

THE IMAGE OF A SMALL TOWN THROUGH THE EYES  
OF ITS INHABITANTS – THE EXAMPLE OF PARCZEW  
(EASTERN POLAND)

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**Summary.** The article presents how the Parczew – a small town located in the Eastern Poland – is seen through the eyes of its inhabitants. The modified method of interviews and mental maps elaborated by K. Lynch [1960] was applied. It allowed to create a syntactical map representing the social imagine of the city structure. The characteristic features and elements of the town as well as the quality and the role of the public spaces were also indicated. In summation the actions which should be taken to improve the quality and the legibility of the Parczew image while maintaining the city’s cultural identity and ecological values were proposed.

**Key words:** the city image, mental maps, landscape shaping, small cities, spatial planning, Parczew

## INTRODUCTION

The imagery of environment is „the quality in a physical object which gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer. (...) it might also be called legibility or visibility” [Lynch 1960]. The imagery is closely linked with the intelligibility of the particular space elements [Conroy-Dalton and Bafna 2003] and identity of the place, which according to Siostrzewitowska [2012] is „the searching of its physical marks”. Wherein the crucial is the aspect of „the relationship between the specific character of a city and the tradition of local culture”.

This issue seems to be actually very important as the development of cities in Poland is frequently hazardous, only based on economical factors. The consequence of this, is the unification of landscape and the lost of the characteristic features of cities. There is a lack of solutions aiming at increasing the legibility of cities while highlighting its local identity, which is still treated as a symbol of backwardness and provincialism.

The paper aims to elaborate, as closely as possible, the representative imagine of a small city Parczew and indicate its strengths and weaknesses. Those analysis should provide a basis for planning decisions and also for various kinds of social activities aimed at improving the quality of the Parczew spatial structure.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Parczew is a small city located in the West Polesie, in Lubelskie province (Eastern Poland). Is inhabited by 10 thousand of citizens. The medieval urban structure of the town is preserved [Horach *et al.* 2001]

In the paper was applied the method elaborated by Kevin Lynch [1960], adapted to the specificity of the subject and study area. Nine questions were formulated which aimed at indicating: the characteristic features and places of Parczew, the most attractive and the mostly visited places, the individual elements which enrich and degrade the values of the city. Inhabitants were also asked to draw and discuss the schematic map of Parczew. On the basis of imagines and interviews a synthetics map of the town imagine which includes the nodes, paths, districts, edges and landmarks was elaborated. Particular elements were presented divided into primary and secondary, dependently on the number of people which have been indicated by.

## RESULTS

### **Characteristics elements and features**

As the most characteristics city landscape elements were indicated the Basilica of St. John the Baptists (style, size, historical values) and a new Divine Province church. From the civilian buildings were mark out the municipality and neighbouring the old tsarist school. All those objects are characterized by large size and original style. Interesting is the fact that on the maps drawings by respondents only those buildings possess marks referencing to its form (schematic drawings of churches, school, municipality building, trees and fountain at the market square). Other elements possess only name. Fewer people mentioned residential schools, statues, figures and parks.

More problems were connected with identification of characteristic features of Parczew architecture. In most cases, this question required further thought. Evidently, there is the lack of features uniquely associated with the Parczew, or there are not widely known. On reflection, generally were listed tenements houses in the city centre. Inhabitants describing their narrow, two-story fronts and decorative facades (pilasters, cornices, drips etc.). Small balconies facing the street and the service grounds are also characteristics.

Interesting was the answer on the second question concerning the most attractive places in respect of landscape. Citizens generally pointed undeveloped areas such as lagoon (natural greenery and open space), park on the site of the former Jewish cemetery (despite neglect), the valley of Piwonia river with surrounding meadows and a small bridge, from where you can watch the river and the old trees leaning over the water.

Most of the respondent also indicated the market square located in the city centre, called also as the park – because of the large number of trees. As the most attractive building was unambiguously indicated the Basilica. Inhabitants are first of all proud of areas of natural character and monuments of architectures. This is proven by the fact as the negative features of Parczew imagine were listed neglected historical buildings and disharmonious new objects.

### **The imagine of the city spatial structure**

In the light of the interviews, a synthetic imagine of the spatial structure of Parczew is consistent. Probably, it resulted from the small area of the town and thus its good knowledge by its inhabitants. The scheme of spatial structure is based on the net of main roads, among them the most important are the street 11<sup>th</sup> November which crossing the centre, the Church street, the Warsaw street and the exterior city bypass – the Alley Jan Paul II, and other street in the city centre. From the skeleton of streets his drawing began the vast majority of respondents – but it is difficult to determine which of them is the main axis of the city. The city centre was illustrated very detailed, the areas located far from the centre were illustrated quite generally. In general, many maps not included outskirts of the city, along with housing estates. Some interviewees, because of the difficulties with reflecting the structure of those parts of the city, marked only its characteristic elements of the name of the residential settlement. On the most maps were drawn railroads constitute clear barrier. In a few sketches was marked river valleys. Interestingly, the Konotopa River, which crossing the city centre, was drawn on one map only in the vicinity of a bridge, which indicates that the interviewee does not know exactly its course beyond the surroundings of the bridge. The Piwonia river, which constitutes the north boundary of the city, only appears on two maps and in a schematic form – playing the role of clear edge.

As nodes were generally indicated all main crossroads and market square and park on the site of the former Jewish cemetery, which is called „Grass”. These places are mostly highlighted by numerous service facilities, which are also the main landmarks. Most of them performs this role, because of its function, not because of its unique or attractive form. These are mainly administrative buildings, schools, hospital, churches, glass works and all supermarkets. Also, of all the landmarks it is difficult to choose the one pointed to by all respondents as the first and most important. Such as object may be the Basilica which has a very characteristic form, however peripherally located.



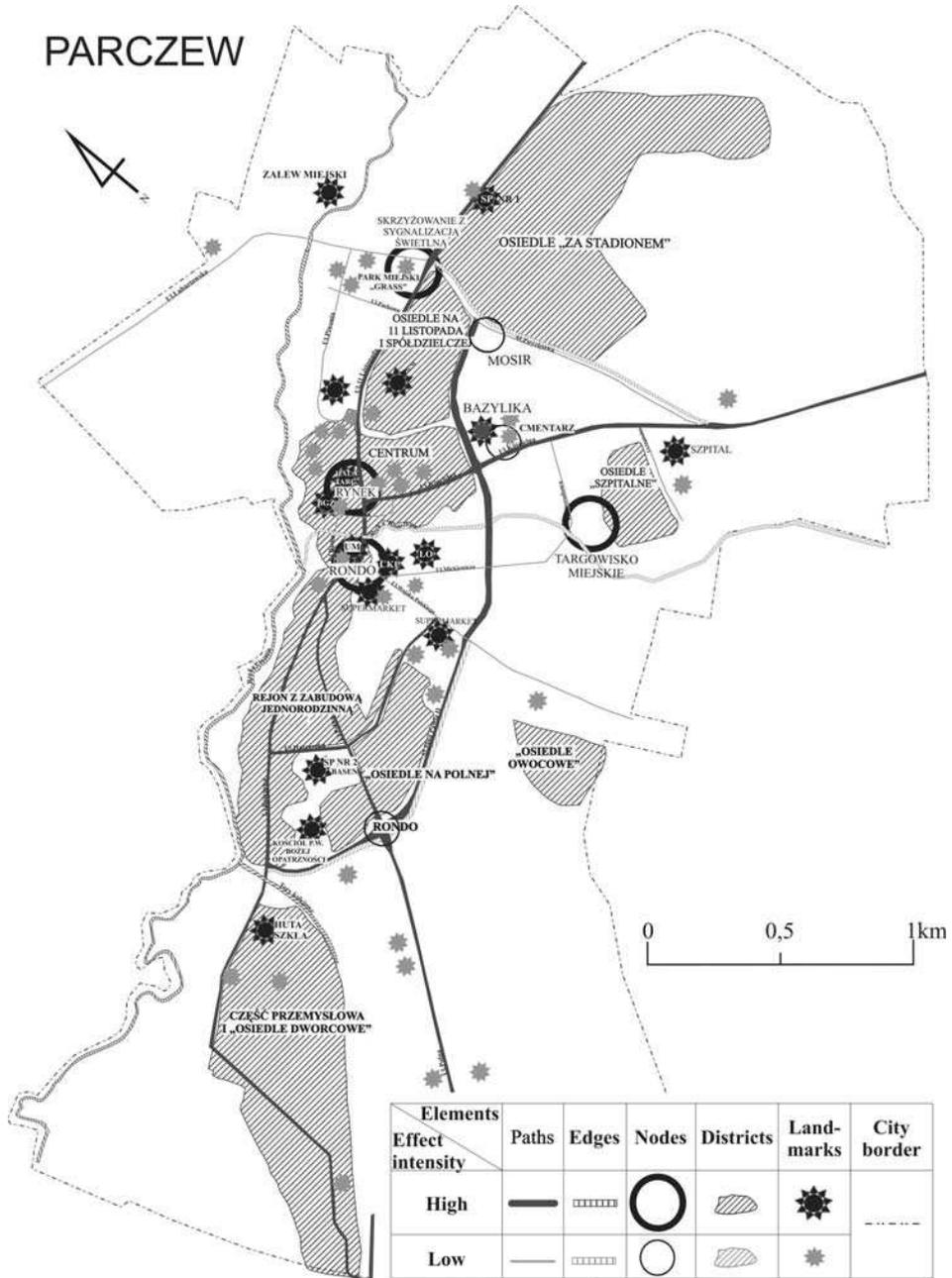


Fig. 2. Synthetic map of the town imagine seen through the eyes of its inhabitants (elaborated on the basis of interviews and drawings)

The main point of the centre could be the market square, but it serves too little important functions and does not have a properly exposed, distinctive objects. The even distribution of the main objects in the centre on the one hand causes the high rank of all the downtown, on the other makes no real central node.

The interviews revealed that quite clearly distinguishing districts exist in Parczew. They were emitted mainly because of coherent character of buildings and often their function. The most important of these is the centre, which consists of two parts: medieval old city with former Jewish suburbs and the single-storied building area on the site of a former small-town medieval village. Moreover, answers to varied questions indicated that the centre with tenement houses is perceived as an area where „you can go”. Outside the centre was distinguished residential and industrial districts. The boundaries between districts are not sharp and are represented through the main streets. The exception is the industrial district separated from the city by clear edge of railroad, thus is often called as the area „behind the tracks”.

#### **Quality and role of the public space in the city structure**

The main public space is the market square – simultaneously serving the function of a city park. Its role derived more from the fact of its central location and the neighbourhood of important service buildings than from the way the space is being planning and management as a city market square. Apart from the fountain, there is a lack of elements which could attract dwellers and create the real city agora. Frequently mentioned problem of the city centre was too narrow pavement and the lack of out-of-traffic streets. Because of it, streets in the centre slightly serve the function of public space. Dwellers very low rated the second park – so called „Grass”. This is mainly because of the neglect and lack of attractive forms of development.

The important space located just beyond the centre is a market place, which is indeed a lively place, but it is limited mainly to the commercial function. Out of recreational spots, interviewees above all mentioned the MOSiR sports centre. Most of the interlocutors also highlighted the importance of the attractiveness of natural areas in the city and its surroundings, especially the lagoon. Also, as the main walking routes are indicated suburbs and quiet streets outside the centre. Interestingly, these natural areas rarely appeared in the handwritten maps. This shows the poor planning and lack of access to those areas by residents. They are treated as background, rather than as specific elements of the urban structure. This area were indicated by residents as neglected and cluttered. There are any walking paths and recreational infrastructure. As public spaces interviewees pointed a bridge on the Piwonia river or a bench on the Konotopa river – very important and almost symbolic elements bonding the city with rivers.

## CONCLUSIONS

Summarize the analysis carried out in the study, attention should pay to several issues important for the proper development of spatial policy of Parzew – also reflecting the problems of many small towns in the eastern Poland. First of all, more emphasis should be placed on the development of the city centre, highlighting its unique features, in particular the historical character (renovated facades, stylish street lanterns, pavement surface, formation of greenery in the way which improve the visibility of historic buildings). For the proper functioning of the city is necessary to improve the quality of public spaces such as the projecting of the attractive forms of square development, widening sidewalks and the maintenance and development of the higher-order services. The city needs to be more suitable for pedestrian traffic, which is currently dominated by vehicle traffic. It is also important to maintain the characteristic style of the historic district of Parzewa – storey, small-town building on a south-west site of the centre. First of all, it is important to define the spatial structure, size and style of newly built and renovated objects. Moreover, crucial is activities aimed at promoting the unique qualities of the area among the inhabitants.

There is no clear axis nor a central point that crystallized the structure of the Parzew city. Creation of such a system requires both, proper form and function of the facilities. In this case, the key seems to be already mentioned, the original development of the existed and future public spaces and the renovation and exposure of historic buildings, in which could be located important services. The example may be the historic industrial buildings and a synagogue – now neglected, which do not perform important functions and were ignored in interviews. Those object could be a valuable and enriching landmarks of the centre while appropriate management. The city, despite the lack of the division into districts, has clearly distinguishable regions. For each of them (except the centre) the interviewees indicated the dominant type of building and pointed out the most important objects such as a school, hospital, playground. In these areas, however, there is apparent lack of distinctive and clear structure. Its reconstruction would have helped to strengthen the imagery of each districts and the entire city as well. Many of them need strengthening or creation of local nodes serving service, communications and recreation functions.

For the inhabitants, areas of natural character are important, but because of their poor access and way of management they do not play a significant role in the city's image. These areas should in a broader aspect serve as a recreational area, which are not found in the city. It is important, however, the proper development of these areas leading on the one hand to make them available for the residents, but on the other to preserve the natural landscape and open character of space valued by the dwellers. The presence of these areas is a positive feature of the city, which easily can be degraded by dispersed housing development. An area of more intensive recreation use should be Lagoon – linked to the valleys of the two rivers.

A significant part of the Piwonia river in the vicinity of the centre is now the border of the city. This can be a major obstacle to its protection and proper land use as the ecological and recreational main area of the city. The optimal solution would be to incorporate this area in the town limits and include it in the local development plan. Only in this way the chaotic building suburban development in this area can be prevented.

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#### OBRAZ MAŁEGO MIASTA WIDZIANY O CZAMI JEGO MIESZKAŃCÓW – PRZYKŁAD PARCZEWA (WSCHODNIA POLSKA)

**Streszczenie.** W pracy zaprezentowano obraz małego miasta we wschodniej Polsce widziany oczami jego mieszkańców. Zastosowano tu zmodyfikowaną metodę wywiadów i map mentalnych opracowaną przez K. Lyncha [1960]. Pozwoliło to na stworzenie syntetycznej mapy przedstawiającej społeczny obraz struktury miasta. Wskazano również cechy i elementy charakterystyczne oraz jakość i rolę przestrzeni publicznych w mieście. W podsumowaniu zaproponowano działania, jakie należało by podjąć, aby poprawić jakość i wyrazistość obrazu Parczewa przy zachowaniu jego tożsamości kulturowej i walorów ekologicznych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** obraz miasta, mapy mentalne, kształtowanie krajobrazu, małe miasta, planowanie przestrzenne, Parczew