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SUBJECTIVE DEGRADATION OF THE INNER CITY IN GDAŃSK

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Abstract

Every resident has his/her own opinion about a chosen city area irrespective of its spatial and functional structure, the quality of technical and functional municipal tissue or the social economic development of the city. The subjective degradation of specified city districts can be studied from the perspective referred to above. This article describes survey results for the Inner City of Gdańsk.

Key words

subjective degradation, valuation, Gdańsk.

1. Introduction

The term area/territory can be understood as a “place”, precisely located in space with a certain variable, which due to its historical and cultural environment undergoes continuous transition (Załęcki, 2003, following Michałowski, 2000). The value of these places is shaped by their creators and users. This is linked to diversified and varying, “spatial value” which results from the value system of the assessor. Various groups of recipients and users may assign a varied range of values to the same place (Załęcki, 2003). Spatial assessment starts with perception, a psychological process where recipients experience stimuli which they may select and assign importance to (Załęcki, 2003, following Huczynski, Buchanam, 1991). Thus the recipient recognises a given object/area, i.e. „how it differs from others, specifying its essence, identification, experiencing its structure (...) and experiencing its significance (...) in the category

good – bad, pretty – ugly, advantageous – harmful” (Turowski, 1979, p. 141). In other words perception is “an experience of space”, assuming initially: seeing, than learning the meaning, and next identification with the place. Though perception is individualised, particular recipients experience similarly the same situations and elements of the city (Załęcki, 2003).

The subjective degradation in the title is defined as a negative image of the place in public opinion (Mironowicz, Ossowicz, 2005). It refers to the humanistic dimension of the city, i.e. the perception of space and its assets expressed by the labels of particular districts. It matches well “the subjective methodology stream of city spatial structure analysis” with emphasis on reality cognition by the city residents (Jurek, 1995, p. 58).

In order to obtain root data to access spatial quality, an opinion poll was carried out by the author in the period April-June 2011. The survey was of a diagnostic nature. The respondent sample was 1.5% of

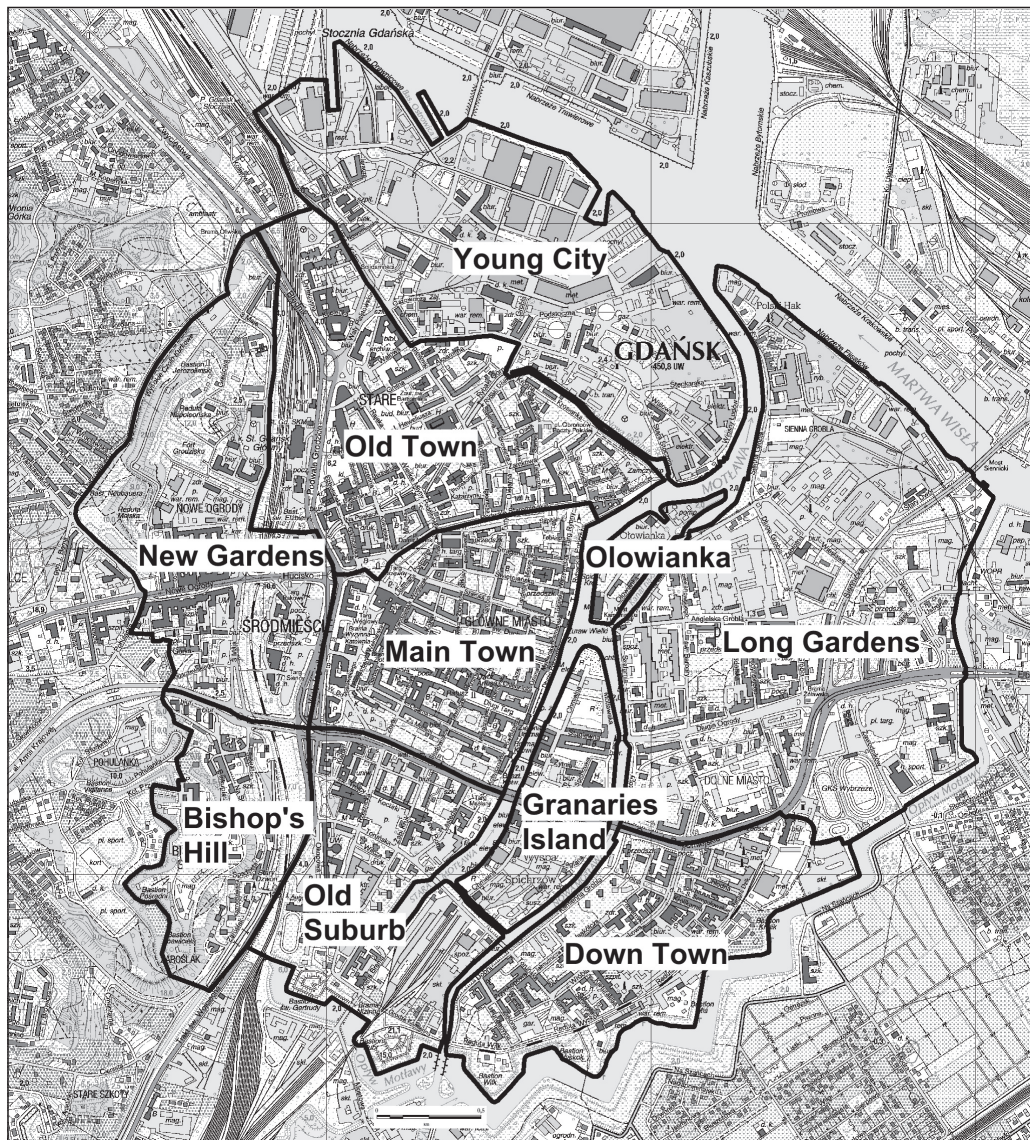


Fig. 1. Division of Gdańsk Inner City into study units

Source: own study. Voivodship Centre of Geodetic and Cartography Documentation.

adult inhabitants of the Inner City of Gdańsk and was a simple random sample with layer modification referring to the proportion of the number of residents in particular districts (Babbie, 2004; Szreder, 2010). The author's study involved a special assessment made by district inhabitants. The general image was specified, for example of a safe, posh place or on the contrary. The assessment is the sum of impressions and related associations and their impact on the public image of an area depending on their kind and intensity (Mironowicz, 2010). The semantic differentiation scale was applied to specify the degree of subjective degradation of particular parts of Gdańsk Inner City (Fig. 1.). The scale involves the choice between two controversial attitudes applying expressions specifying a degree of intensity of a given attitude (Kotus, 1999; Babbie, 2004). The methodology quantifies subjective data. Respondents can chose

from a 5 degree scale, with 1 meaning a negative phenomenon to 5 a positive one (Babbie, 2004). The assessment comprises 7 contradictory statements, e.g. 1 – dirty, 5 clean.

A city resident rarely thinks of the city as a whole. Inhabitants rather show interest in components of their "environmental identity", i.e. place of residence, work, basic services (Wallis, 1977). The fragments used are the best known to the user thus creating an individual subjective image of the city (Załęcki, 2003). It would seem that this environmental identity covers at least a town district such as the Inner City, but the study showed that some of the respondents were not familiar with its outskirts. This may indicate extensive diversification or simply lack of attractiveness of the Inner City as a whole.

The population under study covered adult residents of the Inner City of Gdańsk. 59.7% of the

surveyed were women. In terms of age 80.6% of the respondents were in production age (45.8% mobility age, 34.8 non mobility age). Persons in post productive age constituted over 18% of the respondents. 45.6% had a secondary educational background, 35.5% university degrees, 8.3% primary education with 3.8% vocational and 1.5% gymnasium respectively.

2. Research results analysis

Study research results were presented in a semantic profile (Fig. 2). Generally, inhabitants of Gdańsk Inner City are not certain how to evaluate their district. The most common response was the medium value "three". Concurrently a decisive pressure on negative image statements is noticeable evidenced by the disproportions in extreme answers.

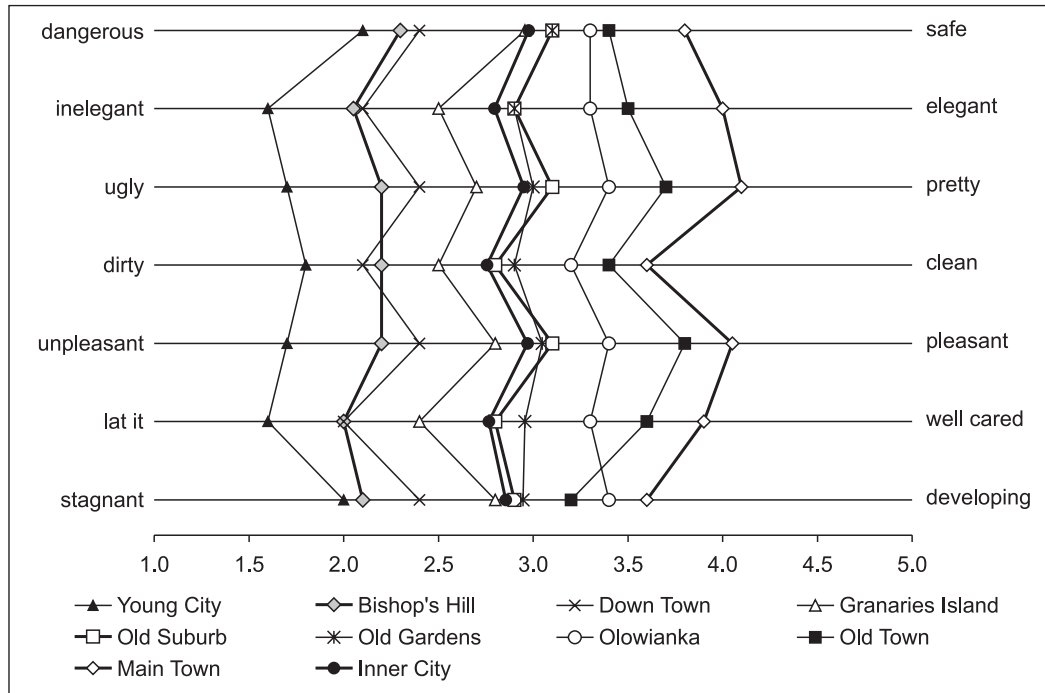


Fig. 2. Semantic profile of the subjective assessment of Gdańsk Inner City

Source: Own studies based on author's own field survey.

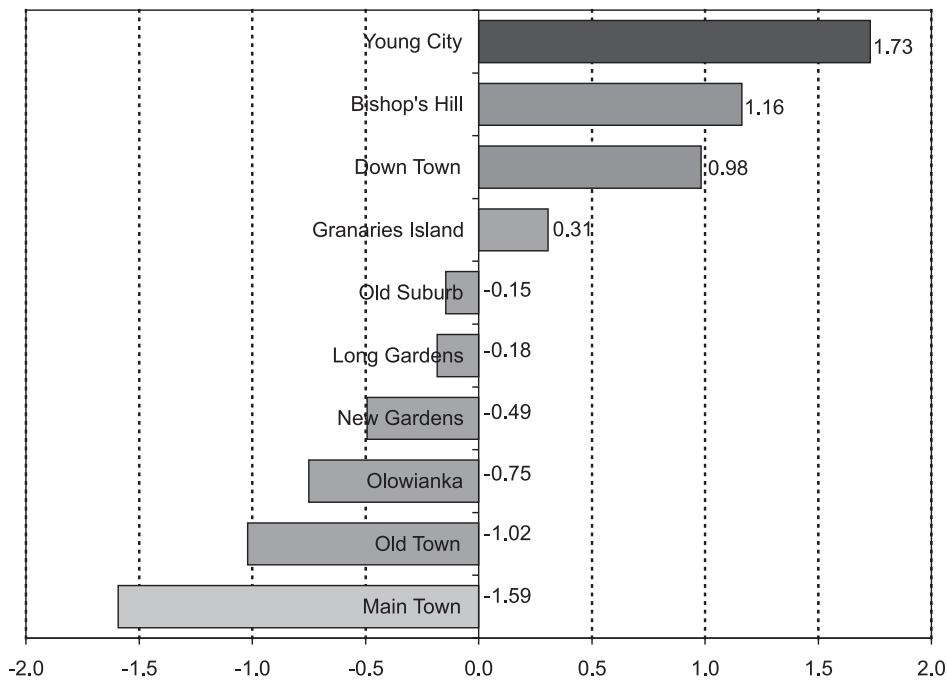


Fig. 3. Subjective degradation of Inner City

Source: Own studies based on author's own field survey.

A subjective degradation index was construed based on Perkal synthetic index and pseudo-one-dimensional classification (critical gap criteria according to Hellwig) for Gdańsk Inner City. Four degrees of phenomenon intensity were identified on these grounds (Fig. 3.) Young City received the worst opinions. The best were for the Main Town. Nevertheless, the majority of the city districts featured a medium level of degradation.

Among the particular parts of the Inner City in Gdańsk Young City is perceived as the worst due to such factors as stagnation, a neglected ugly area (post shipyard premises) lacking elegance. This perception also affects the general feeling of safety. The opinions about the district Bishop’s Hill are slightly better and more similar to those about Down Town.

Main Town enjoys the top rating thanks to its good looks (many historical sites, no industrial areas or infrastructure), which contribute to the pleasure of living with the architecture linked with the waters of the Motława River. A well cared for and elegant area also contributes to the feeling of safety. Old Town ranks second as progress in the district’s development was assessed lower. It was assessed at 3.2 which is the third result (following Main Town and Ołowianka) Once again as in the case of Main Town cleanliness obtained the lowest grades.

Next the Ward cluster analysis was carried out (the statements given above were analysed) and two types of areas were identified (Fig. 4.). Type A units are those that generated a sense of danger

and insecurity and are perceived as suffering stagnation, dirt and general lack of tidiness. Type B units on the other hand are in the opinion of the residents safe and well developed.

3. Summary

Looking at the two classifications given above we can notice certain regularities (Table 1, Fig. 5.). Units featuring high and very high degradation belong to type A, which means that the structure of their underlying factors is similar. They are located on the Inner City outskirts, which form the peaks of a triangle. The most problematic area is the Young City located in the northern part of this district. Pursuant to the local spatial management plans its incorporation into the functional structure of the Inner City has been projected for the future. Down Town and Bishop’s Hill are separated from the remaining parts of the districts: Down Town by the so called W-Z road built in the eighties of the XX century along the street Podwale Przedmiejskie, and Bishopop’s Hill by natural barrier, a hill (60 m above sea level), and an anthropogenic one in the form of a railway line. Residents are of the opinion that Main Town stands out assessed highest in all respects. The subjective degradation of the remaining type B areas was assessed as medium.

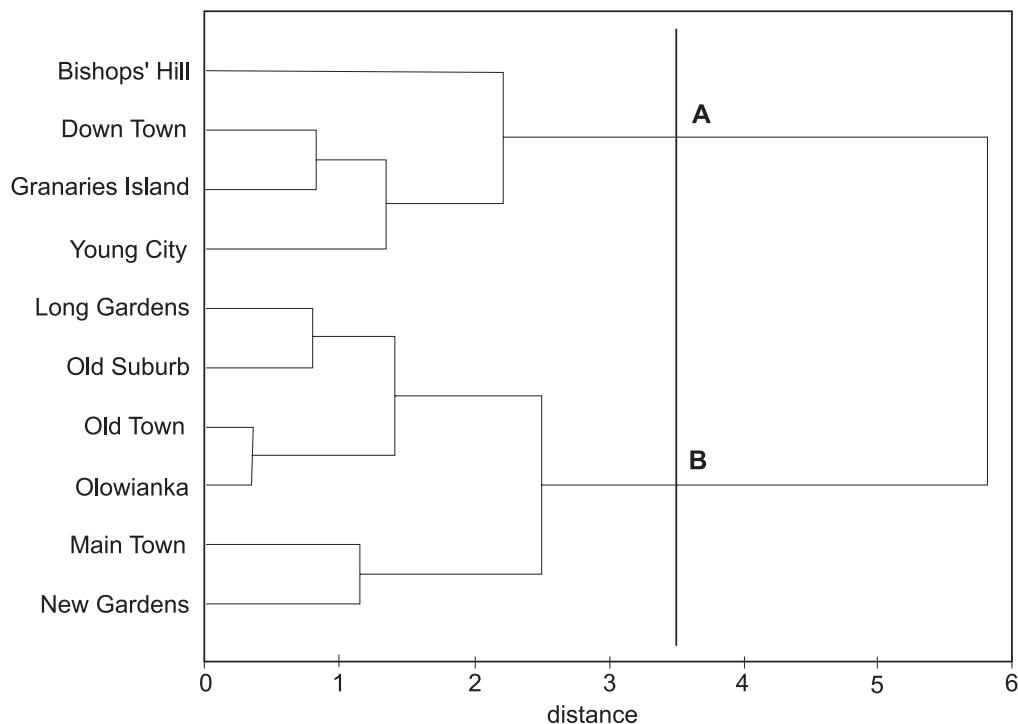


Fig. 4. Types of research units pursuant to the subjective degradation of the Inner City of Gdańsk

Source: Own studies based on author’s own field survey.

Tab. 1. Assessment of research units of the Inner City of Gdańsk according to subjective degradation

Degradation level	Type of area	
	A	B
Very high	Young City	
High	Down Town Bishop's Hill	
Medium	Granaries Island	Old Suburb Long Gardens New Gardens Ołowianka Old Town
Low		Main Town

Source: Own studies based on author's own field survey.

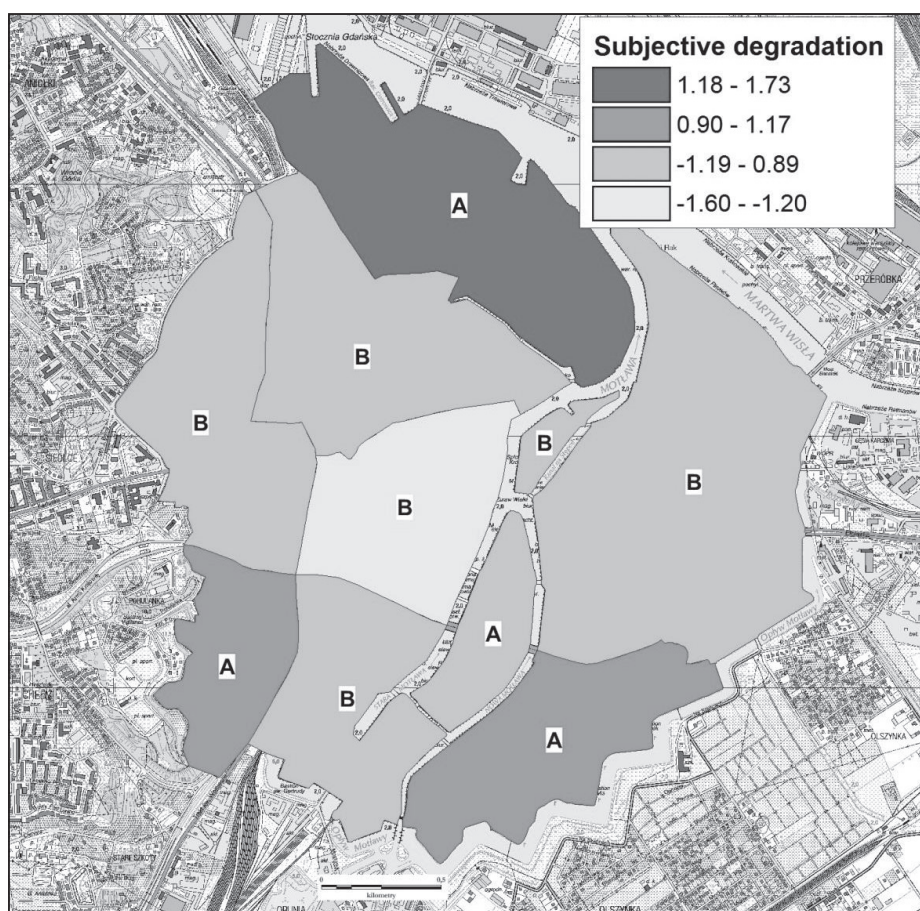


Fig. 5. Assessment of research units of the Inner City of Gdańsk according to subjective degradation

Source: Own studies based on author's own field survey.

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