

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC SITUATION AND SPATIAL PLANNING - THE CASE OF POLAND

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Abstract: Socio-demographic changes exert significant influence on space management. Knowledge on demographic processes and trends may help to create efficient social and spatial policies in a particular region. It may also help to prevent some negative effects of demographic changes as well as it may improve quality of life. The analysis conducted by the author has proven the necessity of taking up actions aimed at improving demographic condition of regions through proper space shaping and altering the space of cities and villages so it corresponds to their current and future demographic structures.

Key words: Poland, population, demography, space management, social infrastructure

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most important development factors of a particular region is its population and changes it undergoes. This concerns economic, social, cultural or physical space as well as natural conditions. Space management, urban planning and all similar actions shall be taken having citizens in mind. In order to do so, it is necessary to be aware of all demographic tendencies and population forecasts. It leads to better quality of live and prevents negative processes taking place in some spaces.

DEMOGRAPHIC PAST AND THE PROCESS OF SPATIAL PLANNING

In Poland as well as in whole Central and Eastern Europe some historical events had a significant meaning in the process of demographic profiles shaping and they can also be considered contributing factors in space management. The case of the eastern part of Poland can be an illustrative example as this region lost a significant portion of its population after the Second World War. As a result of this the dynamics of building up the housing stock there was low and it was intensified much later by the help of some industrial investments (Rodzoś, J., Wesołowska, M., 2012), which have influenced the space of the whole region. Pomerania is another example where a large population of immigrants, mostly repatriates from Eastern Europe, has significantly changed both the sacred and

social spaces (Przybylska, 2014). What is interesting, we can still observe different social and demographic patterns there.

It is also worth mentioning that the complicated past and the experience of communism were contributing factors to social changes. During the period of transformation interpersonal relations, including neighbourly ones, were changing constantly. They were triggered by, among others, wealth inequalities, loss of confidence and, as a result, by a decrease in durability of relationships (Giordano, Kostova, 2002). On the one hand, it resulted from a severe deterioration in financial situation of a large part of population, on the other, it is related to the new European hierarchy of priorities. The process of urban space shaping was influenced by the economic problems which started in 1990's (Andrusz, Harloe, Szelenyi, 2011). The influx of people to the large urbanized centres was decreased as less people from the rural areas and small towns were migrating at that time. Stanilov, K. (2010 a) claims that until 1995 all capital cities of the region, except Warsaw, had been depopulating, however, in 2005 the situation became stable.

All these intense changes which took place in Poland triggered the process of social groups polarization. Warsaw is a good example as some kind of segregation was observed there before the transformation and after the fall of communism it was even more visible (Śleszyński, 2004). These disproportions started to play a special role in the initial phase of the transformation period, when financial problems became the main problem of a great percentage of Poles. What is more, the process of urban space heterogenisation in the aspect of a social status is observed in the whole country, however, it is more visible in the largest cities. Social and spatial polarization is progressing dynamically (Węclawowicz, 2003). As a result of demographic processes differentiation in a given region, migrations especially, the space of some administrative units may be changed. Areas perceived synonyms of poverty shall also be mentioned as they are created as a result of socio-spatial changes, too. They are often considered temporary or permanent places of residence for many people what makes the social segregation of a given area even more visible.

The period of inhabiting a given area as well as the year in which a given district was created shape some distinctive areas where people concentrate accordingly to the demographic features, i.e. city centers become areas where the process of population ageing is visible while the population of suburbs is much younger. We should also take into account that although city centres are usually prestigious places, they are not free from pathological phenomena (Zborowski, Dej, 2009). It is also proven by the fact that when planning revitalization processes for particular administrative units, the planners shall be aware of the socio-demographic situation in a given unit as it often defines its popularity, property prices and the demands its citizens have concerning the aesthetics of urban spaces.

SOCIAL STATUS AND SPATIAL PLANNING

Social status of citizens fosters creation of units dominated by people with high material status. Nowadays the employed or the elderly can also create poverty areas. That is why it is advisable to benefit from the experience gathered by the western metropolises, which try to increase their own demographic potential through revitalization as it is also a way of reconstructing social space of cities (Haase, Biedrzyński, Grabkowska, and others, 2011).

Additionally, when the well-educated and the wealthy dominate in a particular area, they exercise influence over space management processes. In Polish cities we can observe the process of ghettoization, which is popular among the wealthiest citizens. As a result, a kind of microspace emerges which is occupied by the group of people of similar social, demographic and cultural features. The most important determinant of these changes is popularization of the gated communities which has its roots in the need of having a safe, aesthetic and prestigious place of residence. However, it deteriorates the quality of interpersonal relations which, in fact, are already a serious problem of modern metropolises (Polanska, 2010).

Therefore, it can be stated that the issue of housing occurred to be a major problem in the post-communist countries (Stanilov, 2010b). Not only the issues connected with aesthetics of space and social segregation, but also the legal aspects of purchasing properties have become significant problems for a large group of people since 1990 when our society started to impoverish.

Nowadays, besides the socio-demographic features of a particular area which directly shape the demand for housing, a general economic condition of the country, housing policies and mortgage loan availability are of essential meaning. The trends observed, which are extensively dependent on the demographic situation, influence the quality of life of young Poles. Thus, in the last few years the largest number of real estate purchase-sale transactions were concluded in the northern and western parts of Poland. It is worth mentioning that the above-mentioned regions are characterized by relatively high birth and marriage rates.

URBANIZATION AND SPATIAL CHANGES

A key role in the process of urban and rural space transformation played the process of urbanization which had been triggered by accelerated migrations. During the last two decades the suburbanization processes were visible. As a consequence of this process both peripheral districts of cities and neighbouring villages undergone a transformation. It does not only concerns expanding housing estates, trade and services developments or modernization of transport infrastructure, but also a substantial change in social space – what is even more important as the suburban areas are usually demographically young.

Although a slight decrease in the population inflow to cities has been observed since the 1980's, the process of suburbanization has become particularly relevant since 1990 (Kupiszewski, Durham, Rees, 1998). It was the year when an increased influx of population from urban to rural areas was observed for the first time. From this time on, demographic profiles of regions were mainly influenced by migration, not by vital statistics. Thus, it can be stated that the trend, which had been forced earlier, changed its direction and after the Second World War development of suburbs was significantly limited.

Therefore, rural areas surrounding the largest Polish cities are facing population growth at the moment (Szymańska, Biegańska, 2011). It is a visible trend mainly in Warsaw, Poznan, Tricity, Szczecin, Wrocław, Bydgoszcz and Torun (Figure 1). There are also considerable fluctuations in the population growth in towns and villages neighbouring Cracow. Such a situation leads to intense changes in rural spaces concerning architecture, functions and socio-demographic issues (Wójcik, 2012). In contrast, we can observe a completely

different situation in the central Poland and its south-west borderlands. A decline in population of the eastern part of the country is related to some disadvantageous structural and spatial features (Szul, 2006) which are closely linked to the fact that farming is a very important component of the GDP structure and that the branch structure is not diverse enough. Such a situation only exacerbates the problems of local labour markets as well as social-demographic ones and degradation of space.

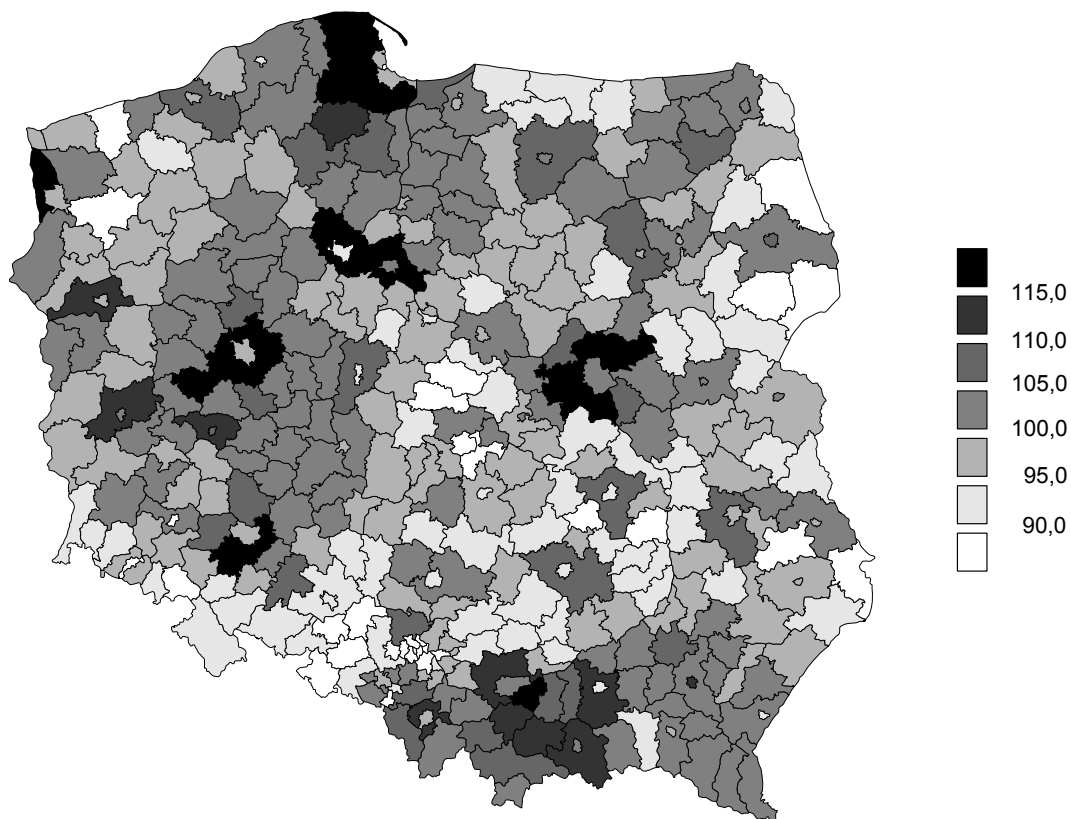


Figure 1. Dynamics of population in Polish counties
in the period of 1996-2012 (1996=100.0%)

(Source: own work on the basis of the data derived from Local Data Bank,
Central Statistical Office of Poland)

The aforementioned process of city centres depopulation is an interesting example of changes taking place in cities and their space. They are expressed by the ongoing qualitative process which is mainly visible by reorganizing interiors of buildings. It is a wide-spread practice that flats are converted into retail and service facilities. However, Warsaw is a thought-provoking case where two contrary processes are going on at the same time: many people are outflowing to the suburbs while a group of the wealthy are inflowing or returning to Downtown. In this case these inner-city migrations shall be considered a symptom of gentrification taking place in the city centre and a manifestation of deepening social inequalities in capital city.

POPULATION STRUCTURE AND SPATIAL PLANNING

When analyzing the changes in the age structure of population, it is clearly visible that the number of minors has decreased significantly. The percentage of people of the pre-working age is characterized by evident negative dynamics. It is a result of an increased percentage of people of the working and post-working ages. As far as the implications of demographic trends are concerned, the age structure of population shall not be overlooked, especially the process of ageing, which is affected by the second demographic transition. The age and gender structure determines the demand for certain services. It concerns the issue of education, health care and leisure which generates the need to properly organize public spaces.

As it was mentioned before, particular parts of the administrative units usually have very diverse structures of residents. Areas located further away from city centres are usually demographically younger. Mainly because the properties located there are cheaper, and that is why people between the ages of 20-40 can afford them. It is a vital issue regarding the revitalization process. However, we should bear in mind the fact that in the nearest decade large housing estates inhabited in the period of 1970-1990 will also start ageing.

When analyzing the changes in the age structure of Poles, it is clearly visible that the number of under-18s has decreased significantly (by 10.0% during the last 30 years). It is a result of an increased percentage of people of the working and post-working ages – they constitute 17.0% of Polish society nowadays. When planning any actions connected with space management it is necessary to bear in mind that the highest increase in the number of people of retirement age will have taken place until 2020. Thus, Polish local authorities shall prepare themselves to this upcoming situation as the population structure is shifting towards regression. What is more, our young society has changed its reproductive behavior. However, this obviously disadvantageous direction of change could be hampered by encouraging young foreigners to settle down in Poland.

Knowledge in the scope of the population structure is also helpful when considering the education system of country. A significant decrease in the number of pupils which will take place in the nearest future will also have its implications for shaping and managing the space of Poland. It will not probably be a noteworthy organizational problem in large cities, but in smaller towns and villages where the authorities will be forced to close some educational establishments it may have some negative consequences as these facilities will have to be used in other ways (Jelonek, 2008). Regions having relatively limited educational offers shall be monitored.

The demographic decline affecting the university-age young will also affect higher education institutions which will have to face some serious problems. Despite the trend to continue education after graduating from secondary school is popular, if not even common these days, the present demographic situation of the above-mentioned age group makes it impossible for all universities and other higher education institutions to continue as before (Jelonek, 2008). This is mainly a problem of private schools which will soon start to disappear from the space of Polish cities. This is also further amplified by migration tendencies among the young who decide to leave the country and begin a new life in the countries of the old continent. In light of these tendencies, the demographic profile of Poland changed significantly after its accession to the European Union. On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that in the cities where state schools

are located, especially universities and technical universities, the pace of population ageing shall not be as fast as in the cities with smaller education offers thanks to constant inflow of young people. Therefore, the space of these cities will have a slightly different nature and they will probably change more dynamically. However, accordingly to the most pessimistic forecasts until 2020 the number of students in Poland will have drastically fallen – by over 30.0%.

Although Central Europe has a relatively high demographic potential when compared to the western countries, the above-mentioned process of ageing is more and more visible also in the analysed region (Długosz, Kurek, 2006). Population ageing is global and continuous process (Gjonça, Gjonça, 2011). This process will affect mainly Poland, Lithuania, the Czech Republic and Hungary during the next few years (Długosz, 2007). Despite numerous socio-economic issues, including problems with the labour market, this unavoidable population ageing process requires development of pro-social activities. When considering this process in the context of space management there are several issues that should be taken under consideration, i.e. accessibility of leisure areas, deleting architectural barriers or health care.

It is estimated that until 2020 the age median of our country will have exceeded 40 years. However, it should be mentioned that the population of Lodzkie Voivodship already exceeded this age in 2011. Slaskie Voivodship also stands out among the demographically oldest regions. The economic condition of these two is negatively affected by their demographic profiles and will have to face some further social changes. The values similar to these achieved for the whole country were reported in the eastern and western voivodships. More favourable situation is in the voivodships of the northwest parts of the country which are Warminsko-mazurskie, Pomorskie and Wielkopolskie as well as in Malopolskie and Podkarpackie voivodships. Population of these regions is ageing relatively slow, so it is possible to forecast some changes which will take place in the future, concerning vital statistics, especially birth and death rates. What distinguishes demographic profiles of the largest Polish cities such as Lodz, Warsaw, Wroclaw or Tricity is the fact that there is a relatively large group of post-working age people living there (Figure 2).

Matrimonial decisions and procreation strategies of Polish population are highly correlated with the demand for immovable properties. However, it is not one and only factor influencing broadly-understood spaces, but it involves the necessity of implementing proper tools in order to manage the space in a rational and pro-social manner. A live birth rate may be a good example, which indicates that the highest fertility - exceeding 13% - is in the sub-region of Gdansk. High live birth rates have also been observed in the following sub-regions: poznanski, nowosadecki, warszawski wschodni and leszczynski. It means that by 2016 in the above-mentioned sub-regions the issues of kindergartens and primary schools will have become the most important. In many cases, especially in demographically young suburbs, it will be necessary to rearrange the space and provide a proper environment for the youngest.

It is impossible to rationally plan development of social infrastructure not having the knowledge of a population's health situation. Such knowledge lets the authorities manage all health care institutions and implement programs preventing the most dominating problems (Michalski, 2009). What is more, just like in the case of high percentage of people of post-working age, it is of crucial meaning when adapting space for the disabled. There are some necessary

improvements connected with the free movement in their place of residence which shall be introduced in cities in order to prevent social exclusion of these people. This concerns in particular means of urban transport and accessibility of public spaces and other facilities in their place of residence. These issues shall enjoy special priority in Kujawsko-pomorskie, Lubelskie and Lubuskie voivodships as these are regions where the highest percentage of the disabled has been registered.

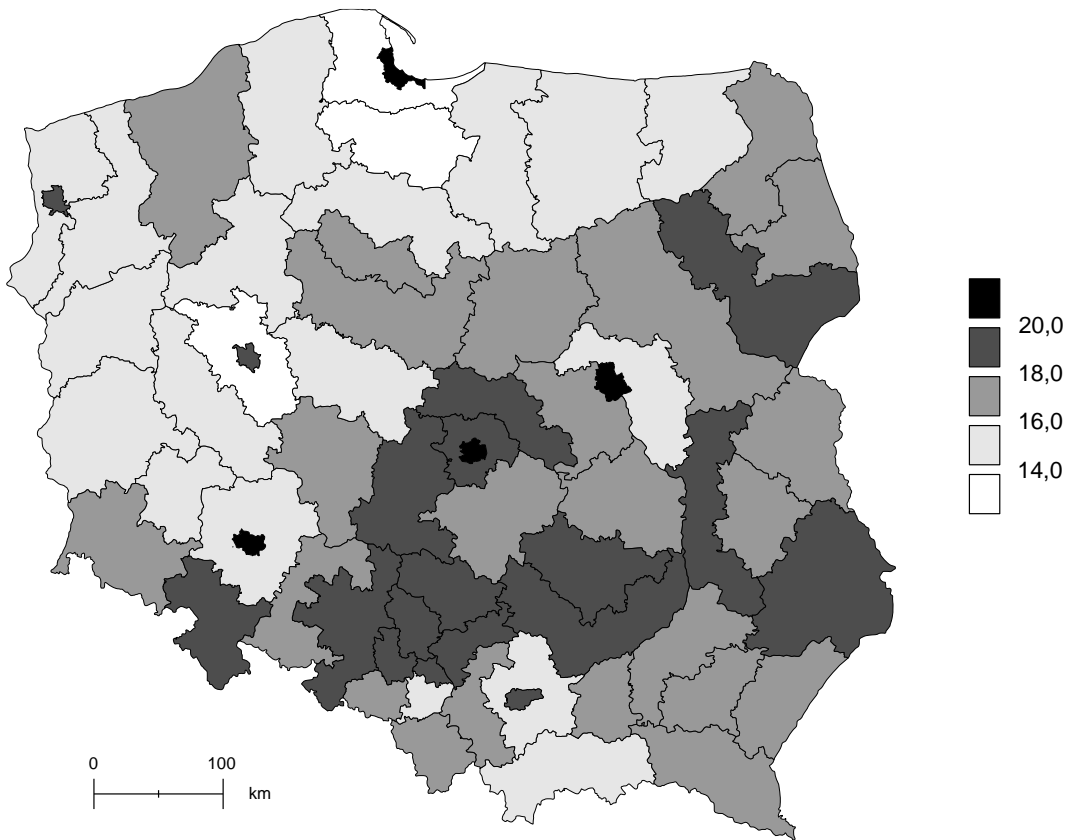


Figure 2. People of post-working age in sub-regions of Poland in 2012 (in %) (Source: Own work on the basis of the data derived from Local Data Bank, Central Statistical Office of Poland)

Nationality structure of society is also a contributing factor when concerning space management. As people of the same nationality have the tendency to concentrate in particular locations, several enclaves emerge which change the space character in a natural manner. We can observe it in districts where people from the People's Republic of China or from the Middle East live. However, in Poland this issue is not so meaningful nowadays and it is not possible to assess to what extent the foreigners may change its space. Most probably this situation will change in the next few decades what might lead to creation of nationality ghettos and increase in spatial segregation of people. Nevertheless, it will depend on age, education and occupational structure of the future immigrants as well as on their wealth (Warych-Juras, Galka, 2009). Their country of origin and cultural background will be of fundamental importance as these two factors decide

whether immigrants will assimilate into Polish culture and values or not – what we actually can observe in Scandinavia and in Western Europe.

Occupational structure of population living in a particular area is also of significant meaning, especially the unemployment rate. Not only it affects the crime rate and the level of space degradation, but it also has an impact on fertility, marriages and migrations – it changes, often permanently, the space of administrative units (Smits, Mulder, Hooimeijer, 2004). The above-mentioned crime rate can be minimised by proper organization and development of public spaces. Involving citizens in monitoring the most dangerous places will also contribute to tightening social ties between them (Mordwa, 2009). Unemployment is a major problem of the north-east Poland and in some counties of the western part of country (Figure 3). That is why, these areas shall be given special protection.

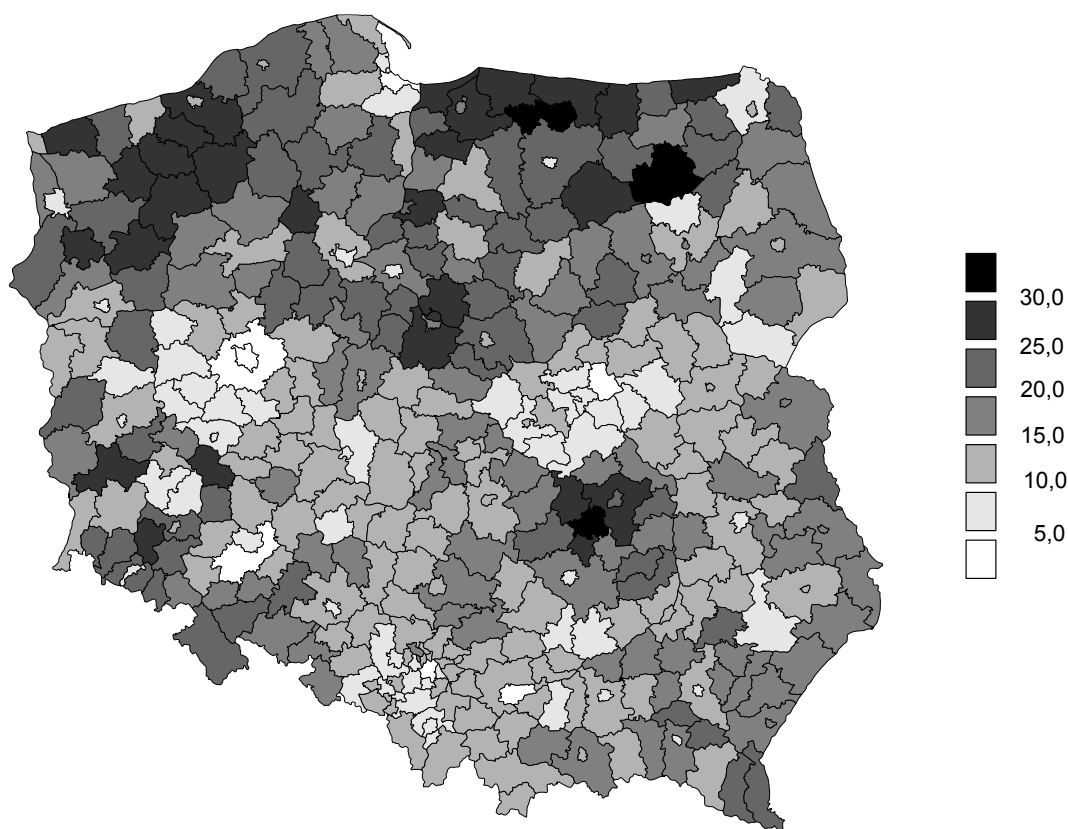


Figure 3. Unemployment rate by counties in Poland in 2012 (in %)
(Source: Own work on the basis of the data derived from Local Data Bank,
Central Statistical Office of Poland)

SUMMARY

In Western Europe demographic problem, in the context of spatial planning also, has been considered a significant field of study for many years. In Poland, this issue was a bit underestimated in the past, mainly because the process of social modernization began much later, as it had been slowed down by the political transformation. Space management and all activities connected

to it depend primarily on demographic condition of a particular area. However, cultural, economic and political background shall also be taken under consideration. Education plays an important role as well because it shapes a proper attitude to space management and protection what results in creation of a citizens-friendly zone. Social infrastructure reflecting demographic condition of a particular area has a different meaning as well as activities taken up by local authorities and stakeholders aimed at increasing its demographic potential. That is why, we should remember that on the one hand, demography exercises influence over the space, but on the other the way of managing it can have a positive or negative impact on demographic situation.

Thus, it is worth taking actions aimed at improving demographic condition of a particular region through proper space management which can boost its vital statistics. Qualitative development of cities and rural areas may prevent depopulation and other negative demographic changes. Another factor is proper management of public spaces and their pro-social designing – it regards mainly places intended for social and cultural interactions. Aesthetics of housing estates and green zones is an important issue as well and these aspects shall also be taken under consideration by both authorities and citizens. Finally, in order to meet the needs and requirements of a population inhabiting a given area, local authorities and decision makers shall do their best to include its residents in the process of spatial planning (Kopeć, A., 2009). This is a key issue in terms of creating a friendly and proper environment for a community inhabiting a particular area.

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