

Are Cities in Poland Ready for Sustainability? Poznań Case Study.

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1 ABSTRACT

The ideas of innovative urban planning are not strange in Poland. Good practices from Western Europe and USA are known to architects, urban geographers and other professionals. Discussions about urban planning are not only pragmatic, but also strongly ideological. However, the everyday planning experience is far away from sustainability path. We often ask ourselves a question, why is it so difficult to make cities in Poland more liveable? Apparently they are still too strongly rooted in the past to move forward to the future. Although many things have changed in the last 20 years, a comprehensive, long-term urban planning is missing.

In this paper we identify some processes characteristic for contemporary urban development in Poland. We argue that these processes – being usually results of developers' activities rather than urban planning - do not lead towards liveable cities, but rather towards socially segregated and unsustainable cities. We also suggest some solutions to improve the urban planning system. Polish cities need a new applicable planning approach, because the current one fails to coordinate large public and private investments.

Our methodological approach is case study analysis. We have chosen the city of Poznań, the fifth-largest city in Poland and the third-largest academic centre. Poznań, as one of leading national economic centres, is changing its spatial structure very rapidly, but there was surprisingly little research on that field. We believe that the results of our analysis can be transferred to other second-order cities in Poland and perhaps to other Central European cities as well.

2 POLISH CITIES AND THEIR CHALLENGES

At the beginning of the second decade of 21st century the major Polish cities face a continuous and serious competition for the second (behind Warsaw, the capital of Poland) position in a range of most attractive places to live and work in Poland. However, since the accession of Poland to the European Union (2004) this very race to the new, better position has become no more local but, in fact, global. In a new political and economical configuration literary every city, aware of the global positioning game, must consider its own present status, dynamics and destination of development and choose the right strategic methods to reinforce its own advantages, eliminating shortcomings at the same time. In the case of Poznań, a city of one of the most dynamic economic growth of last years, yet most expensive conditions of living, the situation is not entirely clear. Even recently declared official Development Strategy 2030 does not define properly its present condition, desired destination, instruments or possible threats. The city of Poznań begins this race being once a true leader, but already an overrated veteran who believes that perpetuating its own legend is enough to win the competition.

In the following paper we identify and describe several processes which are crucial for the current stage of urban development in Poznań.

3 HOUSING MARKET – IS HOUSING AFFORDABLE?

Liveable cities are cities where people of different income and social status live next to each other in the same neighbourhoods (Jacobs 1993). In order to achieve this social mix, it is necessary to provide subsidised housing (also called social or public housing) to the low- and middle-income groups, who cannot afford a dwelling at full price. Although it is arguable, whether a more regulated or more liberal form of subsidised housing is optimal (Hackworth 2007), it is generally agreed that it is a necessary supplement for commercial housing.

Many Polish cities have problems with insufficient housing supply, which date back to the socialist times. Under socialism, the state-controlled and inefficient housing market could not cover the demand, which was rapidly increasing due to industrialisation and inflow of workers from the rural areas. At the same time the old pre-war housing stock was underinvested and was gradually falling into decay. Housing shortage poses a serious problem, even many years after the fall of socialism. In the year 2002, 13 years after the political

change, there were in average 117 households for each 100 dwellings in Poznań. Many families live in small, overcrowded dwellings, because the average size of a dwelling is only 64 m² and the living space per person is 27 m².

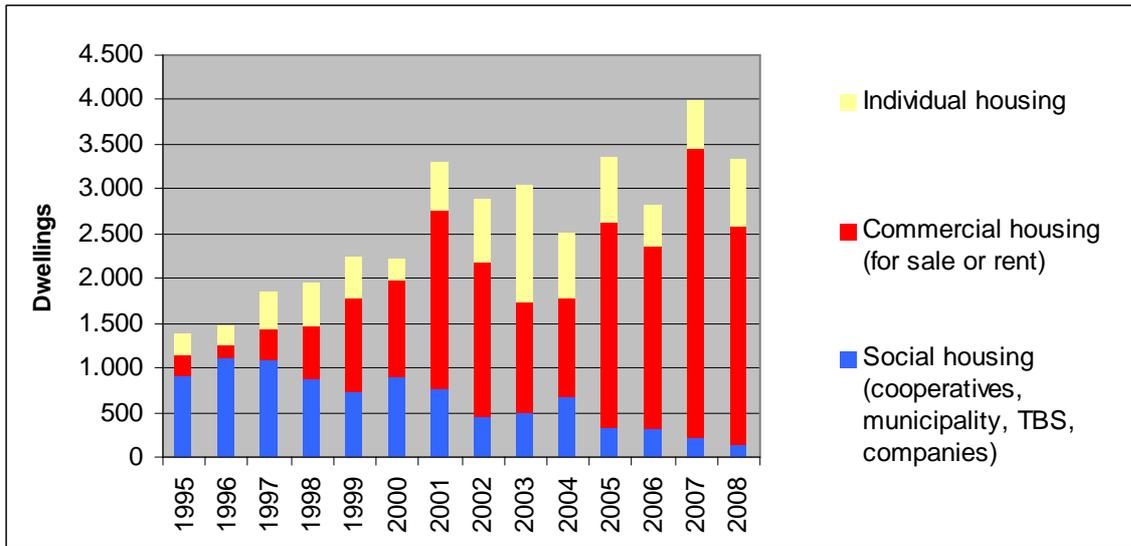


Fig. 1: Supply of social, commercial and individual housing in Poznań (1995-2008) Source: Polish Central Statistical Office (GUS).

Poznań has got vast demand for housing, because of its growing economy and the high share of young people (20- and 30-years old). The supply of housing has greatly increased in the last years, but so the prices did and are much higher than a few years ago. At the moment, it is very difficult to find affordable housing in the city. Housing supply in Poznań in the years 1995-2008 consisted of 25% social housing (including cooperatives, municipal housing, housing provided by companies to the employees, and TBS), 53% commercial housing (provided by private property developers), and 22% individual housing (self-build). In the last years the housing supply has increased, but only in the commercial sector, while the share of social housing is decreasing (Fig. 1). What are the reasons of this decline?

On one hand, some forms of housing supply, which were popular in socialism (housing cooperatives, dwellings for workers built by companies) have lost their significance after the political change. New forms of social housing are municipal housing and TBS (Social Housing Associations). TBS are owned by the municipality. The construction cost is partially covered by future tenants and partially by a preferential state credit. For that reasons, TBS used to be popular among young families and other middle-income households. Unfortunately, the construction costs have increased during last few years and it is very difficult for TBS to obey the cost limits (written in the law), so their market-share is decreasing.

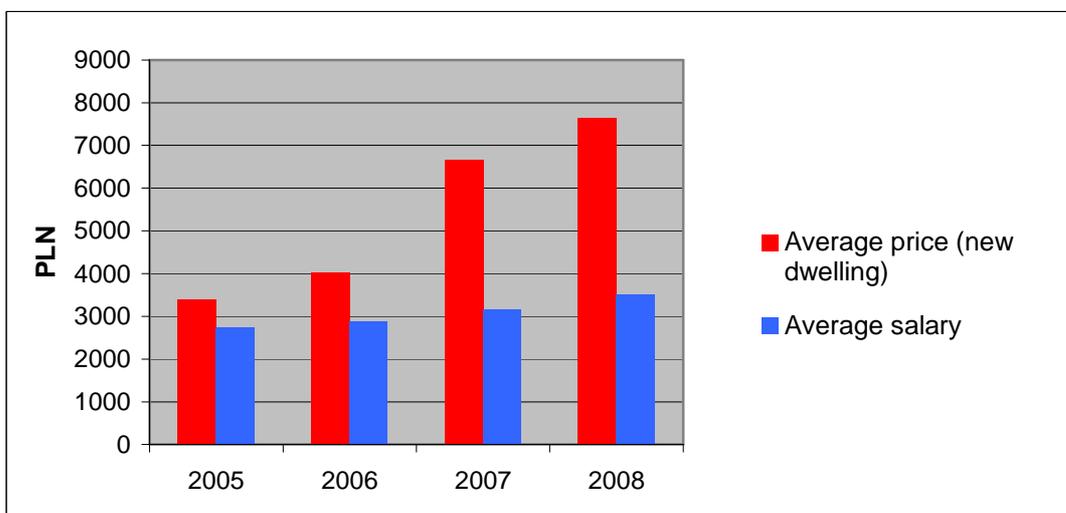


Fig. 2: Average housing prices and salaries (PLN) in Poznań (2005-2008). Source: GUS (salaries) and RedNet Consulting (housing prices).

On the other hand, the commercial housing developers are currently in a very good condition. High demand for housing is caused by young demographic structure (the baby boom generation of 1970s and 1980s is now in the matrimonial age) and increased buying power (economic growth, higher salaries, but especially easily available mortgages). Commercial developers can dictate the prices, which have rapidly increased for the last years, especially between 2005 and 2007. Unfortunately, in the same time, the average monthly salary has only slightly increased (Fig. 2). Whereas in the 1990s, the purchase of a dwelling was financed mostly by cash, today the mortgages have become more popular, but they usually contain high interest rate.

Since there is actually no supply of subsidised housing anymore, there are not many options for those who cannot afford a dwelling at market price. Rental market in Poland is small and, especially in university cities like Poznań, it is dominated by the students. Because of housing shortage, there are also not many dwellings on the second-hand market, and their prices have also increased considering last few years. Moreover, second-hand dwellings are mostly small dwellings in the post-war prefabricated housing estates, so they usually have only 2 or 3 rooms, or in the old pre-war housing, which have not been renovated since many years. Because of housing shortage, many young people and young families live together with their parents.

Last changes on the housing market stimulate residential segregation. Because of extremely high housing prices and decline of social housing, only the well-off households can afford a new dwelling in Poznań. Low income households (the elderly, the unemployed), which often live in very bad conditions, are actually excluded from the housing market, and the middle income households usually move to the suburbs, where the price levels are lower. Poznań has got a strongly negative migration balance with its suburbs, and the suburbanisation process is gaining momentum (Beim 2009).

4 URBAN RENEWAL AND REDEVELOPMENT – A FORGOTTEN ISSUE?

Urban renewal in Poland is an urgent issue, which has been neglected for many years. There is a huge renovation gap, because during the socialist period there were actually no renovation principles for the pre-war housing stock. Private owners could not afford renovation, because the state-regulated rents were extremely low.

Urban renewal, after the fall of socialism in Poland, is a very slow and difficult process. Unlike in Eastern Germany, where most of old housing stock has been renovated already for the 1990s (thanks to large money transfers from the well-developed western part of the country), for many years after transformation there was no financial support for urban renewal in Poland. This situation changed a little when Poland became a member of the EU and received support from the structural funds. Many cities have prepared special revitalization programmes in order to receive European funds. Among them, Poznań passed the revitalisation programme in 2006. However, EU funds are available only for specified projects, except for housing. Apart from the EU funds there is no other chance for significant financial support, so the urban renewal is, in fact, a marginal subject within the local policy.

The maintenance of old municipal housing stock is expensive. Thus, many dwellings have been sold to the tenants during last years. The tenants could afford the ownership status, because they were granted a large discount off the regular price. However, many of them will not afford renovation because of low income. The city of Poznań renovates its housing stock very slow and inefficiently; renovated dwellings are rented or sold at the market price, while the former tenants are moved to other (mostly peripheral) locations.

The inner city of Poznań has maintained (continually) a mixed social structure, but the filtering process has already begun. Wealthy households are constantly moving toward new suburban housing complexes, while the elderly, the unemployed and other low-income households stay in decaying old houses. The City of Poznań estimates that about 20,000 people moved out of the inner city during the years 2000-2005 (Miasto Poznań 2006).

Surprisingly, plenty of high-quality housing projects have been released within the inner city of Poznań during last years. A similar trend has been observed in the Western Europe, where it was called “new build gentrification” (Davidson, Lees 2005). However, in the case of Poznań, this process is not a mere continuation of gentrification. It is rather a kind of substitute for it. Beim and Tölle (2008) pointed out that the main factor behind the decision of moving into new owner-occupied dwellings in the inner city of Poznań is not the inner city milieu, but pragmatic reasons. A displacement of residents from old housing

districts has not taken place so far because of the ownership structure (many dwellings are owner-occupied) and because the construction of new dwellings is more profitable (for developers) than renovation is.

Some parts of the inner city are especially desired by developing companies: the surroundings of Old Market Square, the banks of Warta River (Fig. 3), and specific areas surrounded by parks. New housing often contrasts with historical pre-war brick houses and its derelict surroundings. New inner city housing complexes pose a sign for growing inequalities and segregation. The so-called “apartments”, sometimes equipped with exclusive facilities such as swimming pools and fitness centres, are emerging next to historically valuable, but decaying old houses.



Fig. 3: Gated community at the bank of Warta River in the inner city of Poznań (in the background the cathedral). The fence not only isolates the inhabitants from their neighbours, but also separates the public from the river. Photo: A. Radzimski

It is difficult to predict what the future of inner city in Poznań will be like. One should not expect large financial support for urban renewal in the next few years, except for support from the European funds. Private capital is more interested in new construction, which is more rentable, than in renovation of old buildings. Population decline did not cause large vacancies so far, as many dwellings have been rented by students, or converted to offices and shops. However, in the long term this demand will decline and more vacancies may appear. The worst possible scenario presumes old housing to be demolished to vacate a construction site for new apartments.

In the year 2008 the Old Town of Poznań was announced by the President of Poland as a monument of history. This declaration means that the Old Town should be protected with regard to its historical and architectural values, to mention only a few: Poznań was one of the first capitals of Poland in the medieval ages, from 15th to 18th century an important centre of trade and culture, and a centre of independence movement under the Prussian occupation. However, current neoliberal policy, which neglects old housing stock and blindly approves new large projects poses a threat to the historic legacy.

5 MAIN STREETS VERSUS SHOPPING MALLS

Poznań represents one of the most interesting urban layouts of nearly ideal, oval city centre designed under restrictions of 19th century Prussian polygonal fortress. Main city streets and squares remain to present day the most recognizable and legible elements of urban composition. In the socialist period there was an attempt to radically rebuild the existing city centre, which was in a half destroyed during WWII, and - what was even more important - to alter its image in a modern manner. Once the deconstruction had begun, it has never ultimately been completed within designed range, mostly because of financial shortcuts. After the end of the socialist era there were no urban interventions of such scale and impact up to present day. In fact, during last 10 years there were significant improvements and renovations of main city squares (except for the most important one – the Old Market Square, where an architectonic competition was held in 2008, but no 1st

prize was appointed). Public space improvements can be characterized within three categories: technical and aesthetic improvements (infrastructure and surface replacements, public green refinements) – Ratajski Square, Wielkopolski Square; conservative and prestigious improvements (restoring the pre-war functional and formal layout of public space) – Liberty Square; formal and legislative improvements (creating formal plans without proper formal tools and financial background to realization) – Spring of Nations Square. None of these implied any wider spatial context or general revitalization purpose.

Moreover, several distinctive municipal buildings were refit due to European Union funds, but it has not implied any real, general revitalization of the city centre as a whole. There was neither clear and consequently implied strategy for renovation of building substance and improving spatial-functional integrity nor any systematic efforts leading to functional improvement or reorganization of transportation network and public space enhancement. All of this along with the situation of considerable free market influence upon the spatial design of a city and its agglomeration (urban sprawl) and visible symptoms of city centre depopulation led to significant loss of competitiveness of inner city areas. There were some remarkable architectural landmark realizations (e.g. Old Brewery Business and Art Centre) which (in some sense) altered the hierarchical order of the most important destination points of the city centre, but did not cause revitalization “chain reaction” within their direct urban neighbourhood, as it was frequently claimed and somehow expected.

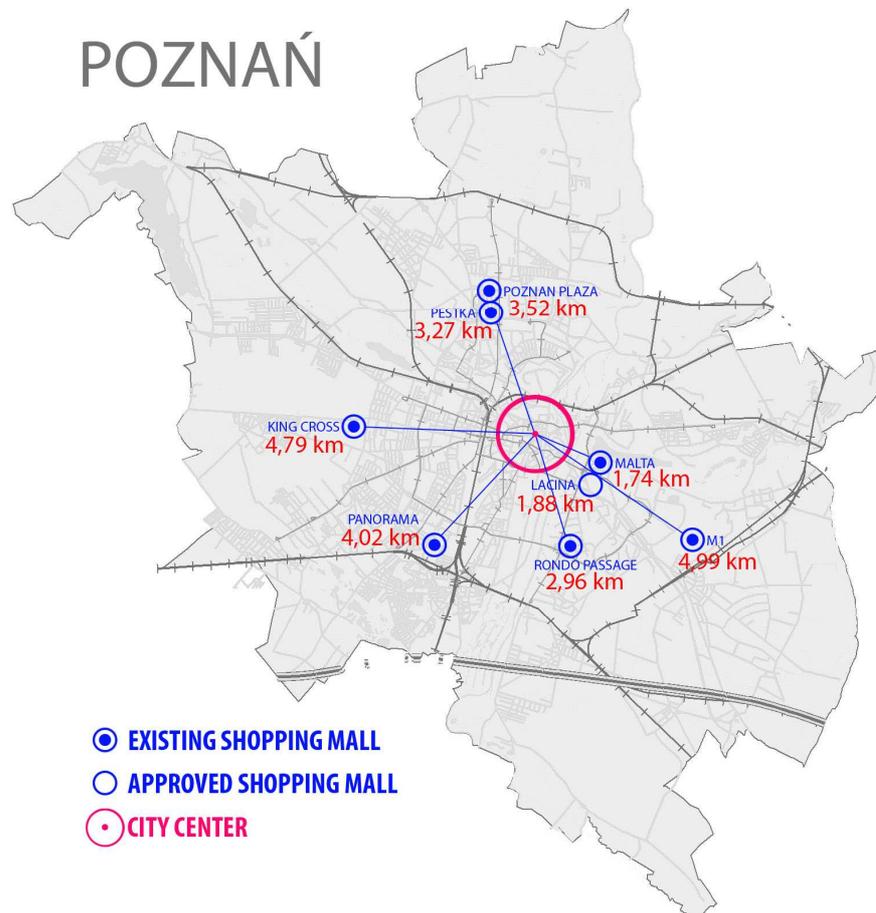


Fig. 4: Approximate distance between the biggest shopping malls and the city centre (town hall tower). The two closest ones (Malta, Łacina) placed within 2 km perimeter. Food discounts and construction markets were not included. Source: own compilation.

However, in contemporary conditions, there are significant but unplanned transformations of public realm in terms of functional alterations. This particular phenomenon is manifested by progressive but inevitable relocation of retail shopping and entertainment from the inner city into huge shopping malls, which are planned and built too close to the core of the city (Fig. 4). Hence, the influence of the big box stores on the functional domination of the city centre can and will be tremendous. For example, in only 500 m distance from the up to now biggest in Poznań “Galeria Malta” (54 000 m²., source: neinver.com) an even bigger “Galeria Łacina” (108 000 m²., source: lacina.pl.), was approved by local authorities. Such “synergic” effect in combination with lack of commercial rent policy and control in the centre caused the interchange of

commercial and shopping services (along main streets) into mainly banking agencies. These were the last ones, which could bear extortionate rent claimed by downtown tenement owners. For the same reason, high specialized stores, hobby centres, pubs, antiquarian bookshops, antique shops, small theatres or small designer stores and studios are consequently disappearing from the main streetscape. This phenomenon, along with lack of smart transportation policy within the city centre, and of an operational revitalization program, might be spatially, functionally and demographically devastating for the character of urban core. According to the new development strategy, an exclusion of selected main streets from downtown traffic will not be released before year 2040, while full bicycle route system could be implemented not earlier than by year 2025.

Although the concept of connected and vital public space network remains underinvested and diminished, there are noticeable declarations to redevelop former transportation and post-industrial areas (brownfields). In the first case (west part of the city centre) a vast enterprise of redeveloping old central city train station simultaneously with train (active) area – designed as the Integrated Communication Centre – would be an asset to the long lasting integration of main city train station and civic areas of the city. The declared term of realization (the European Football Championships 2012) may be difficult to keep, considering a conceptual stage of the project. In the second case (east river bank downtown area), a degraded post-industrial infrastructure (old gas-station facility) were declared as a potential new cultural centre (with the realization budget of approximately total 500,000,000 PLN) as a key enterprise in complicated process of restoring degraded river banks in Poznań centre area. Unfortunately, there is little chance to realize this one, without a serious (or total) share of private sector.

6 TRANSPORT POLICY – TOWARDS AUTOMOBILE DEPENDENCY

Automobile has become the most popular mean of transport in Poznań. The last traffic analysis done in 2000 shows that 53% of trips have been done by car. Modal share of public transport is 37%, pedestrian traffic 8% and bicycle traffic 2%. It is assumed that present modal share of automobile traffic is much higher because the number of local public transport passengers has fallen and the number of automobiles has grown up. The motorization level in Poland has been regularly growing up since the beginning of free market economy in Poland. In 1990 the motorization level in Poznań was 222 cars per 1000 inhabitants. During the transformation the motorization level has increased to 345 in 2000 and 496 in 2008. The fastest motorization growth was observed during five years after the fall of communism. Then the motorization level stabilized and started to grow again since 2004, the moment of EU accession. However, the tax-free import of old cars from Germany should not be perceived as the main cause of this growth. The main reason seems to be huge suburbanization and changes in living and transport behaviours.

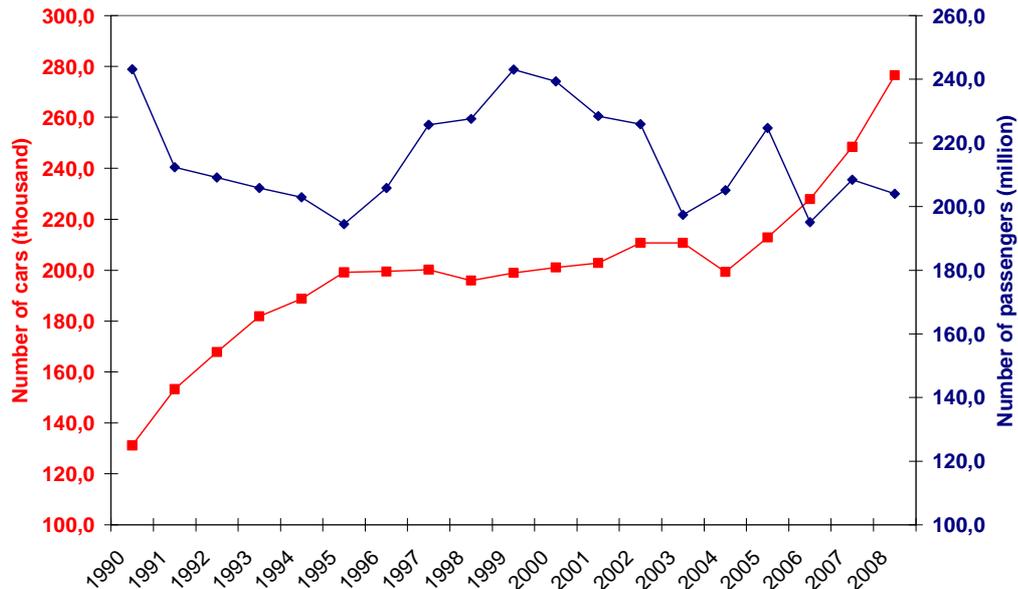


Fig. 5: Number of cars in Poznań and number of passenger of Poznań urban public transport a year. Source: own compilation based on GUS.

Since 1999 Poznań has had a formal transport policy. Although the main goal of Poznań transport policy is sustainable development, this document does not designate measurements of sustainability and does not specify particular tasks to perform in detail. The term “sustainable development” is usually interpreted in Poland as “balanced development” or “even development”. Whatever the case, real policy is actually more car-oriented. With the exception of the old town area there are privileges for automobile traffic, and more amenities for cars are planned. The city’s plans to develop public and bicycle transport infrastructure are incommensurate with road infrastructure.

Misunderstanding of the idea of sustainable development has severe implications for municipal budget and investment processes. For several last years the average expenses for development and maintenance of roads were on level of 400 - 500 million PLN, while expenses for public transport were about 150 - 200 million PLN (the netto sum – a difference between incomes from tickets and costs of maintenance). Main part of road expenses are investments (about 70-80%, depending on particular year), while main part of public transport expenses are subventions for local public transport. Only several percent of this amount (10% - 40 %) have been spent for new investments. Ticket sale revenues cover approximately 45% of public transport costs, and this share is decreasing. Yearly expenses for new cycleways (constructed apart from new road investments) are on a level of 1 - 2 million PLN. Half of this sum has been spent for new pavements, usually within new districts.

Rising motorization forces municipal authorities to continuous improvements of car traffic. It is continuously being done by two ways: the development of new roads and “small improvements”, like intelligent traffic lights or extensions of existing intersections (new lanes, etc.). In some cases intelligent traffic lights improve capacity of streets by 30%. In 2007 alone, Poznań had about 200 traffic light installations. On almost 50 intersections, traffic lights give priority to the public transport. Intelligent traffic lights can be an important tool for sustainable development, but they can be used for car-oriented transport policy as well. In Poznań this system was applied with two main goals in mind: to improve road capacity for automobile traffic, and to improve conditions for public transport on some intersections, which are mostly overcrowded by trams or buses. The main losers of the intelligent traffic lights system in Poznań are usually pedestrians and cyclists.

The city has other plans for many small improvements for cars, for instance new parking lots in the city centre (officially, but inadequately called “Park&Go”), new roads to new settlements and surrounding communes. However, the most controversial and enormously expensive planned investment is a third bypass for the city, which is designed as an expressway (the “third ring”). If the General Directorate for National

Roads and Motorways (GDDKiA) had not taken the decision to construct of a fourth ring located outside the city limits, and what is even more important – outside dense development and residential area, the third ring would have had its advantage. Nevertheless, the city municipals have not changed their decision; what is more, parameters and localization have remained the same, but now instead of being a bypass of the city, the third ring should improve car traffic and ensure that each trip between any points of city would take no more than 25-30 minutes. Since no public transport will be allowed on the new bypass, it will even worsen modal split and privilege automobile traffic. In order to cover the estimated cost of the 36 km long third ring, which is up to 9 billions PLN, the city would have to largely increase the municipal debt.

In the case of public transport, the city plans to extend two tram tracks: to a huge shopping mall in Franowo district, and a relatively short extension of Poznań Speed Tram (PST) to the main rail station. First investment is needed to build a new tram depot, because the old one, located close to the city centre, was sold to a private developer, who is planning to build a shopping mall and apartments. The extension of Poznań Speed Tram allows to bypass three overcrowded intersections in the city centre and fasten trams going to southern districts of the city.

The only restriction for the automobile traffic (excluding closure of some Old Town's streets) is a paid parking zone introduced in 1993. In 2003 it was broadened and covers at the moment about 7,000 parking places. There are some plans for a further extension in 2011. The biggest disadvantage is that drivers do not have any alternative, because the introduction as well as the extensions of paid parking zones were not followed by new measures like Park&Ride system, cycle facilities in city centre or others.

7 SUBURBANISATION – DREAMING ABOUT OWN HOME AND GARDEN

Poznań metropolitan area has been witnessing a self-sustaining suburbanization process for at least two decades. All the characteristic features of suburbanization process can be identified, including: population decline of the inner city accompanied by population growth of the entire metropolitan area, negative migration balance of the central city accompanied by positive migration balance of suburban communes, and a dynamic growth of housing development outside the city limits. Additionally, residential mobility is also observed within the city limits, from the central districts to the peripheral ones.

The suburbs of Poznań are witnessing the features of urban sprawl. Many new estates are established without connection to existing settlement structure. Delivering public transport service to them will be very difficult (if not impossible) in the future, due to their random location, low density and the existing road system. Moreover, the metropolitan area attracts a growing number of new single-function facilities, e.g. shopping malls, industrial zones, technology parks. Private cars are the only means of transport assuring efficient and rapid transfer between these spread sheds and compounds.

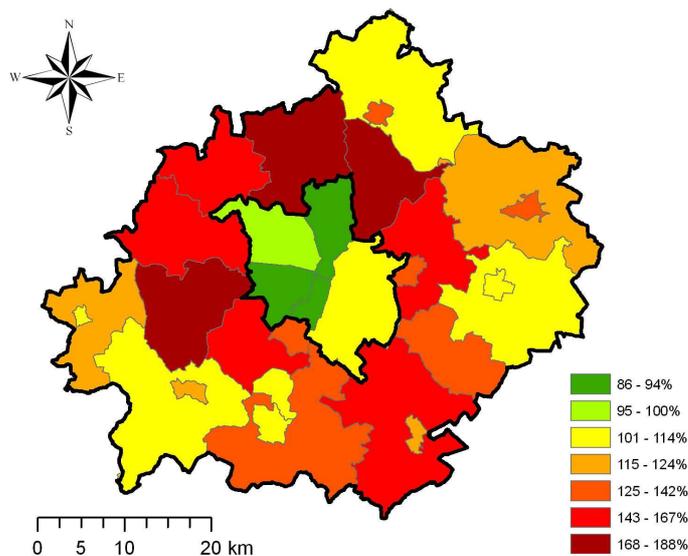


Fig. 6: Population changes in the Poznań metropolitan area 1990-2008. Source: own compilation based on GUS.

The period from 1990 to 2008 could be divided into three characteristic phases of suburbanization. The first phase (mid-1990s) concerns migrations resulting from completing large socialistic investments in multi-

family housing commenced back in the 1980s. The second interval occurred in the mid-1990s when housing market witnessed a downturn: the number of new flats for sale dropped by 50% against 1990, hitting the lowest level in 1995. Housing development slowdown triggered weaker population growth in all communes of Poznań agglomeration, which persisted until 2000. Since then, unlike any time before, the number of inhabitants in the satellite towns has been growing rapidly.



Fig. 7: “Change your neighbour – change your address” Advertising campaign of a mortgage bank (2007). Photo: M. Beim.

According to statistical surveys (Beim 2009), the main reason for migrating to the suburbs of Poznań was inadequate housing space – usually too small. The decision of moving out was also affected by high noise level in the former dwelling as well as improved financial situation. Further, the change of dwelling resulted from high costs of living, air pollution in Poznań and changes in family situation (like marriage or birth of a child). Other factors, like relations with neighbours and safety in the former place of living, were of little importance.

Suburbanization in Poland is strengthened by a new culture pattern of a young family, which has an own home with garden and uses cars for literary each trip. This pattern is deliberately repeated in most popular Polish serials, women's magazines as well as developer's advertises. Simultaneously, the disadvantageous image of old districts and public transport is promoted. Suburban house has become one of the biggest dreams for Polish yuppies. The only exception from this is a gated community.

8 CONCLUSION

In May 2007 the ministers responsible for urban development from all EU member states committed themselves to support sustainable development of cities (cf. Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities). After three years, however, this document remains (at least in several countries, like Poland) only a declaration. Modernisation pattern of Polish cities is driven by urban sprawl and automobile dependency, which are accompanied by inner city decline, privatisation of public space and growing residential segregation. Of course many of these problems (if not all of them) have occurred before in Western European and US cities. It seems that the best way to learn is to learn on mistakes (in fact, own mistakes).

Poznań is a figurative example a city which does not use all of its development chances. At the moment there is no long-term, sustainable and integrated development policy in Poznań. Development decisions are driven by demand for land, or in other words, dictated by developers, without paying much attention to the existing urban structure. Inner city buildings and public space are falling into decay, while the outskirts and suburbs are filling with urban sprawl, accompanied by rising automobile congestion.

The most important impulse for changes in the model of urban development in Poland was the socio-economic change that took place after 1989. It included liberalisation of building regulations and making the purchase of a car more available. First symptoms of change were new shopping centres, open in mid-1990s. They were located within the city limits or in surrounding communes. They showed the real power of individual motorization and the potential of suburbs. But still, the number of people and shops moving to the suburbs was not very high - until the late 1990s.

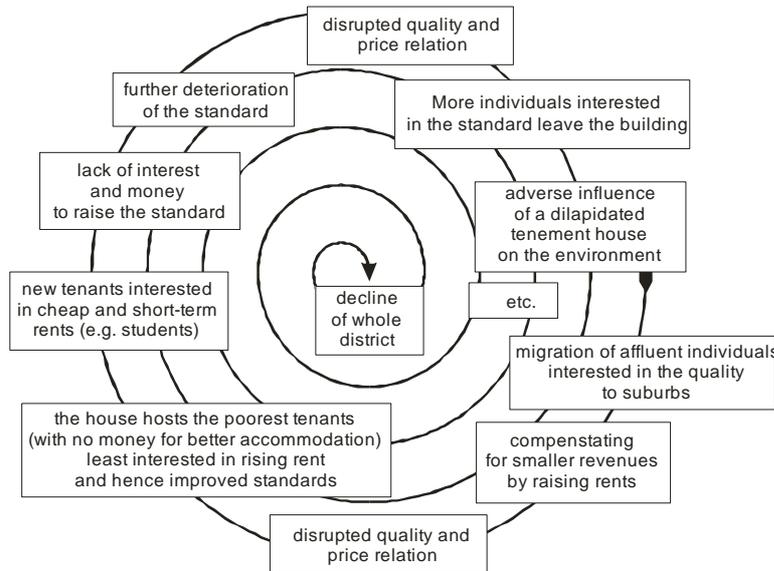


Fig. 8: The relation between the more affluent social groups’ migration to suburbs and decline of a district. Source: Beim 2009.

Residential migration was followed by increasing motorization, thus contributing to mounting transport problems and ensuing further deterioration of environmental conditions. Urban sprawl, which is currently taking place, is destroying one of the greatest advantages of old urban planning: “the city of short ways”, and results in higher modal share of automobile traffic. The inhabitants of suburbs do not have any real alternative, because there is no comparable (in terms of efficiency) public transport. The growing number of journeys by car has been topped by longer commuting routes after migrating to the suburbs. All of this leads to growing automobile congestion in the city and surrounding communes. This, in turn, contributes to further deterioration of environment, especially in the city centre, what induces even more individuals to change their place of living. Hence, a change in their transport behaviour patterns is initiated. City becomes increasingly sprawled. A model of this process is presented in Fig. 8.

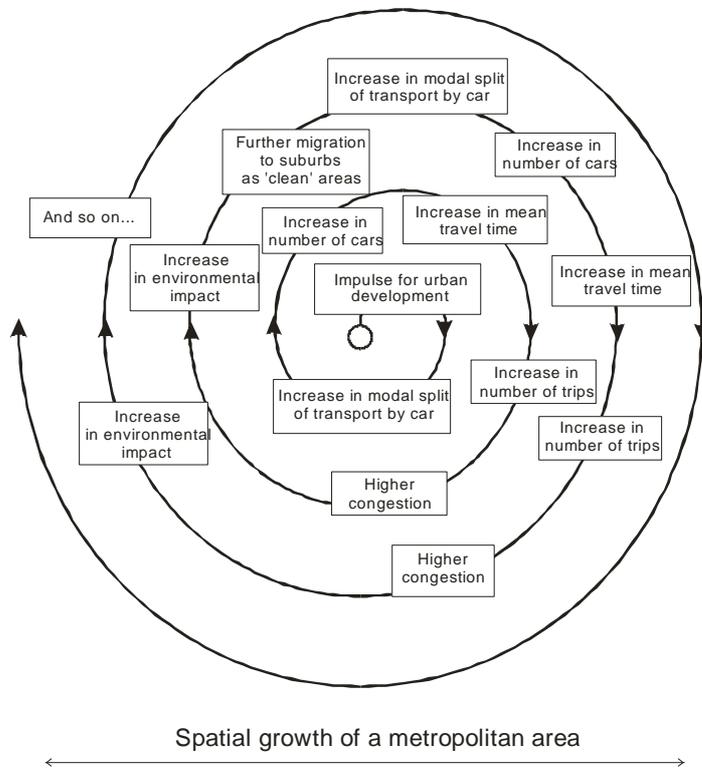


Fig. 9: Connection between the development of suburbs and growing traffic congestion. Source: Beim 2009

Spatial development of suburbs boosts commuting costs, and thus the costs of living; on the other hand, the depopulation of tenement houses and blocks of flats leads to ever worse living conditions and increases rent. The owners, unable to meet operating costs or to find new tenants, often raise the rent for remaining lodgers,

thus forcing another group of people to move out, usually to the suburbs. As a result, the old districts are settled by groups of short-term occupiers, e.g. students. They are not interested in improving the quality of flats and houses, as it leads to higher rent. They are trapped in a vicious vortex. Growing costs of living in the city centre offsets the effects that the rising costs of suburban living (e.g. travel costs) could have for curbing growth of the suburbs (Fig. 9). Similar relation can be shown for retail trade within main streets. The tenement owners would like to compensate losses and rise up the rent. More and more shops move to shopping malls, or simply close down. After several months vacant places are rented for cheap groceries or for trade not welcomed in shopping malls.

9 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Many changes are necessary in order to make Polish cities more sustainable. First of all, it is necessary to change the planning law. There is a need for long-term comprehensive planning instead of short-term demand-oriented planning, which is currently a common practice. Many instruments, which proved to be successful in other countries, could be also applied by Polish cities, for example urban growth boundary, transit oriented development, urban codes, and regional planning. There is a need for cooperation with communes of Poznań agglomeration in the field of housing and transportation planning, but there are practically no instruments of regional planning in Poland at the moment.

However, during last years Poland has been witnessing a public debate concerning liberalisation of planning law. The lobby of developers aims to make planning rules more liberal, although the current act from 2003 is much market-oriented. For example, there is a regulation called “good neighbourhood rule”, which allows to build a house or a housing complex in the absence of local land use plans. The location decision is approved on the base of few basic parameters (for example, access to public road, plot coverage), even if it does not comply with the masterplan of the whole city. Local land use plans usually cover only a minor part of the city, so the “good neighbourhood rule” is being abused, contributing to urban sprawl. More than 80% of new housing in Poznań during the years 1999-2007 was built without local land use plans, i.e. without comprehensive long-term planning. As a result, the vast majority of new housing does not have direct access to public transport and other facilities (Radzimski 2009). It is very probable that in the next years the short-term demand-oriented planning paradigm will be still dominating. Because of developer lobbying, the parliament voted in 2008 for easier conversion of agricultural land into building plots, although this decision was criticised by planning experts and vetoed by president Kaczyński.

Poznań, which is a young and dynamic city, needs a long-term development strategy aimed at reducing suburbanisation and promoting in-fill development within or adjacent to existing urban structures. Students, who are a huge demographic potential, should be encouraged to work and live in the city after degree. Today many young people are pushed out of the city because of extreme price and rent levels, so more social housing is necessary. It could be built in cooperation with private developers, but on municipal land. Social housing would reduce price levels and increase affordability of housing, since there is a shortage of ca. 17,000-22,000 dwellings in the city. However, extensive single-family housing cannot be a successful solution to the housing question.

Parallel to the housing programme, the attractiveness of inner city should be raised by improvements of public space and reduction of automobile traffic. To make inner city streets more liveable, local authorities should encourage social and cultural use of vacant buildings in cooperation with landlords. Local and national authorities should concentrate on the problem of inner city decline and grant financial support for urban renewal and redevelopment. High property taxation of derelict land in the inner city should discourage owners from speculation and promote investment. On the other hand, land value tax should discourage from development in the distant suburbs.

Last but not least, there is an urgent need to redefine the way how the urban planning students are taught. The academic practice shows that what students actually learn about planning is how to make plans for greenfield investments. One can expect that the graduates understand planning as a technical activity, not as a process. Therefore, new elements need to be introduced into the courses, for example: urban renewal, public transport planning, and traditional neighbourhood design.

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