The following research methods were used: observation, inventory of recreational development, and surveys. In terms of the surveys, for each of the selected spaces, 50 interviews were carried out with their users ($n = 150$, random sample selection). The interviews were carried out in central places within the chosen recreational areas. As a result of technical and substantive verification, no questionnaires were rejected. The main objective of the research was to analyse the recreational management of the research areas (infrastructural arrangements, aesthetics, attractiveness) and to determine users' perceptions of these spaces. The survey included 8 questions (open and closed). Respondents were asked about the frequency of their visits, the main motives and goals of their visits, the feelings and emotions arising while visiting the areas, their opinion on whether the recreational space refers to the heritage of the city, and their evaluation of its attractiveness. The attractiveness of the selected recreational spaces was evaluated by the respondents on a scale of 0 to 5 (0 – least attractive, 5 – most attractive).

The first space subjected to the survey was the Piotrkowska 217 project in Łódź (Fig.1). This former iron foundry complex, belonging to Józef John during the second half of the 19th century, was the largest producer of textile machinery and metal components in Łódź (Kusiński et al. 2009). Today, the creative zone located inside the post-industrial walls fulfils functions in the areas of culture and entertainment, sports and social recreation. The idea fits in with the main assumptions of the 'Łódź creates!' project, promoting the city through a modern economy based on creativity, independent culture and artistic education, additionally included in the post-industrial urban tissue. The main idea of the project is to create favourable development conditions for young artists and entrepreneurs who work in the creative industries sector. The products they produce have a unique, experimental form and are of good quality¹.

Revitalization work in the Piotrkowska 217 zone was initiated in 2014 (by OKAM Capital Sp. z o.o.). The most characteristic projects located in this space include those providing new culinary experiences: the Food Truck Corner and Before Food Market (a hall for street gastronomy and live cooking), as well as the only roller-skating track in Łódź: 'Kofowrotki'. An additional element of the project is the introduction of events – exhibitions, workshops, concerts and festivals. The most popular are the Street Food Festival and Swap Party (clothing exchange). Another intriguing idea is the arrangement of the space with original urban furniture in the form of art-industrial seats and tables. There are also

¹ Kreatywna Łódź, 2017. Available from: <www.kreatywna.lodz.pl>.

Table 1. Main motives for respondents visiting the selected recreational areas (percent)

	Piotrkowska 217 zone	Woonerfs	Brine Park
Dining venues	96	84	0
Cultural and entertainment events	16	4	0
Learning about the history of the place, exploration	8	18	0
Physical activity	28	0	4
Social meetings	44	92	26
Rest and relaxation	0	54	68
Rest with children	0	0	12

Source: own research

Table 2. Feelings and emotions of respondents arising during visits to the selected recreational areas (percent)

	Piotrkowska 217 zone	Woonerfs	Brine Park
Pleasure	48	30	30
Joy	16	56	20
Contentment	16	26	18
Curiosity	12	0	6
Happiness	4	26	0
Aesthetics	0	12	0
None	0	2	8
Lack of connections between the newly created space and the local area	0	0	4

Source: own research

elements of street art here – a mural on the facade of one of the tenement houses and a plaque with the inscription “*Before I die, I want to ...*” where people can write their dreams using chalk.

As the survey showed, the Piotrkowska 217 zone in Łódź is usually visited at the weekend (80%), by young people from Łódź (72% were respondents below the age of 30, 92% were inhabitants of Łódź). The main motivations for visits to the zone are the dining venues (96%), as well as social meetings (44%) and physical activity (roller-skating track: 28%) (Tab. 1). Few respondents (only 8%) indicated learning about historic, post-industrial spaces as the purpose of their visit, despite the strong identification of the space with the city’s post-industrial tissue. Another important goal for visits is constituted by the cultural and entertainment events held in the zone (16%), in particular the aforementioned Street Food Festival. The above-mentioned data on purposes and motivation for visits to this place also confirms the importance of the biggest attractions of the zone, as listed by respondents: gastronomic premises (52%), roller-skating track (22%) and food trucks (16%).



Figure 2. Woonerf at 6 Sierpnia Street in Łódź
Source: photo by author

An important goal of the research was to analyse the feelings and emotions that arise in people visiting recreation areas in Łódź, as well as how respondents assess the manner in which the spaces refer to, and are managed in terms of, the city’s history and heritage. In the Piotrkowska 217 zone, respondents most often indicated positive feelings and emotions (pleasure – 48%), as well as emerging joy and satisfaction (16% each) (Tab. 2). The references to the heritage and identity of these places were rated highly – 68% of respondents stated that cultural continuity existed, and that the historical and architectural values of the zone are noticeable mainly through the atmosphere of the post-industrial space (32%) and references to the city’s history and development (20%). The respondents also pointed out that they feel the industrial atmosphere in Łódź, noting “the heritage in avant-garde form” and emphasizing “the hipster character of the place”.

The next space subjected to the analysis of leisure time in Łódź consisted of two woonerfs – at 6 Sierpnia Street (Fig. 2) and its twin extension at Traugutta Street. Both municipal gardens are located at intersections with Piotrkowska Street, located in the central part of its pedestrian zone. This fact undoubtedly contributes to the high attractiveness and popularity of the space which, since 2015, has constituted a cultural and entertainment zone in the city, financed from the funds of the Citizens’ Budget. Within the two woonerfs, the most popular places are the dining premises and gardens located next to them in the summer season. These are accompanied by benches, seats, bicycle racks, greenery and temporary street art installations.

As in the case of the Piotrkowska 217 zone, the respondents here were also characterized by young age (84% below 30 years old), and their place of residence was mainly Łódź (92%). Considering the characteristic urban layout of the city (axial layout along Piotrkowska Street, which is over 4km long), the analysed space constitutes an important place for rest and social events for inhabitants and visitors. 22% of respondents stated that they visit the place several times a week, most often at the weekend (72%). 92% of respondents mentioned social meetings among the main motives, as well as visiting dining venues (84%) (Tab. 1). For 54%, it was important to rest and relax in the immediate vicinity of Piotrkowska Street, while for 18%, exploration-related goals played an important role (the historic centre of Łódź). The most frequently expressed emotions and feelings were joy (56%), happiness and contentment (26% each) (Tab. 2). For 12%, the aesthetic considerations of the two woonerfs – the plants, benches and arrangement of the gastronomic gardens – were also important.



Figure 3. Brine Park in Retkinia residential area in Łódź
Source: photo by author

In terms of establishing these spaces within the historical tissue of the city, 62% of respondents said that such a reference exists, mainly due to the historic development of this part of the city and the immediate vicinity of monumental tenements located on Piotrkowska Street.

The last analysed recreational space in Łódź was the brine park located in the Retkinia residential area, Polesie district (the south-western part of the city) (Fig. 3). This is a typical housing estate with multi-family blocks from the 1970s and 1980s.

The brine park was created in 2015 as part of the Citizens' Budget, and its main elements are two inhalator buildings, where therapeutic salt brought from the town of Zablocie in Silesia has traditionally been used for medicinal purposes. This recreational complex built between high blocks also includes football pitches for children and adults, an outdoor gym for seniors and a dirt park, as well as benches and bike racks.

The sociodemographic structure of respondents for this space was slightly different from the two discussed above. Respondents were mainly inhabitants of the residential area, predominantly women (70%), and the majority were over 40 years old (52%), of which 24% were aged 60 and above. Respondents stated that they visit this leisure zone quite often – 36% several times a week, 24% once a week, 4% daily. Both visits during weekends (52%) and on weekdays (48%) are common. Rest and relaxation (68%), social meetings (26%) and rest with children (12%) were considered the main purposes of visits (tab. 1). Only 4% of respondents indicated physical activity as their motive. The most frequently used recreational facilities are the brine graduation towers (68%), as well as the benches and seats (62%). The remaining elements of the infrastructure are used much less frequently – the open-air gym by 28% of respondents, the pitch by 10% and the dirt park by 6%. The brine graduation towers were also recognized as the biggest attraction of the park (62% of responses). The second most attractive factor was the aesthetics, neatness and order of the area (16%). The respondents also mentioned the sound of water dripping from the branches (6%) and the local greenery (10%).

The expressed feelings and emotions included pleasure (30%) and joy (20%) (Tab. 2). From the point of view of the conducted research, responses about negative feelings related to the lack of connection between the newly created space and the local area were also relevant (4%). Eight percent of

respondents could not indicate any feelings or emotions. This is confirmed by statements about the identity of the space and its reference to the character of the area – 62% of its visitors stated that the brine park is not in harmony with the surroundings, that it is incomprehensible, as if “taken out of the context” of the residential area. Only 6% of respondents stated that the new recreational development corresponds well with the residential area – specifically, with the local greenery.

The research carried out in selected urban recreational spaces in Łódź showed that these three spaces, which differ significantly from each other, have different functions in terms of recreation, different levels of attractiveness and urban composition, and thus different spatial identities. The first two, located in the central part of the city (the Piotrkowska 217 zone and the woonerfs) mainly perform functions in the area of culture/ entertainment and social recreation, with a particular emphasis on dining venues. Both zones are strongly identifiable with the historical tissue of the city (historic buildings in the centre of Łódź, post-industrial buildings). It was the attractiveness of the woonerfs, located in the immediate vicinity of Piotrkowska Street, that was rated the highest by respondents (arithmetic average of 4.5). It is worth noting that the Piotrkowska 217 zone, visited mainly due to the availability of new gastronomic experiences (food trucks, Before Food Market) is most frequently visited by young people. Thus, its attractiveness, despite the highest identifiability and identity as perceived by respondents, was rated the lowest (arithmetic average of 3.8) for these three studied spaces. The recreation space in the Retkinia residential area is, in turn, the area most frequently visited by elderly people. The local greenery, brine inhalation rooms, outdoor gym for seniors and accompanying seats are mainly conducive to passive relaxation and socializing. Thus, in spite of the high attractiveness of the space (arithmetic average of 4.1), respondents repeatedly mentioned its lack of connection with the environment, as well as the lack of reference to spatial values and identity. Therefore, its high attractiveness is associated mainly with the possibility of rest among newly-arranged, neat greenery.

Summary

Public space in cities is a kind of media that influences users' consciousness. If it is developed in an interesting manner, with a well-thought-out urban composition, referring to local heritage and history, it can constitute an educational factor. If it is detached from the urban tissue, it is chaotic and incomprehensible. This research has shown the importance of treatments associated with aestheticization, underlining the visual-image layer and making reference to spatial values. When designing public spaces in cities, including recreational ones, it is particularly important to deliberately extract particular values from the city. While the first two analysed spaces constitute a considered continuation of the environment, the third of the discussed cases is not 'anchored' in the local environment, instead constituting a foreign element within it. In spite of the high attractiveness of the space emphasized by respondents, which is expressed mainly in its novelty and an element of surprise in its concept, it does not maintain the continuity of the place's identity; thus, it does not facilitate the users' identification with the place. While it provides the opportunity for various forms of recreation for residents of the area, it is a foreign, incomprehensible element taken out of the context of the large blocks surrounding it.

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