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The Social Functions of a City

All significant courses and schools of sociology of the 20th Century studied the spatial organisation of city life but, generally, it was not a dominant or all-important issue. In this regard, in relation to other research orientations, a Chicago school stands out. Its main difference, as Jerzy Szacki writes was "undoubtedly the city which was the subject of the research, namely Chicago"². One of authors, and the most outstanding member of this school, Robert E. Park, simply identified the social life of the city. In an article characteristically titled "The City as a Social Laboratory", he wrote "[...] the social problem is fundamentally a city problem. It's about how, under the conditions of city freedoms, to achieve social order and social controls equivalent to the order and controls which spontaneously developed within families, clans and tribes"³. For members of the Chicago school, urbanism became a dominant perspective in the analysis of social facts and processes. The subject of the research was not only the city, in the true sense of the word, but also all the problems that appear within its space: social stratification, occupational structure, the model of the family, social communications, the activities of political movements, religious, racial and ethnic issues, social pathology or crime. Some of the researchers were convinced that exploring the problems of the city contributed to the development of knowledge about much more spatially extensive social phenomena which were not able to be the subject of empirical research. Because of the high and constantly growing level of urbanisation of American society, treating the city as a dominant form and pattern of social life seemed to be an interesting idea.

The achievements of the researchers from the Chicago school are considerable and, at the same time, diverse. Within them, empirical studies dominate although, in the opinion of a section of the researchers, the theoretical legacy, especially the concepts and ideas included in the works R. E. Park, William Burgess, Robert D. McKenzie and Louis Wirth, deserve greater interest. The ecological approach is considered to be the most original part of the theoretical achievements of the school⁴. Paweł Starosta notes that it is "one of the few theories which has been formulated at the mezzo-structural level, the importance and the scientific correctness of which were never questioned"⁵.

Park is recognised as the father of the ecological social concept. He also introduced the very idea into the language of sociology. Formulating the establishment of the ecological

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² J. Szacki, *Historia myśli socjologicznej*, Warszawa 1983, część II, s. 646.

³ R. E. Park, *The City as a Social Laboratory* [w:] *Chicago. An Experiment in Social Science Research*. Ed. T. V. Smith, L.D. White, Chicago 1929, s.2.

⁴ J. Szacki, *op. cit.*, s. 646.

⁵ P. Starosta, *Poza metropolią. Wiejskie i małomiasteczkowe zbiorowości lokalne a wzory porządku makrospołecznego*, Łódź 1995, s. 46.

approach invoked the research achievements of Charles Darwin whose theory of evolution, from midway through the 19th Century, was greeted with great interest by researchers of social phenomena who were seeking general regularities in social life. Park, himself, more than once, expressed in his work the belief that referring to the struggle for survival as the principle for regulating the existence of all living organisms allows for the accurate description of social phenomena and processes⁶. From amongst current trains of social thought, for him, it was liberalism which, in the characteristics of society, also invoked the mechanism of rivalry, being a specific form of struggle for both economic survival as well as for other areas in the life of a society.

At the centre of interest for proponents of the environmental viewpoint was the influence of the natural and social environment on the structure and the development of the local community, especially on spatial aspects of public processes occurring within the area of the city⁷. They singled out two levels in the organisation of a community: biotic and social. The first is not the product of human activity, but is given to people. What's more, it is common to the entire natural world. It is present everywhere where living organisms share a common environment. At this level, communities adapt to the natural and social environments both in an individual and collective dimension. The existence and development of a local community are possible thanks to the continuous coordination of individual activities and the organisation of activities at the collective level. Some researchers simply note within it an "individual adaptation mechanism"⁸. The role of rivalry and cooperation in the functioning of a local community was also noted by R. E. Park who wrote that, in their own place of residence, "individual communities are engaged in a process of competitive cooperation which gave internal relationships the character of a natural economy. To such an environment and its inhabitants, be they plants, animals or people, environmentalists apply the term 'community'"⁹. He considered its characteristics as being¹⁰:

1. the existence of a territorial, organised population,
2. the taking root in the territory it occupied,
3. individuals living in conditions of internal mutual interdependence which is more symbiotic than communal.

Analysis of the adaptation regarded fundamental to the life of local communities drew the attention of social environmentalists to the processes which make it possible. Those researching the work of R. E. Park differ on the issue of how many and what processes he noticed in the life of an urban society. J. Szacki lists four integration processes which appear

⁶ R. E. Park, *Human Ecology [w:] Perspectives of an American Community*, Ed. R.L. Warren, Chicago 1973, s. 33.

⁷ J. Szacki, *op. cit.*, s. 642.

⁸ A. H. Hawley, *Human Ecology. A Theory of Community Structure*, New York 1950, s. 31.

⁹ R. E. Park, *Human... op. cit.*, s. 34.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

in the scholarly work from the university in Chicago: competition, conflict, accommodation and assimilation. Only the first, previously determined "as the most fundamental and universal", constitutes a form of interaction typical of territorial communities. The others merely appear in communities¹¹. However, P. Starosta considers that the American sociologist differentiated three processes: rivalry, dominance and succession, whereas, to them, R. D. McKenzie added another four: concentration, centralisation, segregation and invasion¹².

Similar to J. Szacki, P. Starosta considers rivalry as the most important process occurring in urban society which was probably absorbed from liberal thought. In a wider sense, it refers to all forms of the struggle to survive, whereas in a narrower sense, to social phenomena. Apart from the most developed economic competition, it is people fighting for attractive real estate, prestigious locations, higher social position, power, and the like. The aim of centralisation is to concentrate institutions, as well as industrial enterprises and suppliers of services, into determined areas of a city. This supports the lowering of economic costs and social effects in the functioning of the economy, administration and other municipal institutions. At the same time, this contributes to the creation of dominance by some districts of the city. Segregation, occurring under the influence of economic, religious, racial or ethnic conditioning, leads to the division of cities into homogeneously, natural areas. They are inhabited by groups of residents with similar socio-economic, cultural or ethnic features. Similarity in working and living conditions distinguishes them from other city inhabitants, whereas interactions and social bonds inside this community are stronger than external relations. It was called an "invasion" by social environmentalists in describing the processes of population migration from outside the city into the city and the change in the spatial structure of residents, associated with moving to other districts. They could be associated with a change in economic status, social status or occupation. Succession is a term that has two meanings. The first is connected with the aforementioned process of "invasion" and indicates the spreading to as yet unsettled areas or the taking over of areas inhabited by other groups of the urban population, being driven out of their natural areas, either partially or totally. Such a situation occurs when poor city dwellers settle in vacant, uninhabited houses. Families belonging to the same ethnic group then settle into the district (Asians, Latinos) or residents are removed from houses they have occupied because of their anticipated destruction due to modernisation plans, the creation of a business district or luxury buildings.

The second meaning of the term "succession" is connected with the phenomenon of occupancy and indicates the right of taking over a house or apartment from one's parents. It is also connected with inheriting the neighbourhood community that goes with it.

¹¹ J. Szacki, op. cit., s. 654.

¹² P. Starosta, op. cit., s. 50.

Whereas, dominance is a process which is supposed to lead to dependence or even subordination of other communities of residents to one urban group. It serves to force territorial concessions or influence the functioning of urban institutions.

The functioning of institutions is the subject of much deliberation by social environmentalists. Without them, the adaptation, organisation and coordination of individual activity would be far more complicated. Institutions belong to biotic order. They serve to satisfy the basic living needs of the inhabitants residing in a defined area. It is understandable that R. E. Park regarded them as the deciding criteria in distinguishing a local community from other collective forms of social life¹³. Whereas R. D. McKenzie, when referring to institutional criteria, distinguished four types of communities. The first is a primordial community made up of, at most, a few thousand people. It satisfies the most essential material needs, enabling biological and social reproduction. The second type is called a secondary community. Its basis is the redistribution of goods and services, produced by primordial communities, amongst other local communities as well as placing them onto external markets. The industrial city is the third type of community. It is a place of production, distribution and consumption. Whereas the fourth type is comprised of urban centres which impact upon the entire society or which even have an international impact¹⁴.

A city is a complex form of the spatial organisation of life. For this reason, social environmentalists discerned the need to distinguish smaller subdivisions in the spatial urban structure which they defined as natural areas. In terms of the territorial order, they are the most homogeneous of spatial units. More essential is, however, the voluntary method of development, not influenced by conscious aims or planned actions. Communities inhabiting them have a much more homogeneous character than do urban societies. Whereas, additionally, the same nationality, ethnic uniformity, racial origin, resemblance of class position, a religious bond or a close, achieved, financial status of the residents can strengthen it. It allows them to gain the collective status of a player in the public processes occurring in the city, cooperating or competing with other groups and communities.

The specific character of the process of forming natural areas also determines their specificity. As R. E. Park writes, "Every natural area has or demonstrates tendencies to have its own traditions, habits, standards, customs and property and, if not language, then at least a universe of discourse which is considerably different to every community"¹⁵.

Much of the work carried out by researchers related to structure and function. At the centre of their interest was social space which they clearly distinguished from the physical. This distinguishing resulted from the belief that these two spatial dimensions did not often

¹³ Ibid., s. 48.

¹⁴ R. D. McKenzie, *The Ecological Approach to the Study of Human Community* [w:] R. E. Park, E. W. Burges, *The City*, Chicago 1970.

¹⁵ R. E. Park, *Human Communities*, New York 1952, s. 201.

correlate. People with clearly different education, assets or customs are capable of settling near each other, whereas people with similar social status can live in different districts.

The city, in a social-spatial dimension, is an arrangement of positions, filled by individuals and the relationships that take place between them. Space, when understood as a physical category, constitutes a frame of reference for urban, social life. As Talcott Parsons wrote, territory is "always essential as a place where something socially important happened or can be expected to happen".¹⁶

Functionalists included a local community as a social whole which, for the purposes of analysis, they used as a notional model. They comprehended the community in two ways. For some, it was an element of *sui generis* reality, wholly unreal, but analytical. Like every collective form of social life, it is based on a system of social status. Their static aspects are created by social status and their dynamic aspects by roles. The most complete arrangement of this approach can be found in the works of T. Parsons. The territorial aspect already appears early in his publications, when he analysed the social phenomena in the position of an actor – as the point of reference. The interaction which appears on both sides of the relationship has a social character. However it occurs on a certain territory which constitutes an inherent aspect for it.

Constructed in the late 1940's and early 1950's, having a much more extended form, the model of a social system based on functional imperatives permitted a Harvard University sociologist to conduct a much more systematic study of complex, social arrangements, these constituting a community. The territorial factor was comprehended as one of the dimensions of the function of adaptation. Three issues were treated as crucial in the analysis of local bonds: the connection of community with territorial location, the understanding of that location by individuals performing social roles, as well as the relationship between performing those roles which have a territorial reference and the perceptions of those performing those roles regarding local bonds¹⁷. Consequently, he described it as "an aspect of the structure of the social system which is related to the territorial position of people and their actions"¹⁸.

Like every system, community fulfils four functions: adaptation, the achievement of goals, integration and the formation of patterns. Its distinguishing characteristics are activities being the effects of performing social roles and the territorial positioning of individuals which influence the number and scope of the roles played. For example, one's place of residence determines to which school district, parish community or electorate one belongs.. Linking the territorial dimension with social roles allowed Parsons to determine the specific forms of two functions which he regarded as prominent in a local, social system. These

¹⁶ T. Parsons, *The Principal Structures of Community* [w:] *Structure and Process in Modern Societies*, Glencoe 1963.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, s. 251.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, s. 250.

functions of residence, having an adaptive character and a professional activity, serve to achieve one's goal. In the case of cities, they are differentiated not only their social context, but also by the spatial. Places of employment are usually located beyond places of residence. Both these spatial fragments of a city determine different, but not necessarily completely separate, circles of acquaintances and social interactions. The third structural element of local communities is institutions which concern themselves with the application of the law. Their task is to control the responsibilities borne by the players creating a local, social community, linked to the possibility of using sanctions against those violating the norms obligatory in a community. Entities performing this jurisdiction carry out the function of shaping the patterns and regulation of tensions. Whereas the process of social communication, which Parsons described with name of "communication complex", performs a communications function which serves to increase the level of system integration¹⁹.

Such communities, in reality, do not exist. They are made up of structures and processes differentiated on the basis of functions which complete the social system and the formation of its elements. Such a position gives rise to the issue of the ontological interpretation of the status of local communities. On the one hand, its limits are determined by the fulfilment of the functional requirements of systemic elements. A community is formed by individuals who play roles with the following functions: residential, professional, a local system of social control and communication. Whereas, on the other hand, those fulfilling certain roles belonged to the local community but fulfilled other roles - being part of their environment.

For this reason, the majority of researchers, applying the functional approach, considered both communities as real phenomena. They did not differ from Parson's applied terminology. They considered the local community as a system of roles and statuses, and of groups having a socially aggregative and institutional character. The individual played a role in the basic idea of place. Robert L. Warren described a local community as "a social combination of individuals and systems safeguarding important communal functions, having a local reference"²⁰. In accepting the establishment of the systemic character of a community, they adopted criteria other than Parsons' regarding the division of the system. David E. Poplin considers that the most important sub-systems of a local community serve the following functions: order, business activity, education, religion and social life²¹. Stephen J. Fitzsimmons' and William G. Leavy's proposition of systematic inclusion in a community allows for distinguishing fifteen sectors having a sub-systematic character. They are education, economy, employment and income, social welfare, local centres of government,

¹⁹ Ibid., s. 251-266.

²⁰ R. L. Warren, *The Community In America*, Chicago 1973, s. 158.

²¹ D. E. Poplin, *Communities. A Survey of Theories and Methods of Research*, New York 1972.

law and justice, protection of the natural environment, health, social services, recreation, housing and neighbourhood, transport, social communication, religious life and family²².

In turn, R. L. Warren, in his deliberations, emphasises the functions of the internal community and their fulfilment by institutions. The economic function takes in production, distribution and consumption. It is realised by local business-trade, service, transport, commercial institutions, and the like.

The object of the socialisation function is to form within the individual, as recognized by society, a system of values and social norms, the preparation to perform social roles and to act according to the dominant patterns of behaviour. The existence of the local community is thanks to the process and existence of the reproduction of structures.

The third is a social control function. Its realisation is to serve the formation of behaviours consistent with the mechanisms of communal life, especially where norms regulate them. The most important institutions in the creation of social control mechanisms are the local authorities and administration.

Associations, foundations, social, cultural, economic, charitable, sporting or church organizations enable the realisation of the public participation function. Some of them have a local character. However, they remain only as circles, being branches of nationwide structures.

The last of the functions as differentiated by Warren is the function of "mutual support". Here, he understands this as being social welfare distributed by local government and non-governmental institutions.

None of the listed functions are exclusively carried out by communal institutions. All are fulfilled by a greater or lesser participation within nationwide and regional structures. However, the effects of their realisation have a local dimension²³.

At the centre of interest for functionalists were the processes of satisfying the needs of the local community, assuming the form of social functions. Connecting this analytical thread with the administrative divisions of the city allows for the appearance of the social, functional aspect of the municipal area. Social needs find themselves at the centre of this view.

A city is capable of satisfying only a part of the needs of its inhabitants. The rest can be fulfilled by higher level organisations of communal life, i.e. regional, national and even international, or at a lower level which includes the family, a peer group, a neighbour community, the parish or a community organization, as well as smaller housing estates or district units.

Lower level district organisations of communal life are capable of fulfilling a number of functions and of satisfying countless needs. Because, although they don't have at their disposal all the resources to which higher level communities and institutions have a wider

²² S. J. Fitzsimmons, W. G. Lavey, *Community: Toward an Integration of Research Theory, Evolution and Public Policy Considerations*, Social Indicator Research, 1977, nr 4, za: P. Starosta, op. cit., s. 60.

²³ R. L. Warren, op. cit., s. 178-197.

access, for instance finance, real estate and administrative apparatus, they do have wide access to other resources such as social or cultural capital. The scale of this effect is also significant. Certain resources, even economic, when divided into parts and individually used, usually bring lesser benefits, than if used collectively. Others however, like social bonds or trust, are more effective at the lower level. In communities of a few dozen people, bonds dominate directly; in communities of a few hundred people, they are still significant, whereas with a few thousand people, indirect bonds dominate.

Among the most important functions of a city is undoubtedly the residential. People live in areas with the same, uniform or similar buildings, the character of which allows them to stand out from their surroundings. Usually, residential areas distinguish themselves by a population density within which are, generally speaking, unoccupied surroundings, or which are characterised by a different building development and other level of residential concentration.

The significance of the residential function results, above all, from the fact that it serves the realisation of the need for safety, one of the most important of human needs. Having "a roof over one's head" is a common aspiration. Ideas on the shape, size and standard of one's home or apartment vary. Apart from safety, it also satisfies others needs, beginning with the need for intimacy or rest by aspiring to differentiate an area to be used exclusively by the family and invited guests, and for aesthetic needs.

The level of separation and its realisation through the residential function results largely from the types of buildings. In rural areas, it is more or less closely tied to the economic function. Residential building development on farms, with neighbouring farm buildings, create spatial and functional integrity.

It presents itself differently in the case of city space and commuter belts settled by an urban population²⁴. In the majority of occupations carried out by the inhabitants of a city, workplaces and residences are separated from one another, not only functionally, but also spatially. An apartment or house exclusively fulfils a residential function. Although, in some professions, the possibility exists to carry out all or part of one's profession from home. There is generally no such compulsion to do so. The city, to an incomparably higher level than a village, became a settlement system for the clearly, differentiated functions of individual districts. Apart from the city centre, the administrative, commercial, or industrial quarters, the residential function is largely or exclusively present elsewhere in municipal districts²⁵. Good examples of this are the housing estates. Some of them number several thousand residents and are marked by a clear lack of institutions carrying out non-residential functions. During the last century, architects even conceived plans for the building of

²⁴ P. Rybicki, *Spółeczeństwo miejskie*, Warszawa 1972, s. 161-205.

²⁵ Members of the "Chicago school" were even, as already mentioned, supporters of the deliberate shaping of municipal districts which performed separate functions.

dormitory-cities like, for instance, Tychy, built to perform one function²⁶. Admittedly, for a long time, such a state of affairs is not sustainable and, sooner or later, organisations and institutions develop which serve the accomplishment of other tasks, but the majority of the residential function yields only to weakness and that can dominate over many years.

Despite, it would seem, supporting contact networks and social ties, distinct differentiated urban areas fulfilling the residential function, researchers sceptically speak of the possibilities of the formation of local communities within cities. Piotr Kryczka writes that "despite the differences, the current findings of empirical research agree on one point: in new residential units in large cities, reconstruction of local communities of the old type does not place [...] such reconstruction is impossible"²⁷. Whereas Sjoerd Groenman, author of the so-called concept of the *empty zone*, claims that "separation of the places of employment and residence causes a concentration on family life and a participation in the life of the global society. In such a state of affairs, districts become service units rather than social units"²⁸.

Other authors, discerning the limit and barriers in the process of developing a local community within a city, tend to regard city residents as a communal society *sui generis*. Paweł Rybicki, on the one hand, points out huge models of city life, social divisions, mainly of a class character and spatial mobility, as factors limiting the influence of the tendency to integrate. On the other hand, however, he treats the city as a comprehensive system in which, besides the direct ties which dominate at the family, neighbourhood or local group level, indirect ties appear in broader, social arrangements²⁹. Jan Turowski, in turn, is convinced of the formation, within the space of a housing estate, of an entity having the features of a local community³⁰.

Linked to the residential is the social concentration function. I have already mentioned that towns, and their sections, differed at the level of population concentration in a given area. It is usually reflected by demographers as an indicator of population density. It is shown as an actual, quantitative relationship between the size of a given area and the number of individuals inhabiting it, given as an average value. However, it says nothing about the reasons for such an arrangement of a city community nor about its social consequences. Residency is, in its simplest form, the result of possibility and necessity. On the one hand, the attraction of an apartment or a house is influenced by its location, its technical condition and its functionality, and on the other hand, its accessibility and price. This determines the relatively high level of homogeneity within the social structure of populations of individual towns and districts. In the case of rural populations, profession and ownership of property are

²⁶ B. Jałowicki, M.S. Szczepański, *Miasto i przestrzeń w perspektywie socjologicznej*, Warszawa 2005, s.173-187.

²⁷ P. Kryczka, *Spółeczność osiedla mieszkaniowego w wielkim mieście. Ideologie i rzeczywistość*, Warszawa 1981, s. 11.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, s.26.

²⁹ P. Rybicki, *op. cit.*

³⁰ J. Turowski, *Środowisko mieszkalne w świadomości ludności miejskiej*, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków-Gdańsk 1979.

the most important factors affecting the level of social concentration, hampering or simply making it impossible to move permanently somewhere else without the prior sale of the farm, workshop or shop. As opposed to the city, there are a much larger number of conditions. Among these are:

- a) economic - causing people of different financial circumstances to settle in different districts, but also, in the same district, some are restricted to the purchase or lease of cheaper residences, whereas others have the freedom of purchasing more expensive accommodation;
- b) status - expressing oneself by settling in districts or housing estates recognised as being inhabited by people of a certain social status e.g. by those in the liberal professions or by entrepreneurs;
- c) professional - manifesting itself by settling in a housing estate e.g. one comprised of people employed in the same work-place or working in the same profession (e.g. mining or steelworks);
- d) snobbery - influencing the aspiration to settle in particularly attractive areas of a city regarded as "fashionable" (e.g. the Royal Route in Warsaw or the Market in Kraków);
- e) professional grouping - manifesting itself by people in the same or similar professions settling in densely populated areas of a city, e.g. districts inhabited by artists or financiers;
- f) social exclusion - causing racial, religious, cultural or economic ghettos (districts of poverty) to come into existence.

The level of social concentration: population density (poor districts or ghettos), is characterised, on one hand, by sub-standard building development and, on the other hand, by overpopulation. While working class districts are densely populated, middle class or entrepreneurial are sparsely populated - their inhabitants and their families also have a similar status and social position.

The residential function and social concentration are connected with yet another function - social contacts. Psychologists and sociologists draw attention to the fact that an increase in the number of people sharing a space leads to an increase in the networks of social contacts. Along with an increase in population density, the probability grows that people, living in the one location or district, will meet each other. However, social contacts are conditional, in no small degree, to the location within the space. Abraham A. Moles and Elisabeth Rohmer differentiated nine zones circles in the life of city inhabitants:

- a) the body, allowing for division, separating "oneself" from "others";
- b) the sphere of the direct gesture, including performing an activity without relocating the body;
- c) peace, ensuring intimacy, warmth, personality;
- d) the residence being the smallest place of contact with others;

- e) the "charismatic" area (taking in about a 500 metre radius), being an area of spontaneous behaviour;
- f) the housing estate;
- g) the city centre, constituting a point of reference for the identification of a settlement system and, at the same time, offering a wide range of services;
- h) the region;
- i) the "adventure zone", designating an area of longer expeditions e.g. holidays³¹.

Places for social contacts outside the family are apartments or houses or larger spaces. The relationship between population density and the number of social contacts lessens as the size of a city and the size of its population grows. The inhabitants of big and huge cities utilise only a part of its space which includes specific districts: residence, work, education, shopping, performing administrative activities, and the like. As a result, only in districts of general utility is the number of contacts large. They also often have an occasional, one-time and superficial character. Only a small number of them can be transformed into social bonds.

In districts and housing estates, one can usually identify places or areas where social contacts are especially frequent. These are open spaces, such as central squares, main streets, the surroundings of service and shopping centres, stadiums, cultural sites or civil-service buildings, as well as schools and other public venues in which are held gatherings and meetings of the residents of the housing estates or districts. Some of them perform the role of places of multiple social contacts. As an example, churches gather the faithful for services, whereas they could also serve as a council of the district or housing estate residents. Some of them also accommodate not just religious, but also social organisations.

Districts give rise to various types of contact spaces. As an entity, we can differentiate contacts between: 1) individuals, 2) the individual and a community, 3) communities (micro-communities, mega-communities and macro-communities).

Considering the frequency of social contact, it is possible to distinguish four types: 1) one-off, 2) occasional, 3) frequent, 4) daily.

Analysing social contacts through the prism of social circles, it is possible to distinguish: 1) family, 2) neighbourhood, 3) narrower asocial surroundings (acquaintances, residents of one's most immediate surroundings), 4) from wider social surroundings (residents of a housing estate or district).

In regard to this subject, one can further distinguish contacts according to: 1) profession, 2) economic (trade, services), 3) position, 4) place of residence, 5) social group or social club membership, 6) religion, 7) similarity of interests and customs.

³¹ A. A. Moles, E. Rohmer, *Psychologie de l'espace*, Casterman 1972, za: B. Jałowicki, *Spoleczne procesy rozwoju miasta*, Katowice 1976, s. 28-35.

The level of formality is not without meaning to the character of contact and allows us to distinguish between: 1) informal (spontaneous and planned), 2) informal (partly or completely).

A network of social contacts, their frequency and intensity, as well as their character, create the conditions for the formation and development of social bonds. As one of the precursors in the research of local communities, Ferdynand Tönnies thought that local bonds and community are based upon two fundamentally different kinds of preferences. The community is an entire society, at whose base one can find an organic will flowing from the, unspoken until now, reflection of human ego, while society is the result of arbitrary creation, being the result of thought and calculation³². Both types of will correspond with different types of social bonds. Blood relationships, brotherhoods and neighbourhoods dominate bonds. They have a comprehensive character, whereas their control mechanisms are customs and traditions. In society, bonds are based on agreement, the exchange of goods and calculation. They are aspectual, taking in social roles, rather than entire units. The law is a factor in their control.

The notion of bonds appears often enough as an attributive and definitive feature of communities, so that, already in the middle of last century, George A. Hillery, comparing almost one hundred expressions and definitions of the phenomenon, put them amongst the most often mentioned properties, next to territory and social interactions³³.

In rural and regional communities, direct bonds play a more significant role than in bigger population centres. The smaller the community, the more favourable are the conditions for their formation. In country communities or relatively small housing estates and districts, especially those are long-established, meaning a period of uninterrupted settlement, personal friendships are struck up and maintained relatively more often than in big residential districts. Also a greater number of direct bonds are formed in a greater population density. The dependency of one phenomenon upon the other is noticeable, however, only to a certain, empirically perceptible extent. Above that, then the opposite relationship begins to appear. In places of "density", direct bonds "thin out"³⁴. It is evident, especially, in districts with many high-rise buildings, in which there can be as many as ten thousand residents to the square kilometre. A mass, rather than a group character of the settlement and the use of public sphere, causes a growth in the participation in and role of indirect bonds in the entirety of social relationships. An individual in a block having, for example, 100 apartments and inhabited by a few hundred residents, even with the best intentions of striking up an acquaintance with every one of his neighbours, cannot possibly achieve it due to a lack of time and the different rhythms of life connected with, for example, career, or due to the migration of residents.

³² F. Tönnies, *Wspólnota i społeczeństwo*, Warszawa 2002.

³³ G. A. Hillery, *Definitions of Community. Areas of Agreement*, *Rural Sociology*, June 1955, s. 111-123.

³⁴ P. Kryczka, *op. cit.*, s. 37.

Apart from family, direct bonds most often include neighbours and friends. A neighbourhood institution, connected with the mutual-use of public space, is especially meaningful in their formation. In rural centres, it has a traditional character dating back to distant times. The inheritance of farms invariably results in future generations of the same family living there for tens or hundreds of years. This is a neighbourhood with a high level of homogeneity as it is based on a similarity of professions, financial circumstances, customs, social and religious views and the like. Neighbourhood friendships are often close. They are also dependent upon connections.

Urban centres present a situation of diversity. Housing estates or industrial districts still exist, where neighbours not only live together, but also work together. However, the criteria for settlement are different: inheritance, housing allocation, purchase, leasing an entire apartment, or sub-letting a part of one. They lead to a greater social diversity among the residents. Working, studying or learning elsewhere, residents only live next to each other.

In considering the diversity of factors affecting the character and intensity of neighbourhood bonds, Piotr Kryczka considered the following types:

1. limited - including rare, short and often perfunctory contacts;
2. informed - an interest in one's surroundings and a desire to acquire knowledge about them;
3. conventional - manifesting itself in daily habits (e.g. greeting, a short conversation and the like);
4. beneficial – doing favours, certain forms of help, as e.g. walking a dog, keeping an eye on a neighbour's apartment while they are on holiday, or performing joint activities e.g. cleaning up;
5. solidarity - being reflected in, for example, the provision of support in difficult or dramatic situations;
6. social-friendly - connected with a relatively high level of intimacy, which is indicated by mutual visits and spending time together³⁵.

The last four types provide the conditions for the formation and maintenance of direct bonds.

Yet, they also have significance for indirect relationships. Not only do they make up the structure for direct relationships, due to them it is possible to talk about residential or district communities as social entities. Institutionalised, indirect bonds, resulting from membership of the same church or community organisation, attending the same school or studying at the same college, build the foundation for permanent conduct and repeated behaviours and customs. What's more, in certain circumstances, they can provide the conditions for the formation of new, personal acquaintances.

³⁵ Ibid., s.116-123.

Districts and housing estates are also areas of development of needs and public interests and their articulation. Similarity of living conditions, joint use of public utilities in the immediate environment, desiring the same or similar changes and, finally, an awareness of that similarity of needs and expectations, and that collective forms of action are more effective than individual ones, induce joint behaviours serving to satisfy mutual interests.

Some needs can be satisfied by the authorities and regional communities. Basic and security needs fall within their purview. Residents of districts and housing estates also fulfil material needs, associated with the spatial order, cleanliness, public space aesthetics, the state of technical infrastructure, construction and housing, public institutions (maintenance of schools, health centres, cultural institutions, recreational facilities) and, caring for the natural environment.

It is impossible not to notice that the most immediate social environment is, best and most fully, capable of realising non-material needs, such as: social contacts, the formation of social bonds - especially interpersonal, affiliation, a unity of opinions, views and beliefs, individual and group identity, expression and, finally, participation in the life and events of the community, activity, performing roles, particularly in the most immediate environment, based on social acquaintances, neighbourhood and friendship.

Other needs can, however, be met exclusively and, above all, by the municipal authorities. Among these are, for example, change in the organisation of educational institutions or health services, arranging the routes of public transport, approving development plans or creating branches offices of the municipal administration or social welfare. In these instances, district or residents organisations can only express the expectations of residents. In these matters, residents can act by articulating their interests. Even though those forms of activity include all stages of the process, they are especially apparent in the first two stages: articulation of needs and collective interest. Discussion amongst neighbours, meetings of residents of rural districts or housing estates, formulating a petition and collecting signatures, visits to offices of councillors or community administrators, being present at sittings of the council or participation within its committees are more important, are far from all the forms of expressing expectations and requests are concerned. Some of them, like village or housing estate meetings, are institutions prescribed in local government legislation. Others result from the principles of carrying out public functions. Still others are developed on the principle of customs or customary behaviours.

Generally, the possibilities are more modest for the representation of interests and demands for community support of individuals. The free character of the terms of office of local councillors does not force them to be guided by the needs of residents of a district in their public activity. Whereas competition for places on the council from party or organisation lists influences a feeling for greater loyalty to social movements or political structures than to voters.

In order to dominate political divisions in council, caucuses are formed by councillors drawn from one or more related political programs.

Another solution, such as representing the interests of a district community or its organisations, is only possible where they have been established. The best solution, in this regard, is the village council. The functioning of local-government councils not only requires the obligatory division into rural administrative units, but the choosing from among them of a village head and a village council. In the majority of councils, the village heads are also invited to council sessions and committee sittings which makes for the possibility of expressing expectations, requests and demands from the residents of the rural administrative units.

In cities, this mechanism for the representation of interests appears in districts and housing estates, in which elections are held to local authority bodies. Chairmen of management boards of support units usually participate in council plenary sessions and on committees. The possibilities of exploiting other structures for the representation of interests are not great, since the majority of social and political organisations do not create links at the district and rural administrative unit level. Whereas those which do exist, in general, do not have sufficient resources at their disposal.

This forces residents of support units to utilise other forms of representation of their demands. Most often, they choose those which allow for self-help. These forms include individual and collective action, both spontaneous and institutional. An example of this could be the activity of local committees and foundations. Some communities, in order to advance their interests, strive to gain favour with politicians, journalists or leaders of public opinion to make of them patrons of their undertaken enterprise. A new phenomenon is the utilisation of the services of marketing and public relations agencies.

Despite these limitations, the articulation of the interests of the majority of a district community does not change. They exploit its other methods, forms and mechanisms. The articulation takes on a verbal form (e.g. the expression of opinions at meetings of council authorities with residents, formulating requests or demands during discussions with councillors or the mayor or president), a written form (petitions, demands, protocols or reports from meetings or gatherings, as well as information in the local press or displayed in public places). It can also have a spontaneous character, impetuous, but can also take on the form of institutionalised, organised and coordinated action. It is also possible to link these diverse forms (as an example, it is possible for the mayor or council delegations to accept petitions or demands submitted by residents of a district).

Within auxiliary units, it is possible to distinguish many channels for the articulation of interests. They include:

1. individual action (intervention, applications, complaints, visits to local politicians, informing the press or administration of situations requiring intervention, or taking other action);

2. collective spontaneous action (protests, demonstrations, hanging posters in public places, civil disobedience);
3. organised action, leading to the formation of social movements, but also including rural and regional meetings;
4. leaflets, written appeals, pamphlets;
5. local press, radio and television;
6. regional and national sources of social communication;
7. leaders of public opinion;
8. councillors, the community administrator and his deputies and other politicians coming from community auxiliary units;
9. wider-ranging social movements (not just local).

They enable the articulation of interests in various ways and techniques. Well-organised local communities are able to apply elaborate articulation strategies, including action at the level of auxiliary unit, community and outside the local community, evoking words and images, utilising formal and informal channels of articulation.

The formation and activity of auxiliary units does not lead, with any certainty, to the solving of all the big problems of a city. Tasks such as town planning, public communications, the supply of water, electricity and heating, cleaning of the public sewerage system, transport of waste and the maintenance of dumps as well as incinerators and the environment are, for multiple reasons (significant among which are financial, technical and access to available space), better and more effectively fulfilled at the wider level than at the local community level. In satisfying other needs, for instance social welfare, culture, sport or tourism, associations, foundations and other forms of social organizations deal well with them. Councils are privatising some posts or institutions which serve to deal with "public matters of local interest". They contract out other services of public benefit.

In the multi-faceted social, economic and political areas of cities, however, there is a lot of capacity for support units. The advantages are their particular demographic, cultural, psychological, systemic values and behavioural resources, their right to exist being a meaningful level of functionality manifesting itself in the ability to satisfy a whole raft of social, village, regional and community needs.

However, for these virtues can become apparent, a level of political activity, which exceeds the incidental participation in elections and protest campaigns, is essential. Apart from criticism of the authorities, there must be a desire to change the existing situation. Above all, it must carry the hallmarks of deliberate and intentional activity. This still differs within Polish reality and not only at the district or city level.

Some sociologists distinguish three phases of a city's existence: "youthful", when it is established and develops, being transformed from a settlement into a larger, social centre,

”mature”, in which it stabilises its population size and sets its boundaries and “declining”, a time in which it empties and dies.

In order for that final stage in the life of a city not to begin, it must establish an even social-spatial system, performing all significant functions for its residents. What is more, these functions must be carried out in a complete manner. They must assume a developed form enabling the achievement of all goals which are within their purview. Residents draw satisfaction from such functionality. It creates additional incentives for entrepreneurs to invest. For tourists and visitors, it creates a positive image of the city.