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## EVALUATING AND INTERPRETING THE CITY USING A PHOTO PROJECTIVE METHOD: THE EXAMPLE OF ŁÓDŹ

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### Abstract

Urban space, especially that of large cities, is not homogeneous, but consists rather of particular elements characterized by clarity, expressiveness and distinction, which generate both positive and negative emotions among citizens. A good basis by which to evaluate a city is therefore provided, and it has been the aim of the work described in this article to identify and interpret places that are characterized by different qualities, i.e. places of significance where individual social experiences of the Polish city of Łódź are concerned. Specifically, the aim in question has been fulfilled through the use of the photo projective method, which makes possible the creation of a subjective image of a city by reference to photographs taken by those experiencing urban space.

### Key words

photo projective method • shared image • sense of place • evaluation • city • Łódź

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### Introduction

Space is a particular term in the geographic sciences, and its multifaceted and complex character today makes interpretation from just a single point of view an impossibility. This also reflects the large variety of stances and theoretical and methodological approaches adopted in the field of contemporary geography.

The above situation is in marked contrast to the traditional point of view, which held that space had nothing more than a physical dimension, the change over the last 30 years reflecting a socio-cultural turn taken in human geography – as overall in the social sciences – which enriches the interpretation of space with social and cultural aspects

that increase the focus on individual facts and reference to common knowledge (Lisowski 2003).

Space is experienced intuitively by the average person, and those having direct contact with it certainly also experience it emotionally, i.e. non-rationally. Research on the ways in which space itself is perceived and experienced by human beings represents an aspect now deeply-rooted in geographic tradition. It was as early as in 1947 that J. K. Wright began advocating a broadening of geographers' interests and their work to take in the subjective picture of the world contained in human ideas, on the basis that these were the modern world's terra incognitae, and thus the most fascinating available object for geographic research (Wright 1947).

This article thus proceeds on the assumption that cultural space – in the understanding of contemporary geography – is a set of objects (physical space) and/or a human environment (ecological space) perceived by people, who are simultaneously the carriers of the significances and meanings assigned to such particular objects or areas. Cultural space arises out of the set of multi-dimensional and multifaceted spaces experienced by individual people. According to F. Znaniecki (after A. Suliborski 2010: 148), “human entities never experience some common, objective, non-qualitative, invariable, unrestricted and undivided space in which there exist and move all objects, including themselves”. F. Znaniecki claims that there is a system of individual ‘spaces’, which he calls a ‘spatial value’. According to A. Suliborski (2010), such a spatial value is a place – a category closely related to the concept of cultural space in human geography.

Space becomes a place in the course of its being experienced and evaluated by people, and following Y.-F. Tuan (1987), ‘places constitute centers of experienced values’. Transforming physical or ecological space into cultural space, understood as a set of meaningful places, is associated with the conferment upon that space of a symbolic dimension in an individual and collective sense (Lisowski 2003). The concept of place is developed within the field of human geography (e.g. in the works of Paasi 2001, 2004; Relph 1976; Tuan 1974, 1987; Jędrzejczyk 2001, 2004; Rembowska 2002, 2004; Madurowicz 2002; Sagan 1995, 2000; Kaczmarek 2001, 2005; Kotus 2007; Wallis 1977, 1990).

The aim of the work presented in this article has been to identify and interpret the urban space in the Polish (second) city of Łódź from the perspective of individual experiences. This aim has been served by using photography as the research method. The photographs were taken in the springs of 2011 and 2012 by 2nd-year MA-program students of geography at the University of Łódź, within the framework of the project “My image of Łódź”, as part of the course on “The image of urban space”, this corresponding with the National Science Center funding scheme, “Social and economic disparities in the city of Łódź. Factors, mechanisms, effects”, which has been in the process of implementation by the Department of Regional and Social Geography, University of Łódź since the spring of 2010. The students were asked to use their own cameras to present various

places within the following categories being inter-related with the problem of spatial distortions in the city, i.e.: ‘places – symbols of Łódź’, ‘beautiful places’, ‘ugly places’, ‘places in which one can see development’, ‘places in which one can see crisis’, ‘places where time has stood still’ and ‘places in which I hide away’. The photographs expressed and distilled individuals’ social reflection upon urban space, and constituted visual data for further quantitative and qualitative interpretation, as each picture had to be equipped with a caption of about 50-60 words – a justification for the choice of a given place or object. While 75 students participated in the project, this article has confined itself to the 44 papers from those originating outside the city of Łódź. This decision was justified by the inevitable fact that these students experienced the city in a different way, their reflections not being distorted by the so-called ‘local effect’ associated with the place of residence and socialization in a given environment. Obviously, they had an idea of the city before coming to study in Łódź, but that image was a result of indirect experiences.

## Photography and geography

Our contemporary world is dominated by visual communication and visual culture, frequently referred to as iconology (Panofsky 2008). New terms have appeared in modern humanities, i.e. a graphic turn, also known as a pictorial turn or an iconic turn (Zeidler-Janiszewska 2006; Kawecki 2010). The growing significance of the visual in contemporary Western societies constitutes an element of a wider analysis of the transition from pre-modernism to modernism, and subsequently from modernism to postmodernism, in which the visual sphere constitutes the focal point (the so-called ocularcentrism) (Rose 2001). Images convey information, knowledge, emotions, aesthetic experiences and values. They become the subject of conscious deciphering, at the same time being able to affect the subconscious. According to P. Sztompka (2005), they can be read like a text.

Therefore, the role of photography as a research method in social sciences is becoming more and more crucial, a circumstance that may be attributed to a growing interest of these disciplines in creating, interpreting and using visual depictions of reality. Photographic analysis has been used successfully by anthropologists, envi-

ronmental psychologists and human geographers, with a view to the importance of place to people being better understood. It is often stressed that photographs can convey a great deal of information about the appearance of a place – far more succinctly than words (Sontag 1978; Prosser & Schwartz 1998). The relationships between the construction of geographical knowledge and the analyses of visual representations of place were discussed by M. Crang (1997) and G. Rose (2000) who highlighted the contribution that geographers have made to analyzing ways of visualizing ‘landscapes, places and spaces’.

“Photographs have always played a major role in geographical studies. Ever since the invention of photography in the 1830s, it has been assumed that photographs are perfectly suited to help answer that eminently geographical question, ‘what is this place like?’” (Rose 2008: 151).

Examination of the qualities of space with the aid of photography proceeded on the assumption that it was the relationship between the photographer and the space around him or her that was being reflected. Thus, the researcher may attempt to interpret subjective experiences and the sense of particular places from the perspective of their individual and collective meanings. A similar approach was as handmade sketches of space were analyzed.

“The creation of an environmental image is a two-way process between observer and observed. What he sees is based on exterior form, but how he interprets and organizes this, and how he directs his attention, in its turn affects what he sees” (Lynch 1960: 131).

G. Rose (2000: 555) notes that:

“Recent work on photography and geography has certainly focused on the meanings of things photographed. Several writers have made a strong case for the importance of photographs as a source for historical geographers ...but not because photographs accurately record what places looked like in the past. Like many other historians of photography ...these geographers argue that photographs are not simply mimetic of the world they show. Rather, it is being argued that the production, circulation and consumption of photographs produce and reproduce the imagined geographies of the social group or institution for which they were made.”

As is noted by J. D. Sidaway (2002), photography and photographic images have a long history

in geographical fieldwork and teaching, especially in the educational curricula of Western countries, and through the twentieth century their role grew, to some extent displacing or complementing the traditional ‘sketch’ and hand-drawn map. In the course of geographical fieldwork carried out in Barcelona, J. D. Sidaway (2002) asked his students to take photographs that could serve as ‘representations of Barcelona’, to select four, and to justify the selection in up to 400 words, explaining the criteria that had been applied in making the judgment. Research conducted in Japan (Noda 1988; Hisa & Utsumi 1992; Teramoto, Ohnishi 1995 – after Okamoto et al. 2006) using the so-called photo projective method (PPM), focused mainly on children, who were given cameras and asked to take photographs of the city in general, or some specific places they liked or disliked. T. Okamoto et al. (2006) asked the students of one of the Japanese universities to take photographs of their campus, focusing on both its characteristic places and those places that were not characteristic of the campus. The students were also asked to justify their choices. Among the numerous advantages of such a method, the ones emphasized most were freedom and the possibility of space being made subject to the individual interpretation difficult to obtain in the course of standard social research. It was also concluded that, notwithstanding the subjective nature of the experiences and evaluations of individual persons, and the freedom offered by the photo projective method, the vast majority of images may be interpreted as reflecting typical impressions common to all the participants. Students asked about their opinions on such methods being used when experiencing urban space, considered the photography projects to provide a welcome contrast with the more standard individual essays or field notebooks typically associated with such courses (Sidaway 2002).

## **Łódź is Piotrkowska, Piotrkowska is Łódź**

The space of every city is filled with signs that are ‘read’ by individuals every day. R. Barthes (1986: 88) notes that:

“The city is a discourse and this discourse is truly a language: the city speaks to its inhabitants, we speak to our city, the city where we are, simply by living in it, by wandering through it, by looking at it.”

Some of its elements – cultural objects which bring to mind the city, like buildings, monuments, statues, streets, palaces, events or famous figures – are symbolic (Rembowska 2004). These symbols may be permanent, representing timeless and universal values, but they can also be “signs of the times”, i.e. appear abruptly and persist in our consciousness for a certain time.

Where permanent, universal symbols are concerned, the city of Łódź is undoubtedly famous for its Piotrkowska Street and Wolności Square, which have constituted the urban axis of the city since the early 1820s. This fact is corroborated by all the research on perceptions of the city conducted so far using traditional methods of social research such as questionnaires, interviews and sketch map analysis (Mordwa 1993, 2003; Szkurłat 2004; Jakóbczyk-Gryszkiewicz 2007; Boryczka & Sokołowicz 2010; Tobiasz-Lis 2010).

In 29 photo essays prepared by the students, Piotrkowska Street has been indicated as a symbol of Łódź. One of the students defined the street as: ‘Axis Łódziensia, via aeterna’ (the axis of Łódź, the eternal road). The students highlighted the architectural, urban and aesthetic values of the street, as well as the fact that Piotrkowska offers a historical account of the city in the form of its buildings, more minor architectural items and the city’s information layout. Furthermore, students also emphasized the spatial and functional changes that have been taking place in the street since two shopping malls – *Manufaktura* and *Galeria Łódzka* – opened here. Finally, the students drew on their own experiences, memories from childhood and relatives’ accounts:

“Undoubtedly, Piotrkowska Street has always been a symbol of Łódź for me. Even in the times when Łódź seemed a ‘remote city’ to me, ‘Pietryna’ always appeared in my relatives and friends’ accounts of the city. Today I’m experiencing it myself. Living in its vicinity, I can readily notice how the street changes from one day to another. The buildings, with their institutions, restaurants and pubs, create a special atmosphere with a unique character, all of which makes it easy for me to say that ‘Pietryna is a symbol of Łódź.’”

“In my opinion, Piotrkowska Street is an indisputable symbol of Łódź. It has a unique charm, which changes together with changing parts of the day, adapting to the needs of citizens and tourists alike. During the day it is a trade center which offers luxury goods (although recently more

and more low-quality shops have appeared in the Street, lowering its rank). At night, the Street turns into a nightlife hub, teeming with life thanks to its numerous pubs, restaurants and gardens. Piotrkowska Street is an axis around which the entire city develops, with its peculiar architecture, revitalized tenement houses and quaint backyards (yet not all) giving it unique charm and character.”

“I have always associated Łódź with Piotrkowska Street. It was affected by the stories I heard from my parents and my grandmother, as well as my subsequent trips to this city. Łódź is Piotrkowska, Piotrkowska is Łódź.”

“Piotrkowska Street: a symbol of Łódź, a landmark on a tourist map, a place which reflects the character of a city unlike any other. A street full of contrasts, in which historic tenement houses, posh shops and fancy restaurants interweave with humdrum backyards full of unfulfilled dreams. However, with the course of time, newly-built shopping centers have diminished its popularity.”

“It is the longest street in Europe with a continuous building line. It is an axis along which the entire city developed. For me, this street was a symbol even before I came here for the first time and got to know other places, monuments and tourist attractions. In my mind, Łódź meant solely and inseparably Piotrkowska Street...” (Fig. 1a).

“When I was getting to know Łódź, walking along its streets and moving around by public transportation for the first time, I would always direct my excursions towards Wolności Square, which for me was a landmark, and to this day is the center of the city and the transportation hub. No matter from what direction I came here, the Kościuszko Monument always seemed to grow in front of me”.

Piotrkowska Street is undeniably the most important landmark in Łódź. Notwithstanding the numerous changes in function, aesthetics and development that have affected what is now a central pedestrianised zone, the thoroughfare still plays a crucial role where the experiences of inhabitants of Łódź are concerned. It must be highlighted that the stretch of Piotrkowska Street from Wolności Square through to J. Piłsudski and A. Mickiewicz Avenues joins Wolności Square itself on the Register of Historic Monuments as urban layouts and guidelines harking back to 19th-century industrial Łódź. Furthermore, in

Piotrkowska Street itself, or at most within a single block of it, there are 109 objects listed on the Register, or nearly 50% of all the monuments present in Łódź as a whole (see the 2010 Study of conditions and directions to the physical development of Łódź – SUIKZPŁ 2010). Drawing on the photo essays prepared by students, it may be concluded that Piotrkowska Street is in fact mainly perceived through the prism of such historic buildings as tenement houses and town mansions, these being so dominant among its buildings and so well able to epitomize the dynamic development that characterized the city in the industrial era.

social consciousness of inhabitants as Poland's political and economic transformation got underway but which do not emerge in the research conducted recently, are symbols of the industrial era. As recently as in the 1990s, the city was universally associated with the textile industry, and with smoking chimneys determining its landscape (Mordwa 1993, Jakóbczyk-Gryszkiewicz 2007). Defining Łódź as the city of Ariadna, Z. Nowakowski (1931: 114-115) relayed his impressions of the city using such words as:

"Cotton! Cotton!... It may be seen everywhere! At every turn! (...) Fustian cloths, percale, cloth,



**Figure 1.** Symbols of Łódź: a. Piotrkowska Street, b. the Poznański Palace, c. *Manufaktura*.

Source: A. Brzezicka (2011), self-analysis (b i c).

In the remaining 13 photo essays, the status of symbol of Łódź was assigned to Wolności Square, from which the former Piotrkowski Track was marked out, to *Manufaktura* and to I. K. Poznański's Mansion. The last two buildings, adjacent to each other, are located within walking distance of Wolności Square and Piotrkowska Street. All of the above monuments constitute vital elements of the so-called Circle of Tradition and Culture of the city of Łódź, which has been marked out in successive urban development plans for the city of Łódź. It seems, however, that *Manufaktura* is to be regarded as a certain 'sign of the times' associated with the Łódź's postindustrial period.

On the other hand, the symbols of Łódź which belong to the past, which were present in the

scarves, fabrics, yet mainly cotton, cotton and cotton again! Lying in piles, stacks, pyramids... (...) A strange city, as if created by a formist painter, who designed his entire large painting solely around the motif of chimneys, string-stretched streets, redbrick factories and a grey, very grey sky. What an enormous painting it is!"

### Łódź – a city of contrasts

Since there is a lack of uniformity to the space in any city, particular fragments tend to be perceived differently. The related process by which urban space may be evaluated is a multifaceted one that may make a crucial supplementary contribution to traditional urban analyses, augmenting them



with such aspects as scenery and landscape, as well as an aesthetic or economic outlook on space (Bonenberg 2012). Scenic, utilitarian and aesthetic values, which many a time translate into the economic value of space, shape the relationship pertaining between human beings and particular elements of a given city.

When asked to indicate in their essays places in the city of Łódź that are beautiful, the majority of students tended to concede that this was a difficult task:

“Looking for a ‘beautiful’ place in Łódź is not an easy task, and the difficulties with finding them served to expose a rather negative attitude towards this city on my part. While there are numerous interesting monuments worth seeing, are they really beautiful?”

In the majority of cases, students settled on municipal parks, highlighting valuable features of a social, as well ecological, point of view, inasmuch as that these are seen to be good places in which to take a walk, meet people and relax.

“I have discovered this place relatively recently. Unusual paths, old trees, arbors, bridges, a pond full of ducks, all make this place very charming and uncommon. At night, the park is lit with old-fashioned lampposts, which give it a specific, beautiful character. And a frequently occurring morning mist gives this place a feeling of magic, as if from a movie frame.” (Fig. 2a).

In their essays, the students also emphasized the beauty of monuments that are remnants of industrial Łódź, and hence also of the one-time power of local manufacturers and magnates, as well as the city’s multiculturalism. Some attention was also paid to interesting and uncommon

architecture, as well as to the greenery enriching the objects alluded to. Students also went on to stress the influence of the season, time of day or specific weather conditions when it comes to experiencing urban space and perceiving places photographed.

“Standing in Wolności Square, one just cannot help but smile as one looks at the cobbled surface of Nowomiejska Street descending towards the line of trees marking Staromiejski Park and the Łódka valley. This picturesque sight is complemented by the lines of the Church of the Virgin Mary in Kościelny Square. In my opinion, the view there is incredible, especially after the rain.”

“Villas in Wólczajska Street may also be deemed beautiful places in Łódź. The most beautiful of all is at No. 243. Personally, I love glass and mirrors, and they abound in this place. Even as a young child I always imagined I would live in such a house. A mansion... I am watching...admiring...envying...Besides the architectural shape, this place also benefits from the surrounding greenery.” (Fig. 2b).

“The largest shopping-recreational-amusement center in Europe. The special atmosphere of this place has been created by adopting and revitalizing the buildings of what was once Izrael Poznański’s textile factory. These redbrick buildings look particularly beautiful in rays of sunlight. When I visited ‘Manu’ for the first time a few years ago, I was completely enchanted by the place. Personally, I think that the beauty here lies in the history, and in the huge functional transformation that the entire complex has undergone. It is fascinating how the story of these old factories has changed...”



**Figure 2.** Beautiful places in Łódź: a. Żródliska Park, b. Richter’s Villa, c. the Alexander Nevsky Orthodox church.

Source: P. Bogutczak (2012), P. Stępnik (2011), I. Piątek (2012).

"The green color of grass and bushes stand here in contrast with the red color of former factory buildings, and the fountains located along the pedestrian track complete the sense of cohesion and harmony. It is a perfect example of how an old and dilapidated object can be turned into a beautiful and much frequented place."

Unfortunately, the number of places deemed ugly by students is markedly greater. The objects presented are most often identified through the prism of environmental, social or urban features. The students' photo essays identify the Łódź Fabryczna train station as of particular interest. Yet in 2011 it was this place that prevailed where the category ugly places was concerned. However, following its closure and demolition, and with the building of a New Center for Łódź there now in prospect, the area surrounding the former station has become synonymous with development as far as the 2012 essays go. Where unfavourable venues are concerned, the place of the former Łódź Fabryczna train station has now been taken by a stretch of Zachodnia Street, which is interpreted (as the Station had been in 2011) as a place in which the crisis can be seen. There is still hope that future essays will see the rank of this place change, in line with the latest plans local authorities draw up.

"Getting off the train on my arrival in Łódź, I can always see this extremely ugly, dirty and neglected place. It is always full of the homeless pestering other passers-by. Just like that, a notorious landmark of Łódź. How long is it going to last? Apparently, an 'open city operation' is coming closer and closer."

"Peeling facade paint, drunkards, bums and crowds of people. This is everyday reality in Fabryczna. Best advice is to limit your presence here to the minimum."

"Łódź Fabryczna train station. I use it quite frequently and I am always struck by its ugliness. The sight of this place is repellent both inside and outside."

"Łódź Fabryczna train station is an ugly place. It is old, shabby, dirty, unpleasant, with its 'notorious denizens' who can be very troublesome. It is a place I have to visit regularly, but I leave it as quickly as possible. It is nothing but necessity that makes me stay here."

Many a time the students highlighted contrasts in the urban space of Łódź, marking as ugly not only single tenement houses or their backyards

(especially ones situated along Piotrkowska Street), but also entire streets located in the vicinity of the beautiful Piotrkowska Street or Manufaktura:

"The city center, with its surrounding modern, glass and steel buildings, shopping centers, corporate headquarters, and among all those buildings one can notice a conspicuous small, ugly, neglected tenement house. I have often wondered why the residents of such houses do not lift a finger... I have two possible conclusions: maybe they do not want to, or maybe they simply cannot afford..."

"It is the essence of stereotypical, neglected Łódź. I am aware that there are more examples like this in the city. However, what I feel particularly hurt by is the sight of Legionów Street, since it is the city center, the immediate vicinity of Piotrkowska Street, Manufaktura, the Old Town. What seems worst is the fact that individual houses are interesting architecturally, yet are doomed to be demolished due to a complete lack of interest."

"Kilińskiego Street. One of the most important, yet ugliest streets in the city - formerly known as Widzewska Street. Devastated, neglected and shabby all along, stretching from Północna Street to Ślęska Street. It reflects best 'the dark side of the city', with its dilapidated tenement houses and broken tram tracks. The only thing it brings to my mind are constant traffic jams, delayed trams and peeling walls of old tenement houses."

In their essays, the students also emphasized the existence of new architectural objects whose character was not compatible with the surroundings. This is an effect of many years of negligence in urban planning, following on especially from a lack of current local urban development plans for the city of Łódź.

"New does not mean pretty. The complex of University Business Park buildings in Wólcańska Street dominated the surroundings completely. As a result, the real estate market grew in yet another unused office space in a really hideous frame. Raw, sterile, heavy buildings have been put up, buildings which do not match the convention of surrounding buildings in any way." (Fig. 3d).

The places identified by students as instances of development or crisis frequently overlapped with the examples of beautiful and ugly places. In this case, however, more attention was paid to the relationship between the standard of the space - its 'furnishings', visual attractiveness, location - and economic value. The places where development was clearly noticeable reflected the city's



**Figure 3.** Ugly places in Łódź: a. Łódź Kaliska train station, b. Zachodnia Street, c. backyards, d. the University Business Park.

Source: M. Klimczuk (2011), B. Szperlik (2012), A. Brzezicka (2011).

largest investments, which the students had experienced directly within the space or knew from the media. The majority of students pointed to Manufaktura, Scheibler's Lofts, developed areas of former factories within the Łódź Special Economic Zone, Piłsudski Avenue (referred to as the 'contemporary axis of development' in urban development plans), and recently the surroundings of the Łódź Fabryczna train station, where a New Center of Łódź is being built.

"It is probably the only place where one can see a real hive of activity. It is always full of noise and motion, with thousands of people going in and out of Manufaktura every day. Apart from a perfect idea for developing this former factory land from an economic perspective, this place has also began to play a unifying role for citizens and to serve as a landmark for tourists."

"It is a masterpiece of revitalization and renovation. It is undeniably an attraction of the city and its biggest success in the last decade." (Manufaktura, editorial note by Tobiasz-Lis, Wójcik).

"Stylish apartments in old, abandoned factory halls and the warehouses of the former cotton mill in Księży Młyn. I think that this place reflects development best. From raw, abandoned factory walls to beautiful apartment buildings. A transition as if from an ugly duckling to a beautiful swan. Impressive." (Scheibler's Lofts, editorial note by Tobiasz-Lis, Wójcik).

"Textorial Park office center located in Księży Młyn is an investment which serves as an ideal

example of a very successful combination of modern architecture and old postindustrial construction." (Łódź Special Economic Zone, editorial note by Tobiasz-Lis, Wójcik).

"For an example of a developing place, I chose a stretch of Piłsudski Avenue between Piotrkowska and Kilińskiego Streets. Glass and steel skyscrapers, offices, a shopping mall, an amusement center, cinemas, cafes, world corporations, banks, fitness clubs, discos, hotels... I myself am stunned by the fact that all these things are squeezed into such a small area. All of these modern, effective buildings give an impression of development." (Fig. 4c).

"The so-called 'Łódź Manhattan' is a place where one can see development. We can notice some of the most important investments in the city along its major artery. The presence of the tallest buildings in Łódź, both corporate and residential, may also reflect the high rank of this part of the city."

"Not original... But the place where one can really see development is the Fabryczna train station. (...) There is always one element which accompanies an initial stage of development – an excavator."

"Not long ago, there was not a single good thing about Łódź-Fabryczna train station. It haunted not only local citizens, but also tourists. Although it seems to be in a state of complete demolition at present, we can see a bright-looking future of this place." (Fig. 4d).



Unfortunately, in this case also, more places were identified in students' essays as instances of crisis than of development. A striking majority of objects are located in the inner city, frequently near places described as those where one can see development. This fact corroborates the existence of disproportions in the urban space of Łódź. Furthermore, the students also depicted in their essays abandoned and neglected former factory buildings, which – despite their architectural and symbolic value for the city and its citizens – are undergoing gradual degradation.

"Neglected, dirty, mostly abandoned, tenement houses with smashed windows, haunting in the commercial center of Łódź. The nearby Staromiejski Park and Manufaktura offer a huge contrast with these buildings. Walking by, I always have a feeling that one day soon, one of these houses will collapse. They just ask, scream, beg for revitalization."

"If you want to see crisis-stricken places in Łódź, just enter the closest backyard. These places leave no room for comments. Old tenement houses, scratched walls, smashed windows...During the day there is nothing to look for there, at night it is dangerous to go there."

"Wschodnia Street is a synonym of old, collapsing buildings, run-down tenement houses, poverty and deterioration. This street reflects best the character of Łódź and the problems this city has to face. The only thing which seems to flourish here are liquor shops and cheap, second-hand clothes shops."

"An obvious crisis in this city may be exemplified by numerous devastated buildings of former factories. One of the best instances is the building of Scheibler's New Weaving Mill. The only remnant of the then enormous plant is now the perimeter wall (...)."

"Factories – once the symbol of the city's power, now they symbolize its great decline after 1989. Abandoned and neglected, they tell a story which by far foreshadows an imminent doom."

The author of the fourth photo essay has marked Piotrkowska Street as a place where crisis is visible. The local authorities have also noticed this phenomenon, and as a result of the 'crisis phase in Łódź center', they passed a document called "A Strategy for Piotrkowska Street for the years 2009-2020". The provisions of this document outline the street as a place thought out in every detail, neat and tidy revitalization space

– a multifunctional and metropolitan city center. However, will these plans become reality?

"The street, deemed by many as the symbol of Łódź, is currently going through a crisis. It is easy to notice some gaps in the pavement, there are more and more low-quality shops offering cheap clothes and Chinese products. Fewer and fewer people walk down this street, and restaurant and pub gardens are frequently empty."

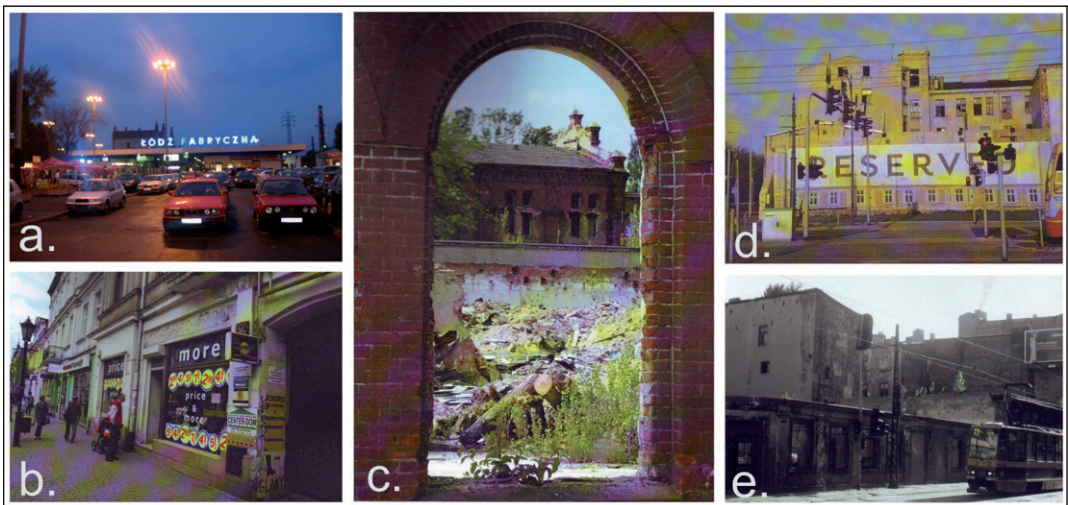
"Putting all my sentiment for Piotrkowska Street aside, I have to notice that it is currently going through a crisis. It stems from severe competition from Manufaktura and Galeria Łódzka, but also from inappropriate care from the local authorities. That is why, next to beautiful tenement houses we can see ugly, neglected backyards, where some economic activity is able to take place only for a short while. Businesses which manage to stay on that market do not enjoy high prestige. Piotrkowska definitely needs help." (Fig. 5b).

The following map (Fig. 6) depicts places which have been evaluated as positive and negative by the students, and interpreted in their photo essays as beautiful places identified with the city's development as well as ugly ones, frequently cited as symbols of crisis. The character of this outline is strictly synoptic. Not every case described by students could be located exactly on the map. The students often generalized, writing about 'tenement houses and yards in the center of Łódź' or about entire housing developments such as: Stare Bałuty, Stare Polesie or 'Manhattan'. Nonetheless, there is a noticeable concentration of both positively and negatively evaluated places in the city center, especially along the borderline of the peripheral railway track which delineated the area of the 19th century industrial Łódź. Apart from city parks, the area of the New Center of Łódź and Manhattan – identified with service-related buildings along J. Piłsudskiego street rather than with a housing development, positively evaluated places are located patchily, often as enclaves inside crisis areas or in their closest vicinity (Manufaktura, Staromiejski Park). On the other hand, negatively evaluated places are linear in their character – they form long stretches of streets situated in the very center of Łódź (Tobiasz-Lis 2010). Photographing and writing about these streets, the students highlighted their poor condition, decapitalization of buildings and social problems. A counterbalance to these



**Figure 4.** Places in Łódź in which development can be seen: a. Manufaktura, b. Scheibler's Lofts, c. Piłsudski Street, d. the Łódź Fabryczna train station.

Source: self-analysis (a and b), P. Bogutczak (2012), W Kośmider (2012).



**Figure 5.** Places in Łódź in which the crisis can be discerned: a. Łódź Fabryczna train station, b. Piotrkowska Street, c. Scheibler's New Weaving Mill, d. Legionów Street.

Source: self-analysis (a), W Kośmider (2012), P. Stępnik (2012), I. Piątek (2011), M. Klimczuk (2011).

negative examples is J. Piłsudski Avenue, which is perceived in the citizens' eyes as, not only an area of contemporary development of the city, but also a contemporary center of Łódź. The following outline, which corroborates the existence of disproportions in the contemporary urban space of Łódź, especially in its central parts, also serves as an inspiration for far-reaching research to be undertaken on the micro scale as regards the social environment of winners and losers of the transformation processes.

### Places where time has stood still and oases of calm

The places where 'time has stood still' presented by students in their photo essays encompassed all the 19th-century residential areas for the work-

ers of the former K.W. Scheibler factory in Księży Młyn and I.K. Poznański's factory in Ogródowa Street. An interest in this area may be explained by the recent emergence of large investments in the form of Manufaktura and Scheibler's Lofts, which have been created in the immediate vicinity of the above-mentioned places. Dynamic changes revolving around these objects stand out against the background of certain fragments of former industrial conceptions which have not been subject to revitalisation. Among other places listed in this category, there are: the Old Cemetery, St. Joseph's Church, and tenement backyards. In all of these examples the students highlighted the fact that the places and objects did not undergo any changes over time, which makes them good 'tellers' of the city's story.



Figure 6. Disproportions in Łódź urban space.



“Peering into some backyards, I often feel as if time had stopped there many years ago. One step is all it takes to move back in time.”

“A street which is characteristic of Łódź, a street which used to enchant with its stylish tenement houses, today symbolizes the enclave of poverty and social ills. It seems that time must have stood still there sometime in the 1980s, with the only thing different being the cars parked along the street. There have been no renovations – the pavement is full of potholes, the railway line is twisted and plaster falls from building walls straight on to pedestrians’ heads.” (Fig. 7b).

“Walking into Księży Młyn, I have a feeling as if nothing has changed over the years, almost as if time has stood still in this place. Cobbleled alleys, family houses lined up along the street and the red color of omnipresent bricks offer a chance to travel back in time to the end of the 19th century, like in Reymont’s ‘The Promised Land’.”

“Can time be brought to a standstill? Obviously, the answer is yes. The best example of this in Łódź is St. Joseph’s Church in Ogrodowa Street. This old, quaint church is itself a travel in time. Being there, one might forget about the present, about what is going on around. People just stop as if there was no future. Time stopped in this place many years ago, and I hope it will not start passing again...”

The last category of places, which the students were asked to photograph and interpret, are

‘places in which I hide away’. This category seems crucial, especially from the perspective of those who were not raised in Łódź, but came here to study. For students – who for the first time in their lives leave their family comfort zone and go to a big city, with its new environment, new community, new challenges – Łódź might be a stressful place. As it turns out, the places to which young people run away to hide are mostly green areas – parks (which have also been listed as beautiful places) and various places found on the outskirts. What follows from the students’ photo essays is that these places offer reminders of hometowns often in fact smaller and effectively in the countryside. They try in this way to escape from the city noise, lights and crowds to green and quiet places.

“I go jogging in this place, which I often do when I don’t feel like meeting other people. I am sure I will not come across any acquaintances. There is an unpaved street lined with single-family houses. You can feel there as if you were in the country. That is also why I always go there when I feel homesick.”

“The Botanical Garden –it is my own island of peace and beauty amidst the city jungle. I always go there when I am fed up with the city, and I cannot go away. I strongly recommend this place at the beginning of May, when all kinds of tulips blossom.” (Fig. 8a).



**Figure 7.** Places in Łódź at which time has apparently stood still: a. Old Cemetery, b. Legionów Street, c. Księży Młyn, d. St. Joseph’s Church.

Source: A. Brzezicka (2011) M. Chudy (2011), self-analysis (c), M. Gniwecka (2012).

"The park at Piękna Street – it is a jungle in the city center. This inconspicuous park, the greenery of which I often hide away in, is located just a few meters away from the tenement house I live in. The atmosphere in the park seems dark and mysterious, due to dense treetops and entwining ivy. This is my place; this is where I come when I need to unwind or stop for just a minute and hide away from the entire world." (Fig. 8b).

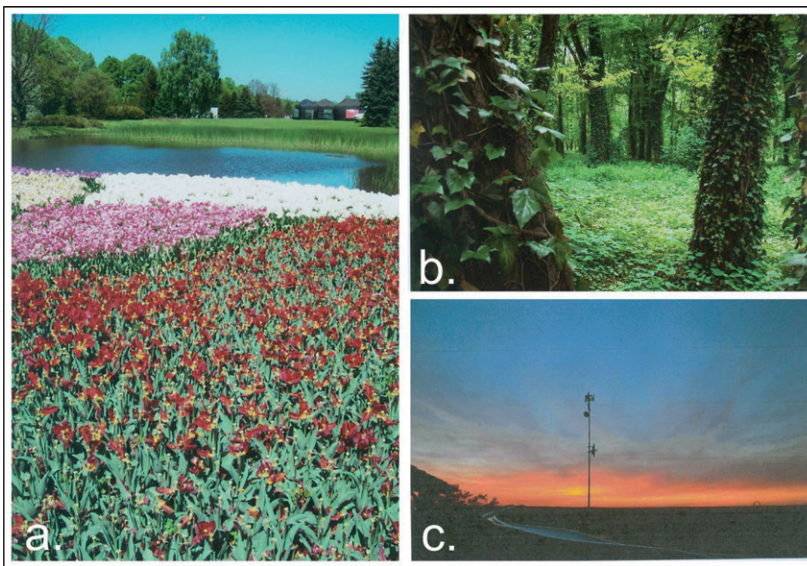
"Rudzka Hill – located outside the city center. There you can admire a beautiful panorama of the city. I feel a bit at home here – I like it when the height difference in the area is more than 5 meters, especially when I can see a stretch of forest somewhere on a hill and a city lost in hollows." (Fig. 8c).

"A place where I run away to – Matejko Park  
I run away to read  
I run away to speak  
I run away to relax  
I run away to think  
I run away to study  
I run away from people  
I run away from school  
Many reasons – one place."

## Conclusions

Every city in the world reflects certain materialized social, political and aesthetic ideas. In every part a city conveys an unlimited number of meanings which are constantly read by users, and as a result lead to a shaping of durable experiences in the users' consciousness. Among all the major cities in Poland, Łódź occupies a peculiar place. The city was built as a result of lively processes of 19th-century industrialization, and regardless of the political system (capitalism or communism), has been characterized by strong social and spatial disparities. All this makes Łódź an extremely interesting subject of research, which in our case has been conducted in the form of photo essays prepared by geography students who were motivated to take a closer look at the city in which they decided to spend five years at university.

The photo essays prepared by the students reflect a certain subjective image of Łódź, on the basis of which some conclusions may be drawn regarding the social interpretation and evaluation of both the entire city and its individual fragments. The results of the research presented in this article, obtained with the use of the photo projective method, verified earlier assumptions concerning common images of the city, which despite being experienced in subjective, multidimensional and



**Figure 8.** Places in Łódź where I hide away: a. Botanical Garden, b. Park in Piękna Street, c. Rudzka Hill.

Source: M. Chudy (2011), A. Brzezicka (2011), A. Janiszewska (2012).



multifaceted ways, manage to unify people with similar social features. The captions which accompany the photographs and explain the choice of certain places or objects by the students, allow for a more complete interpretation of meanings people give to and read from different places and objects in urban space. In conclusion, the method presented in this article may be said to broaden current standard social studies conducted on the basis of a survey questionnaire, as well as enriching traditional methods used in the course of students' geographical fieldwork. Evaluating the whole course on "The image of urban space", students seemed truly satisfied with the outcomes of their project papers, highlighting that it was "something different than what they had done before".

It was not the aim of the article to compare student comments on the city presented in papers from 2011 and 2012. However, as some places switched from the category 'ugly' into 'beautiful' or from 'place of crisis' to 'place of development', it would seem that people are capable of very rapid reactions to changes in the urban fabric. It may therefore be concluded that these kinds of study, i.e. ones concerning emotional attitudes to urban space, should be regarded as crucial when it comes to devising strategies and planning local development, and indicating problematic areas which require protection, renovation or deeper functional and spatial transformation.

Finally, it should be noted how the photo essays prepared by the students and commented on in this article reveal at least five functions of photography in social research, i.e.:

1) stimulation of the attention and imagination as a city is explored with a camera and certain topics are selected with the intention of photographs being taken;

2) inspiration as regards the discovering of something behind photographs, as these are continuous invitations to deduce, speculate and fantasize;

3) documentation of externally observed visual facts as "each photograph is a certificate for something" (Barthes 1981: 87);

4) service in the role of trigger for discussion or debate within a focus group allowing different individual perceptions of situations presented in photographs to be confronted;

5) illustration of concepts and categories with a view to a better understanding thereof. As visual representations and interpretations are eagerly used by sociology, ethnology, architecture and urban planning, on account of their multifaceted character, they should also be recognized by urban geographers, especially when it comes to the description and analysis of a very complex and continuously changing city landscape.

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– from 2012: P. Bogutczak, M. Gniwecka, A. Janiszewska, K. Kikosicka, W. Kośmider, P. Stępnia, B. Szperlik, K. Wiśniewska.

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