



GREETINGS FROM THE ISLANDS OF BEAUTY!

Dear Friend,

During my last journey to Warsaw I've been invited by some Polish friends to their apartment. It was close to the City center, in the one of the oldest districts of Warsaw called Mokotów. As I arrived at the given address I had realised that it was a gated estate. In order to get myself being let in, my friends were called up by the guardian who only after their spoken confirmation could let me in. I can tell you it was something very special and peculiar^{1,3,5} which I haven't experienced in any other European capital^{1,3,5} and you know I travel a lot! I realise that if I wanted to enter by car than I would have the same problem. This place is quite huge that I could easily get lost myself, but the guardian was kind enough to explain me very where to go.

This place is called Marina Mokotów and the guardian told me that it's the most spectacular⁵ constructions in Warsaw, so far. It actually looks like a "city within a city"⁵. On my way, I had passed many shops, medical offices and other services,⁵ everything which is embraced within this space of one gated community. Than I spotted at least several other guardians, apparently the crime is on the rise...⁵ Another thing is how picturesque this place is. On the other hand, I couldn't help a wonder, that despite such vastly developed landscape I didn't pass-by anyone who would enjoy this space without a rush. There were only some mothers with baby carriages. Though I remember from Warsaw this unique phenomenon¹ of people spending time in the City center and enjoying public spaces.⁴ I have finally reached my friends' flat, after being constantly tracked by the omnipresent security cameras.¹ Coincidentally, I met there a young German student, Henrik Werth. Do you remember his article from some newspaper where he explained the process of mapping Warsaw's gated communities? Well,

photo credit: courtesy of the investor of Marina Mokotów Estate in Warsaw's Mokotow district

if not I'll shortly explain to you: he came up with astonishing results of which no-one, even in the Capital city was aware of: the great number of the gated communities here in Warsaw and it was just in the 2005! Now, he said that there are more than 400⁸ of them and its surroundings. We spoke also to the host about this. They thought of their situation as rather privileged, surely not problematic. The visit came to an end and I decided to go back to the hotel. As I was about to leave the place I curiously turned my back to have a general overlook of this place. Just next to the checking point and the guardians there was a big-scale commercial advertisement on which a happy man (apparently the resident of this estate) tries to encourage you to purchase one of the apartments by the words: *The residence of the Marina Mokotów is a unique proposition for people who search for prestige and comfort in a low price.*¹¹ I have decided to have a longer stroll to the subway through the open parks, homey courtyards, passing-by so many different people. And to my astonishment, I saw other gated communities on my 1km-path....^{1,3,5} You may say: listen, gated communities you can find everywhere around the world as it's a global phenomenon. Cities such Johannesburg, Sao Paulo, Mexico City, Jerusalem⁸ have it! But I feel like the situation here is different, and the scale of this investments and its exceptional number is something outstanding.⁶ Now, you will maybe understand why I had to tell you about this phenomenon⁵. You won't understand *the intrinsic logic of this city*¹ without being aware of the unique situation and the nature of Warsaw's gated neighborhoods. I think they are, apart from creating a certain isolated image of this city, an answer to its urban disorder...¹ True "islands of beauty"¹ in the ocean of chaos!

I will be soon back home, and finish my story,

Best, Fred





Hey Nikolaus!

I'm in Warsaw right now, chillin'. Yesterday we had a beautiful sunny afternoon, but no one could give any idea where to go! We were in the city centre near that popular bar, not so far from the river banks. Surprisingly to our eyes, we saw some people with beach mats and towels... We decided to follow them! You will not believe where these people were going, but suddenly we saw a crowded beach and it seems that *the young Varsovians decided to convert it into a unique place*¹ of urban leisure. Now, I can definitely say to you that Vistula is one of the biggest surprises to me in this city. We started chatting with someone sitting next to us who was actually sunbathing in the middle of the city...Cool, 'nothing' out of ordinary. He told us that there was someone who was invited by the mayor of Warsaw asking how did they do it to have such a magnificent wild landscape. And you know what, they actually did nothing! But I need to admit that there's something suspicious about this phenomenon.⁴ Maybe it's just some reminiscence of an old structure, swept from the ground and now we have all this space. I think that it's one of the few rivers in Europe¹ which runs through a city, especially the capital, that has prevailed its wild, untouched character. Look at Paris or London and you will find not even an inch of grass. Sitting around I saw some cyclists who disappeared among the trees. They say in here that it's the most beautiful cycling path in Europe⁹ and you can even get lost here man! Having the view of the city in front of us we could feel that the Vistula is an unbreakable part of this townscape. It was late in the evening and we saw people moving on the other side of the river. This bank feels more connected to the city itself but there's just one building - Copernicus Science Centre. You can also walk along the boulevards, but I must say too you they have potential. For now it's just full of cement and a little bit depressive. There are also under construction and being

refurbished. For that evening we chose a spot called Temat Rzeki, which is one of several trendy bars at the river bank. From this side we could observe the opposite of Vistula from which we had just come from. There was a mass of birds singing, and their voice drown the music coming out from the bar. So you see, there's this crazy situation when you get at the Poniatowski bridge in the city centre, and on the left you have the city with the pedestrians and bars; on the right wild nature, some people chillin' on the beach, some fishermen. This is the biggest phenomenon⁴ of Warsaw! Come to this city and experience both, wild vacations in the bushes or great night life at the river banks!

Cheers man!

K.





Hey!

I don't know if you remember but I'm currently in Warsaw on this conference on the participative society. It's been just two days but there're so many things to tell you about! You probably know that the topic of this conference is also quite a current issue in Berlin, especially if you refer this to the political background of our city. They're just certain things that you don't expect in a post-socialist city like Warsaw despite the fact that we share a little bit a common history. Where to start... Firstly, the place where the conference took place was quite unexpected. It's barely a conference place in the traditional meaning. It was a café which is apparently quite popular in the city, situated on the Chłodna Street. All participants gathered at the given hour in front of the meeting place. You should have seen their faces! Than the organizer showed up and explained the reason for this unusual meeting point. Such places as Chłodna 25 seem to be symbolically very powerful ¹ to the Polish Capital, and are normally titled as the civic cafés. Inside of them you can organise many different events, apart from simply have a meeting with a friend over a coffee, you can set up a conference, workshops etc. In general, any good idea will be wormy welcomed. But this cafés are named "civic" because there were created by the citizens of Warsaw to enable public discussion on the issues concerning the City or for meetings directly with the municipalities. Even that last took civic cafés into account when creating new policies. They've become so significant in the public space! In 2009 an unusual ¹ competition took place. The City's Hall had a free space for lease in Warsaw's center. Right from the start the offer for a potential tenant was limited to only these cafés which had a cultural profile. By this I've realized the fact that's how the Nowy Wspaniały Świat and

photo credit: http://kapsacz/konferencja.pl/wp-content/uploads/IMG_0844.jpg

Ogrody were created, both your favorite spots in Warsaw! I 'd looked over a leaflet, which was left on counter in the Chłodna 25. Different debates were already scheduled ahead by people who live in the neighborhood who want to take the situation in their hands because no one else is capable to. From this I see that these civic cafés poses a particular importance ¹ in the actions of Warsaw urban movements. I didn't know before, but they already contain a very peculiar continuation in a history of the capital's traditions. In the past they held unique role ¹ of a place, which very often served as gathering point for intelligentsia. It's very fun this shift from something elite to popular.

It's too hot and I go inside the Chłodna 25. You know, the word means cold in Polish! :)

See you soon than.
Best wishes from Warsaw!
P.K.





Hey!

You know I'm currently staying at Jan's place. He lives in this gated estate in the city centre of Warsaw. Every time I try to enter this place after a long day of sightseeing in the city, I need to call him on his mobile in order to get in... I was waiting like 30 minutes. Later he explained to me that he was taking a shower. Meanwhile, I saw an old lady coming back from the local grocery shop along with her dog. There was also a group of students, probably flat mates going out somewhere together. It was all socially mixed up. Than I looked through the gates of Jan's estate. People who live there seem to be a little bit different from those outside "the Great Wall". Middle-aged or slightly younger, normally having their first baby, all possessing cars which they use to make their weekly 'stocks' in the big shopping malls situated in the suburbs of Warsaw. They seem to have the same interests; fitness available at the place where you live etc. Briefly, sharing the same lifestyle, it's phenomenal! ¹

There, one day in the evening, Jan asked me if I want to go with him to a theatre. It wasn't a normal one, but a place which is usually a nightclub, the same happens sometimes to some other theatre's in the city - they become a one-night party club. It's a unique Warsaw-thing. ⁴ We watched some play at this weird but very stylish club/theatre and I had started to look at the audience. This people look if they were belonging to some elite. At first I thought that such social phenomenon happens everywhere, but as Jan explained me this group of people is called diminutively Warszafka. There you have celebrities, actors but also people who have nothing to do with them, but somehow magically belong to this group, maybe by their financial status??

After this we decided to go to one place which was a former communist party headquarter, there you have several bars... It's unusual how Varsavians re-adapt such

places. Places which after all had a dark period in their history. I think in general in Warsaw there are so many bars and super clubs, which is incomparable to any other European city! ³

Till the next postcard!

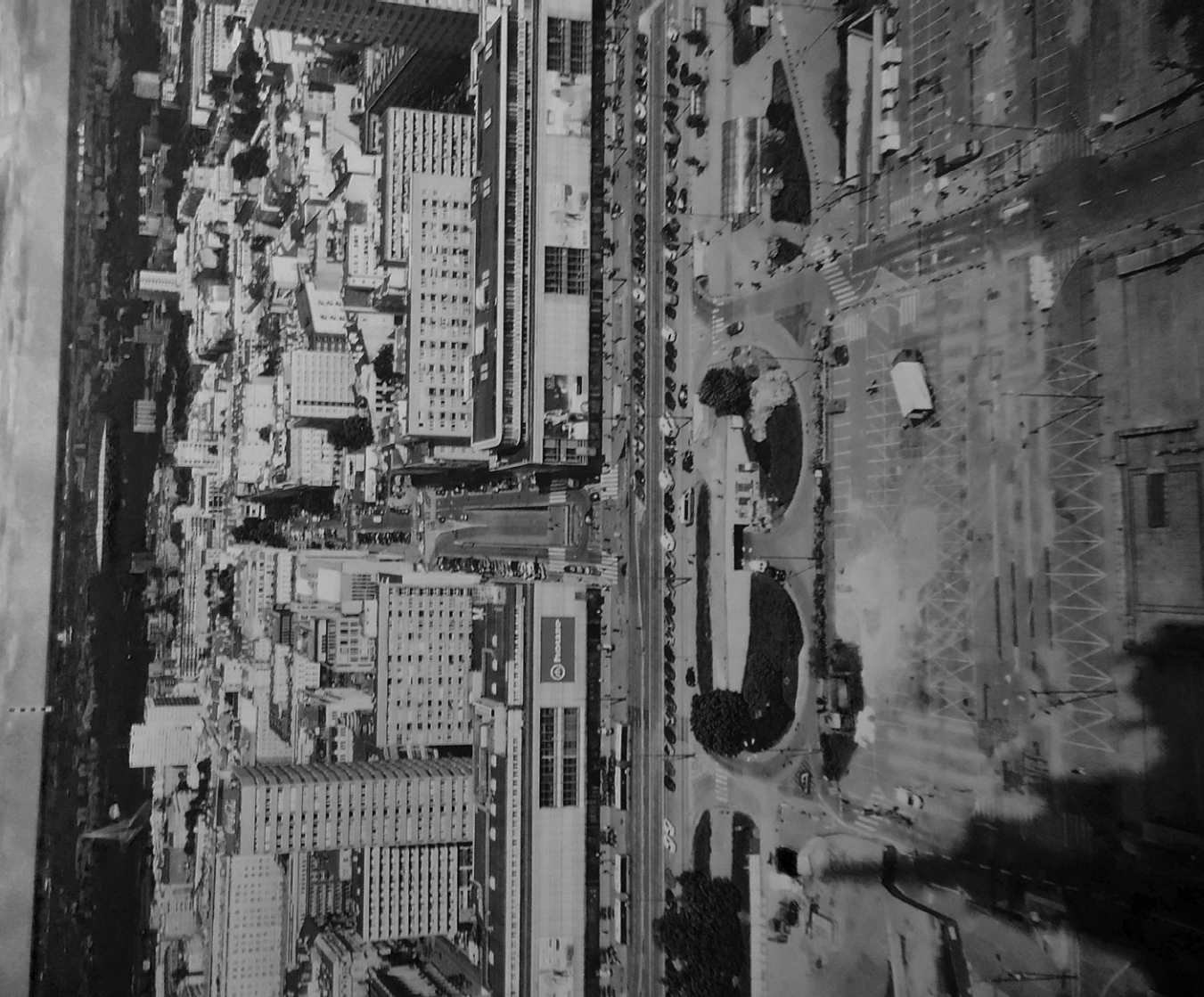
Bye bye

K.K.



photo credit: captures from the video. Fisz Emade jako Tworzywo Szluczne - Warszawa - feat. Pablo Hudini

WELCOME



Warsaw, 6th of March 2014

So here I am finally!

Just came by train from Prague at the main railway station situated directly in the centre of Warsaw and my first emotion emerges: I get confused. Is the centre just a geographical point for Varsavians or the war has just finished some 15 years ago and there was neither enough time nor money to rebuild the capital? My eyes are numbed by this vast open space which surrounds the Stalinist tower. The most interesting and the most expensive plot in the city and it's almost empty! It's definitely the most spectacular³ void I have ever seen, a real axis mundi. This' truly the biggest and most impressive vacant lot(s) in Warsaw, but not the only one. When you stroll through the city, you will find *numerous gaps, vacant lots and vast empty spaces*³ in every district. These spatial 'oversleepers' are like a solid financial asset of its owners who wait for a proper time to sell their land. But the situation has not change since, well since a long time probably. You may say that, these people are crazy. They always complain of not having enough money and at the same time they are literally walking next to millions of dollars! This situation is too strange to have a simple answer: yes, they are weird indeed. I think that probably it has something to do with this: You know, when the official doctrine was saying that everything is a common good. So it was just after the Great War, and since more than two decades they have capitalism, old-new problems emerged. And I tell you this must be it, property and claims! This I think is a uniquely Warsaw case,⁴ I don't remember any other post-communist city which suffered from such issue. On the other hand, there's maybe a second reason for this situation, which is a specific dynamics⁵ of the (than) socialist country. It was a part of tradition that something was always left aside, in a in-between state a specific meanwhile.

photo credit: Krzysztof Pacholak, pacholak.net

In a contradiction to what you may imagine yourself, I find a very specific charm in these empty spaces. Oasis of green grass with chamomile flowers.⁵ But you're architect, you see there a building already. Why not!

See you already in Prague, our 'full' city.
B.B.





Dear Tom,

I'm sending you my best wishes! I'm still working in Warsaw in the real estate domain, but no longer as an intern! You probably don't know, but here the number of new flats is the highest than in any other large Polish city ¹ - I'm up to my ears with work. This is why I couldn't come and visit you last summer. Something very specific ¹ for this city is that fact that there's still not enough of new condos. It's a never-ending story, but that's even better for me. There's also a negative side of my situation. Remember as I always wanted to have in my offer these beautiful and ambitious pieces of architecture to my clients? That's a dream of any real estate agent. Well, here in Warsaw it's quite particular. There is a certain type of housing market and urban regime constellation which differs from Western European cities. ¹ Every district in this city is historically different and the new dwellings are also very heterogeneous in their aesthetic. It's like you move 15 km from one point to another, and you'll feel that everything changes. I think that it's the municipality which is responsible for this special kind of situation. ¹

I've always felt that I have a mission, and I know it's funny to here from a real estate agent, but I'd love to offer something more affordable to my clients. People here they doesn't earn enough to afford a new flat without having a gigantic mortgage. Do you remember watching this one Polish sitcom called "Alternatywy 4" where people had just move to new blocks in Ursynow district in Warsaw? They could hear, smell, feel their neighbors from any possible direction. These buildings they exist till today and people continue living in them. I just have sometimes impression that the Poles or even Poles in general, will accept anything that gives them some privacy within the four walls of their flat. Another fun fact which I've discovered

just some time ago is that during communism Poles gathered in their flats treating them as the only 'private' spaces of their living (read secured from the communism state and surveillance) and organised inside of them different kind of public spaces, like a theatre for example. That was phenomenal! ². Poles are very attached to their traditions, Poles especially concerning their history - why not offer them something crazy for us, but natural for them with a sense of historical continuity...? These are my crazy thoughts, for now!

I am waiting for some news from you !
XXX



photo credit: snapshot from the serial Alternatywy 4 by St Bareja (1983)



Dear Margaret,

It's been thirty years since I was last time in Warsaw and I can't recognize this place anymore. That's how it changed that much! To me, it had already a unique identity,^{4 U.D.} full of reach and tragic history, but ever since the communism felt, the city started to develop dynamically creating a new meaning. Don't be mistaken that the former system can't be visible anymore, at least in some places...

Warsaw is none of the places^{1 U.S.} you have seen in Western Europe. You won't find neither the German functionality nor the French charm. I think it's peculiarity lies in its complexity, that's what makes it so different.^{2 U.S.} The first time I came here I didn't understand the city, no one does...

The clash of the recent 'tradition' and the symbols of capitalism are amazing. Contrast is another word for Warsaw: *from almost any spot in the city it is possible to take a panoramic photograph depicting at least four or five historically and stylistically different architectural styles*^{6 U.S.} - you can see it on the postcard! It's a patchwork, like my grandma used to make!

I can observe something unusual and unfamiliar^{7 U.D.} which happens to this place - a finally reached continuity. Sometimes it doesn't mean something positive. For instance, the phenomenon^{1 U.S.} of bringing back to life old industrial districts by replacing them with building offices. I remember going to one of such places on some business meeting in early 80s. It was a local factory. Now it has mushroomed with offices, but some small industry has prevailed - so you have this unbelievable contrast^{9 U.D.} of a small manufactory which produces mirrors next to a bank. Such similar situation I'd seen passing through another district. But there you have seemingly unique condition^{2 U.D.}, where the nature faces the business. It would be a pity to loose it. I had also been to the southern district of Warsaw called

Ursynow. It's northern part is famous because it's been built in remarkable^{6 U.D.} short time but...everything looks so sterile and seemingly the same! In comparison to Paris you feel like it's just a mock-up part of the city, which is prepared for the near destruction after being showed to the public. The other districts are quite different one to another, it's like they were separated villages. I must tell you, it's an extreme example^{13 U.D.} of lack of any planning. A particular laissez-faire is especially visible here in Warsaw.^{16 U.D.} You have here so many public spaces. Probably just a few other European capitals^{4 U.S.} have it. For me, this city is showcase^{5 U.D.} model of what's changing in a city when a system collapses. It's amazing and you need to experience it by yourself. Let's come together the next time. I think everyone here requires a guide... *I like it that you need to be so much more aware to appreciate Warsaw; to seek its small architectural details, interesting spatial contrasts and urban uniqueness.*^{3 U.S.}

Kisses my dear, see you soon!



photo credit: R. Latoszek, The view from the inner courtyard, 4 Sienkiewicza Street



Hey!

I'm currently in Warsaw for 6 months on an internship. I found some great, cheap flat right in the city centre where I live with some Spanish guy. I don't know if any city in Europe has such buildings right in its middle ! ^{1B} Plus, just a look from the window and with all this greenery you feel like in the Central Park. I'm waiting impatiently to see it covered in snow on December! The buildings are not so close to one another so it's very spacious. When I came here the first time I thought it's going to be like in Paris- not very secure and dirty but at least affordable. To my surprise this place turned to have its unique character. ^{2B} Every day I enter through a long elegant lobby tiled with marble plates, I can choose one of three elevators - it's like staying in a 4 stars hotel in a price of a youth hostel! And the huge difference, between such blocks in our homeland and these in Warsaw, lies in people who live there. For example: the neighbor on my right is an old lady who sometimes knock on our door to offer a piece of her apple pie. Than on our left there's a young Polish couple who have just got married and it's their first condo ever. On the same level we have also a professor from the local university. This place it's not so anonymous as we got used to it in France. What's more these 'grands ensembles' are not ghettos in which people live because they don't have any other choice or because of their financial situation. Here, they've got used to this blend because of the communism system, as our friendly neighbor explained to us in one of the talks we had in the corridor of our block. But I can imagine someone coming here the first time as I did when I was searching for a place to stay. You will be shocked when you come here. In the place where I live there are 19 similar blocks, each consisting of 320-400 flats. Looking at that mass you think: wow, Warsaw

photo credit: Jacek Lagowski, Agencja Gazeta, Osiedle za Zielazna Brama

is an ugly concrete monster ^{1U} and they have it just in the middle of a city and not at least in the suburbs, as we do. Well, before my departure I've checked on the Trip Advisor where I'm going for my internship. You know, I chose the city for the work not the place itself. The result of my "web investigation" was that in 2009 Warsaw was chosen the ugliest city in Europe! ^{1,2,3U} People wrote that the city is colourless or that the ubiquitous cars unable a normal walking through the city. Someone even stated that the citizens don't actually walk or stroll. Instead, they run everywhere in a rush. They also pointed out that the city doesn't have an actual centre, the Old-Town *where nothing happens* and *the train stations, which brings to mind any of the Caucasian republics, and not a pretty big EU country*. ¹ But for me it's not the architecture which creates the problem but more people's attitude...

Warsaw's indeed neglected, it doesn't have a centre as we imagine, but the centre for me is created around the place where I live and I've got pretty much attached to it. At the same time in Paris I can move from one district to another without a feeling of lost.

Even if Warsaw is an ugly misfit compared with the timeless beauties of Rome, Paris and Stockholm or, closer by, the three fabulous Austro-Hungarian gems of Vienna, Prague and Budapest, ^{3U} I do feel good in this ugly duckling and I'll be very glad if I could show you its hidden beauty !

With Love,
-Tim





Hey Mika!

I've watched some time ago a short animation 'Warsaw 1935'. At that time the city was called the 'Paris of the North' for its unique atmosphere.¹ Out of curiosity I googled 'Warsaw' and the result was...let's say peculiar- try by yourself. Can a city change that much?! Today nothing resembles the place that it used to be before the Second World War. I mean really this day.... because I'm in Warsaw right now! Yep, I needed to go and see it by myself. After all it's not so far from Rennes and I've some friends here who came on Erasmus exchange two years ago. I'm here since Christmas - I thought to myself that every city looks amazing at this time, it has to. I came to Warsaw late in the evening and the snow coated every piece of land and every building. The atmosphere was amazing, magical and somehow different in a beautiful way than any other city.⁹ I woke up the following day and expected crowds in the city center, you know, like the one you have in Berlin or in Prague just before the Christmas time. But here in Warsaw I couldn't feel any atmosphere of animation, except maybe the St. Anna's church in the center - there was a peculiar atmosphere.⁵ On the other side the morning was absolutely amazing, it was this bizarre energy, *a unique clash of time and place*...¹⁰ The city has revealed its genius loci. *I think that the character and the taste of this city is hidden*,⁹ not evident and this is exactly the Warsaw's peculiarity.⁹ My friends were busy so I was wandering around by myself, finding my own paths. I wasn't in any rush, nothing waited for me in Rennes. So the Christmas was over, we spent an amazing New Year's Eve and the city got back to its original rhythm. And that was a significant moment. You see, Varsovians are in such a rush. I mean *everybody are always hurry, they're always late and*
¹¹ I as saw on the example of my friends when we were at a bar discussing something... *they compete with each other*.¹¹

photo credit: PAP, Tomasz Gzell. Warsaw under the snow after a snowstorm on Christmas

Such society creates a crazy, mad, neurotic city.⁸ The following day I was wondering where could I possibly go. To my astonishment I saw a recommendation to visit charming suburbs...³ It was written just underneath a section truly unique atmosphere.³ Can you imagine this kind of advice for Paris?! I was really shocked. But this city has many of such wonders⁴: *City of tragedy, City of commerce, City of dreams, City of ruination, City of billboards - Centre of this particular universe*.² It's a city for an individual discovery that's how you can reveal its unique atmosphere⁶ and peculiar beauty.⁹

Is it all something specifically different for Warsaw?⁷

For me it is.

I'm coming back to Rennes in about a week. I will tell you everything in detail. See you quite soon!

Vince





10th of May, 2014

Greetings from Warschau!

The weather is so beautiful that we decided to go all together from Cracow to Warsaw by train. Long trip but everyone said that it's worth seeing the capital city in contrast to the ancient borough of the Polish kings.. We found a cheap apartment by Airbnb in the southern district of the city. The owner has left us four bikes. While he was leaving he mentioned that in case of a sunny day we could go and take a ride to the near Kabacki Forest. It was a great idea and the kids loved it - it's like having your own jungle without leaving in proximity a grocery store! We got lost but we crossed a lot of helpful people who showed us the way out. Apparently the place is quite popular.

Than we took a subway, the first station of the line. We started talking to another German who we met on the way. Over thirty minutes had passed, as we realised that we arrived at the terminus station! It was 15 minutes back to the center, so we decided to get out and just take a glimpse of what's outside. We climbed up the stairs and there was..a forest again! Imagine at both points of the subway you end up being surrounded by nature. We rent bikes; after all it's the best way to experience the city. We weren't far from the subway station, when Martin shouted that he could see some trees... This forest was nothing you can compare³ to any other green area in a city! *It's like a wild recess. There is no place better on hot summer days.*³

At first you may say that grey's the colour of Warsaw. The city center is indeed a little bit sad, but then if you pay enough attention you may see these green dots. Actually greenery is Warsaw characteristic!^{4,5}

We visited also Wilanow, which is one of the most beautiful parks in the world!!⁶ With every step taken everything changes.

Don't get fooled by the others who say that Warsaw is a

sad, depressing city. How can it be true if it's so green!
I'm sending you many kisses!

best,
Anna



photo credit: Green Ursynow by ewulka. www.gametek.pl



2nd of August 2014, Warsaw

Dear friend,

I wanted to send you a typical postcard from Warsaw with some views of commonplaces which every tourist is obliged to see...I was almost among one of these tourists...

I came to the Polish capital on the 1st of August. Only on this specific day in the year, precisely at 5 pm, everything and everyone stop, the city comes to a standstill. And then, for one minute the only sound you acknowledge is the one of an alarm, the same, which people heard seventy years ago when the Warsaw Uprising started in the '44. I can tell you this sent shivers up my spine. Imagine yourself, there where young people, the same age as we're now, who knew that their childhood is now gone for good starting from the sound of this very siren. I don't want to write you a sad letter, but it'll be eventually a bitter sad, with an optimist ending, this I promise you!

I've found somewhere inside one of my guides that there's a museum created to commemorate this very special 'event'. I didn't know before, but the Warsaw Uprising was the largest single military effort.^{3 WR} How about that? And we thought that we're the brave ones! I saw pictures how the city was ruined during the Warsaw Uprising, but that was just the first act of destruction. Later on when the resistance had fallen, the Nazi army as a gesture of their private vendetta had finished the annihilation of the city. It's the only such case in the history⁵ when the city was being destroyed so meticulously...

Warsaw has another very unique phenomenon^{1 WR} - yep there's something more! *The civilian underground movement and the army created the Polish Underground State*.¹ Brrr, that sounds like a great story for a next Hollywood movie!! Wait, Poles already did it.

Speaking about the underground, this is very fragile

topic, here in Warsaw. Watch out, because it's iconique and highly symbolic part of the national memory^{1 UC} - as one guide in the Warsaw Uprising Museum told me with a sense of superiority in his voice. My fault - I made a big smile when entering a fake sewere canal... People survived because of them.. I felt really stupid at this moment.

I think Warsaw has a unique identity^{6 WR} because of this post-war scape and this underground accent. There's no place here for denying or forgetting what happened. It's hard for me to tell if it's correct or if it's wrong. But how could you forget such thing which happened to your city? Here, it became legendary. These were certainly different vacations than I used to have, but I definitely rather to have this than lying on the beach like my parents do. It's quite sunny here, you know....!

See you soon.

x

PS: You absolutely need to watch a film by a Polish director A.Wajda. The film is called 'Kanal' and it pictures the scenes of the Warsaw Uprising, which happen in the underground... Look at the cover of the postcard!



photo credit: a scene shot from the film Kanal by Andrzej Wajda (1957)



30st of August 2008, Warsaw

My dearest, aunt Petunia,

This year we decided to have rather special vacations. After all the stories you told our kids, they've started to be interested in the history of the Second World War. So we took them to the places which played the biggest role at these times... Luckily for us the weather is perfect, not too hot so the hours we spent in the cars don't bother us so much...at least any more!

We've already visited Paris, Brussels, Berlin and Dresden. Out of 2 days which we originally planned in Warsaw, this is our forth. And you know why! Since we're almost at the end of our trip we need to make a short statement: it's definitely the city which suffered war destruction on an unparalleled scale.⁴ It's particularly visible if you search for trace of old buildings and you notice almost none, than you realise that no other city in Europe³ *was taken down so methodically*. When you stroll down this city you can see everywhere the traces of the past, not only the emptiness of something which was standing there long time ago, but also an emptiness of a historical content. They almost didn't reconstruct the buildings after war, except from the Old Town, The Castle and the Royal Route. But the most shocking is that the Jewish district you may only find by the signs on 'new' buildings which indicate the places where it used to be. For Marge and me it's a phantom City. But one day we stopped accidentally at an open-air photo exhibition under a title: "The city of Phoenix. War*saw Everything".⁴ and the kids added that for them the city is like this, rising from the ashes! Well, they're the greatest optimists from all of us. But from what we've learned from this exhibition is that this city has some kind of magical power to rebuilt

photo credit: Domena Publiczna/Chnuściel, Marszałkowska Street under the fire of the Warsaw Uprising

itself and it was not even once in the history!!! It's a city of a different story,¹⁴ more complicated, simply different¹⁴—than any other one in the Western Europe. I can just now understand why do Varsavians cherish this, lets be honest - quite ugly, city so much. It's this special form of Warsaw which makes it so weird¹⁰ but so original. It's unique to us...

Best wishes!
Ben with family

PS: The kids are sending you their own postcard in which they plan to tell you the story of a phoenix named *Warsaw* ;)





Exit 4

4

Hey mom, hey dad!

How's it going back home? I've just spent the first week of my exchange in Warsaw. I was planning to get to know the city from the guide that you bought me before my departure, but actually I don't even need it that much...

On the second day came a Polish student named Ania who voluntarily offered to make a small trip in the city. She asked us a simple question: from what side would you like to see the city. The party will be on the weekend so maybe I can offer you a little bit different sightseeing. She doubted whether it's too much for us for the first time, but after we heard that her grandfather fought in the 1944 during the Warsaw Uprising, we thought that she might explain us the story from an interesting side. You know, not the museum kind-of-one. So we went to a trip, and I've realised that this city is created more than any other European city,¹ on memories of the past.

We started from one point where everything begun. It was somewhere in the city centre. I don't remember the name of the square. Ania rushed from one point to another describing the actions which took place in the Polish capital over 60 years ago. She didn't need to read it from any book. Not because she has a good memory or something. It was actually the fact that the city is filled with different traces of the past. You should have seen the number of signs on the buildings indicating precisely what happened there, who lived inside of them..It contains such huge sum of monuments, more than most cities¹ that you can take them as the reference points, a self-guide through this city.

As we spent almost three hours with Ania, I've started to think that Varsavians have a remarkable sense of longing.¹ Even simply the names of the streets are something of a great matter to them. Also

they have a specific obsession with cultural heritage and its commemoration!³ For instance: the Old Town. Apparently it resembles nothing from what it used to be before the war, but the fact that it was 'reconstructed' is essential.

I don't know what to think of this, after all we came here for other reasons...

From the other side I've asked myself who knows this city from this side, I mean any other foreigner. We had this opportunity; it was nice of Ania to sacrifice her time for us.

Next postcard will be from Cracow, where we're going in two weeks from now. Someone said it's totally different from Warsaw. Can't wait to see it.

Kisses!
Hannah





Warsaw, 13th of October 1960

Dear John,

I came to Warsaw some time ago to describe this city of ruins for the Guardian newspaper. I remember your article from April 1945, in which you described your visit in this city soon after its liberation. I hope you didn't forget our discussion over this topic one year ago, at the dinner party at the mayor's office in New York City. Since our conversation, Warsaw started to change significantly. Regarding the fact, that it was almost entirely ruined it makes a double, very strong impression on everyone here including me. I thought you might be interested in this matter. My article will be published within three weeks, so you'll be the first person to read about the recent phenomenon. The communist regime gave accreditations to just several journalists including myself.

Your article in the LIFE magazine described this city as *the worst urban scar in the world*.² Indeed Warsaw became *incomprehensible*,² surrounded by a *thoroughness of ruin*.² Since the communist Party had taken over the control this image of ruined city became a central *symbol* in its iconographic arsenal,² more importantly than the one of the working class and industry.

The traces of the war destruction are still visible, not only through the physical presence of ruined buildings, but also in the use of an *unique building material*.¹ The rubble, which we're talking about right now, was an inexhaustible resource. In the place of the former ghetto, it was used in the building of the new Muranow district. You can see that it's the rubble by a visibly reddish facade. The use of this material somehow tragically highlights a *unique discontinuity*⁵ of Warsaw. Here in Muranow it marks the absence of Jews in the city. Apart from this we mustn't forget

that the post-war situation of urban *tabula rasa* created a *unusual opportunity*.⁴ The city was rebuilt in the exceptional *circumstances*¹ - *the existing cityscape played a minor role for the urban planners*.¹ The communist Party found this perfect to incorporate their propaganda in the city's reconstruction process. The rhetoric of the *genuine humanism*,¹ which was also adopted by the architects and planners, was mostly used to mark the contrast to the pre-war situation of Warsaw and the positive changes which were about to occur. Today, in the places where the city reached the highest density, you see this *unusually wide street and squares*.¹ It's for the defensive purpose in case of another uprising which Varsovians could start against the new system. I honestly believe they could!

Today's Warsaw is a bizarre example of how the buildings, which were *positive sites of everyday experience* became new ruins. It's an *unlike situation*² in comparison to some parts of Europe *where conservationists have turned their attention to post-war architecture*,² here they are being neglected.

On the other hand, Warsaw's ruins present us with something more *peculiar*: *an artificial antiquity fabricated in the twentieth century, missing one essential ingredient—time*.³ I keep my fingers crossed for the luck of this city, hoping it will find its right path...

I'll be surely attending the annual meeting of the American journalists on the 20th of November, hope to see you there to have some chat about Warsaw.

Z pozdrowieniami z Warszawy,
Kevin

PS: Tomorrow I'll send you additionally my future article.

issue: *ruins*. category: M,S / I,XII,XIV

photo credit: Association of the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland





Warsaw, 15th June 2008

Hey cousin!

How's it going back home?? It'll be my second postcard to you and I have received none from your side! I'm in shock but not as much as you'll be after reading what I'm about to describe to you after my 5 months in the capital city! In my last postcard I shared some of my doubts with you. I was really stressed of living in here, even if it's just 3 hours from our dear mother-home. Do you remember that last time I told you about my flat? Now my neighbours are: a professor on the right and an ex-miner who came to Warsaw to take care of his aging mother. And it's the city centre! To the miner I can speak in the same way as I do back home, but with the professor, naturally it's something different. I don't feel that comfortable, like under some kind of social experiment ¹⁰ because of this mix. At least in our block everything is crystal clear and people know where they belong.

It's not like I hate everything. If I want to buy myself new gloves I go outside and there're these ladies next to a fancy restaurant who sell stuff on their portable beds. Yes, I REALLY meant beds indeed! There was also something phenomenal ² happening here at my block. Do you remember the meetings we had once every month in the village at the fire station? Here we have something similar to this but we take different kind of decisions. Issues such as: to plant some trees in the inner courtyard, make the common places friendlier. I like it because then I can show to the rest of the residents my skills as a carpenter, just as I used to do back home. I've made for instance new playground items for the local kids.

Yesterday I went also to this Bazaar Europe. I have even spoken to a foreigner! It was amazing, I mean

I don't know English very good so the conversation was a little bit weak but meanwhile I was eating a Vietnamese soup. Delicious! Moreover, you can buy there everything, the place's huge but I've heard from one of the merchandise (I bought a new sell phone from him), that they're planning to close it in several months. There'll be a new national stadium or something. That's a pity, because I felt in this place like being somewhere else, quite exotic!

I spoke to a guy from my work than we had some beer together and he said, his name is Piotr by the way, that there's only one person in the office who comes originally from Warsaw. These 'true Varsavians' are so proud of them; I never speak to them, or just briefly...

In the end, the city made a huge impression on me, so I don't understand all these people complaining, comparing it to other cities. It's all weird.

Anyway, I'll be home in October to see yours kids going to school for the first time in their lives. I'll bring something for them.

Big hugs for you and the rest of the family!

Bartek



photo credit: czamola.org, Warsaw Decade Stadium Bazaar Europe, The entrance to the bus station.



Hi Bridget!

I'm sending you a big smile from Warsaw! You wanted me to describe how I feel in this city. I must admit that I had some negative expectations. I'd imagined Warsaw to be a greyish, post-soviet city, an epitome^{1E} of the past aesthetics and planning of the communist regime. Also by contrast^{2B} to the other Western European cities, it seemed to be oppressively predictable. *It lacked their excitement and sensual range.*

So to my surprise I've found something unique^{1,2,3B} in this sad, sad city. Warsaw certainly escapes to be a prominent symbol of a fully developed city as it tries to advertise itself in the magazines available on the airplane. With merchants whose presence astonishes you in the least expected places, along with a certain omission and mediocrity clearly visible in the streets, Warsaw still resembles a capital city of a Second World country which it was until not so long time ago! So you can ask me, why am I surprised? Well because in this city the East is as much detectable as the West!

Warsaw is very proud of its capitalist image. Such number and seize of the shopping malls I've seen only in the Northern America! And these skyscrapers in the centre. That's at least daft, frankly speaking!

On the other hand I think that this mixture of West and East could be treated as Warsaw's specificity.^{3B} The Varsovians seem to deny their attachment to the Eastern culture or any its presence in the city, but highlight Western influence in the city. They should stop denying themselves, and just admit the facts and create new quality basing upon this difference. Moreover, from the cultural point of view, the city starts slowly to be a melting pot as it used to be before the war. Yesterday I went to a former Jewish district and I found

myself just in the middle of the Singer Festival. People singing and dancing in the place of the bygone ghetto, all this crowd and you could have a substitute of what the place could be today ... If you have this in mind, I can say that Warsaw exceeds expectations for me as a *music lover, art enthusiast and history expert thanks to its vibrant cultural life, countless festivals, art events, modern museums.*^{1E} Maybe Warsaw as a borderline between the two 'worlds' of East and West creates something special? I think in a special case of Warsaw.^{3E} this cultural mixture produces great openness and creativity. See, I'm better than the adverts you can read on the plane!

By the way, I'll buy some Polish specialities for our family.

See you soon!

Kevin



photo credit: Sławomir Kamiński (...) . Meanwhile, shopkeepers set stalls in the Saxon Garden.



Warsaw, 2nd of September 2008

Dear all,

Greetings from Warsaw!!

The people are very nice in here and the food is not so bad after all. We even managed to find some croissants for the breakfast, good for us! And the city in general is quite cheap in comparison to England, so we had made a small reservation back in Suffolk for a small extravagancy in the Polish capital...

Before the trip to Poland, we booked a small passenger plane to have a quick tour around the city, it's really not that expensive. Nana wanted to see Warsaw from the above. She said she saw some pre-war photos taken by the Germans and she needed to compare it. You know her passion for the Second World War!

So we had our small sightseeing in the sky yesterday and... I need to tell you it was magnificent. You may tell me that everything looks good from the above, but what I'm thinking precisely are the buildings themselves which made such a huge impression on me. I can't imagine having high skyscrapers right in the city centre in our hometown! It's quite unusual for Europe.² Nany told us, looking at the old photo shoots from 1939, that it's probably because nothing stayed there after war. The city was in ruins, so they were given a free hand... and bang! There you have the Palace of Culture, this massive *landmark and the most outstanding element of the Warsaw skyline*!³ The pilot said that the citizens wanted to raze it after the fall of the communism, and many times ever since! It's some kind of local obsession; you'd better not start a conversation on this topic at least if you have several free hours.

Next to the Palace of Culture and Science you can see that there's another construction taking place. Apparently it'll be new, very high skyscraper. I saw the visualisations

when we went to the local commercial centre situated just next to the future Złota 44 (that's the name of the building) and it was written with big letters that the new construction will create a unique skyline (...).¹

I don't know how about the rest of my family, but for me it's ok already like this.. Otherwise Warsaw's going to resemble one of these American Cities, with skyscrapers everywhere, where nothing happens and the city looks so empty. Anyway, the postcard's very beautiful and I hope you'll all enjoy the view. We saw the same exact view on our plane trip!

Best from all of the Brendon Family!



photo credit: Warsaw Panorama by Kwaikowski Bartosz, Flickr



Warsaw, 12.12.2002

Dear Bernard,

Do you remember when we were young, crazy fans of David Bowie and Joy Division music? So, they both recorded songs about Warsaw... I recalled to myself how we imagined the capital city in the Eastern bloc: sad, frightening, greyish, full of concrete buildings. We were surely influenced by the songs. But most of all, as if my son would describe it today after watching Games of Thrones: we thought that it's a wild city, somewhere far away, like in fairy tales. Well, that was in the early 80s and today I'm leaving this city after several days of a business conference and I thought you may be interested by my several remarks...

You see, I've always had some pre-judgments concerning communist countries. In Warsaw the changes since the '89 are so rapid that the world representing the old system slowly disappears becoming something of an exotic otherness.^{2WA} On the other side, you can feel like the Soviet slovenliness' present everywhere. Buildings separated by the in-between space of unused terrains and I feel like the city of Warsaw resembles more of a Kinshasa, the capital city of Congo, than the Western cities.^{3WA} And about this voids in the city, here they look more like scary wild fields.^{4WA} than the places for a potential investments. I had one next to my hotel, and certainly I didn't feel like having more space and feeling a specific charm of this situation!

Now, I should make a small note about their suburbs. On of these days, we went by a lent bus to a conference somewhere very near the capital and you won't imagine how bizarre it was! These places look like little fortresses, truly spectacular and exotic!^{5WA} It's like going back to the middle ages.

But there was also something that just broke my initial ice. What's so different and wild in here is

that you can always snap out of town, without actually staying here. It's something totally unique.⁶ And today to our surprise, they put this artificial palm just in the middle of a busy roundabout, right in the city centre. Crazy people.

In this confronted image of a wild city and the one with its complicated history, I thought to myself that Varsavians should stop treating this city as a life-museum with this specific Polish nostalgia. I think, the city symbolizes¹¹ the changes after the fall of the communism in its own right. And the only common thing it would have with its wild image it was the natural process of selection! What works, stays, what not - out! So a new title for the future Bowie's song could be - Warsaw's laboratory! Unique,²¹ no?

See you man,
best from Warsaw!

photo credit: PAP/ Jacek Turczyk. A controversial decoration of the Capital.





Hey Romek!

So imagine yourself in the city... Actually you know you're in one, because you remember passing next to some buildings, trying to avoid being knocked over by a car, and hearing all these noises - the most characteristic feature of the city.

Than, in contrast to all this urban natural state and to your astonishment you see big green mass on the horizon. Curiously, you enter it. The reason is simple: since when can you find such bushes in a city, especially in a concrete city of Warsaw??

Inside the greenery and after the first shock produced by the contrast between the sunny outside and the shady forest, I felt like miles from the civilization! Well, almost, because after some time, not too quick, you hear people chatting and having fun. They're amateurs of canoeing who found a perfect spot to introduce their beloved activity in the city, 20 minutes from the centre. I haven't realised it before but they were swimming inside the moat. So I thought to myself, wait a second... a moat of fortress?

I continued my path when I'd realised that the road was over. My journey ended up in the middle of something, which was evidently abundant, and certainly served a military purpose ages ago.

I've come back to the civilization to my home; eager to check what was it. I'm originally from Lodz so to my astonishment I realised that Warsaw back in the XIXth century was a fortress city! At these times it was in a very specific political situation.² As the city on the Western edge of the Russian Empire, Warsaw became an important defensive point, a grotesquely enormous military fortress! When the country finally reached its independence from the usurper, Warsaw was facing an extremely high² density. The fortress was limiting the growth of the capital.

Some modifications had to be taken under account. Among 29 originally built forts, *a large numbers have survived to date, although they no longer have a defensive purpose. They are a real item of curiosity in our city and on a European scale, are unique. Maybe no other town in Europe can boast of such an attraction!*⁴

That's all for now! Tomorrow I'll go for a jogging to the fort!
How cool does it sound?

Best,
Magda



photo credit: Google Earth. Bem Fortress in Wola district.



Warsaw, 15th of August 2014

Hey Mathilde,

Just look what a nice postcard I've found for you! To answer immediately your potential question: yes, it's Warsaw! I know that I'm being sarcastic, but we should be realistic. It's one of the first things you acknowledge in this city, but you never take a photo of it. So this postcard seems to be a good way to loose up oneself, get a distance and try to understand what actually composes of this bizarre city ³ of Warsaw. Maybe it's more than we think as we simply ignore it. Perhaps in the end you'll also say that's not chaotic after all! I'll send you one card each month. Here we go with the first one!

One day I was strolling down Pulawska Street to get from Anna's flat back to the subway, and in the middle of this place not far from the centre I saw this (look at the front side). For me Warsaw is an eccentric ¹ compilation of nice and ugly. Let us remember it wasn't planned to be like this. In Warsaw they still need to build bridges.... The city's on a different stage of development to other major cities, ⁴ so maybe this is the reason for which its beauty's so limping. All this, let's say "mess" is partially the result of an extraordinary tension ² between the capitalist's and the communist's ways of treating the space.

On the other hand you have destruction and on the other, all these new buildings emerge, the new reality so much in contrast to the previous one. *This mix in architecture, where buildings still communist, Stalinist, compete with ones already postmodernist, plus the communist Palace (of Culture and Science) - it is a postmodern mosaic. Such ambivalence at such a high level I've never seen before.* ³

Warsaw is an extraordinary city; ² and it's easy to get lost here. Beware of stereotypes and simplifications; don't let them cloud your impression. ⁸

Till the next postcard!

Kate

PS: I recommend you to visit any bookstore in Warsaw and you'll always find half a dozen books which speak about the city. It's seriously phenomenal! ⁵ Also if you'll get obsessed about this topic there're many websites with open forums. Ask a question about the city and you'll get the answer faster than you think. Have you seen such interest in our city? *I don't think you could observe anything like this in other cities.* ⁵

That's all from me. Please tell me how are you and how the things' going to!

K.



photo credit: <http://jeziorki.blogspot.com>



Warsaw, 25th of February 2014

Dear Esther,

We left Tel-Aviv two weeks ago to have this obligatory trip to Poland. I know it's our heritage, but we were all quite sceptical about the city after we googled it. We said to ourselves: alright, it's not going to be an ordinary sightseeing after all.

We firstly went to Auschwitz, which was quite traumatic, not only for us, but also for other non-Jewish visitors. Since today we're in Warsaw. Imagine, after a trip to a place where you had some of the traces still visible and preserved, you end up in a city where there's nothing left of our existence! Almost nothing. In this exact place, there was once a major Jewish district which is named today Muranów. There was no other solution than to be guided by someone for a simple reason. How can you actually acknowledge anything out of nothing? Apart from us there were many other Jewish groups. At the entrance to the district everyone stopped chatting and telling jokes. There was a deep silence. Not only because of the most important fact that we walked through the former ghetto, but it has also something to do with a unique situation.^{4c} This peace and quietness are something rare in Warsaw.

Back in Tel-Aviv, I remember watching some photos presenting this district. It was one of the poorest parts of Warsaw but it had a specific character.^{4a} full of many small workshops... And after this place was totally erased. They had to build something new, but there was almost none Jewish left so a new district could be built from the scratch. And then, the architect of this place decided to use this specific meaning^{4c} given by the site and all this rubble, which was lingering in the streets. The rubble was turned into red bricks visible on the facade, which become a spatial sign.^{4a} Later on, they covered it and there's nothing to be read anymore. It's a real pity.

I find it a beautiful gesture such a way of commemoration. I'll show you the photos as soon as I come back! We need also to have some rest mentally from all of this.

See you soon!
Best, Debora



photo credit: Bartosz Bobkowski/ Agencja Gazeta



Warsaw-Prague, 24th of June 2014

Dear Bartek,

I'm in Prague! No, not the one in Czech Republic, but a district in Warsaw, Poland!

Despite the fact that in my opinion every district in this city has its own unique character,⁷ Praga (in Polish) is the strongest competitor to be named the most specific^{5a} case.

In the rest of the city you won't feel immediately their uniqueness as it's revealed pretty modestly, here the authenticity is something that hits you at the very moment the tram enters the district which you took on the other side of the river next to meticulously rebuilt Royal Castle.

You finally see buildings which provocatively try to highlight their age by a lack of plasters on their facades exposing red brick walls; missing architectural details of balustrades; sometimes even without windows. This place is so neglected that you feel a little bit like in slums and just want to get back to the "normality" which is offered to the tourists on the other side of the river. But there aren't many places^{5c} like this in Warsaw, as authentic^{5a}, and when you finally fight up your fears, you start to discover its beauty. For example: the inner courtyards, often with wells, which are so characteristic^{5a} for this district. It's a place of encounter for neighbours who often gather around charming chapels. Old people 'keep guards' around them, bringing fresh flowers and lighting up some candles. After a first dislike you enter one of the shops. It's 30 degrees outside so you search some shadow. And even though the shop assistant knows you're not from here, he starts speaking to you. It's just in here, everywhere else in Warsaw they'll serve you and that's it! After an hour of walk, I came to see some small artisans studio, professional workshops which in our country don't exist anymore, since like 20 years! For instance: corsetière. In the

places where you think only criminals live, you'll find artists... This place breathes with a different air that the left-bank Warsaw. I appreciate enormously the unique character of this district, the charm of old forgotten shop centres, little grocery stores.^{5a} *It's like a city-village.*^{5a}

Next to the architectural gems^{5a,c,d} of the past epoch, I can also risk a statement that even people here are different. For instance today I observed a very specific folklore^{5a} in Prague. It's summer, hot and sweaty, and *men are walking around topless as if it was their garden!* Someone even said to me that they have a different slang, but it's slowly being forgotten. The district's still famous for pickpockets standing in the gates along with drunken tramps. This can be surely hardly *understandable for others, with its difficult but unique character!*^{5b}

Maybe there's also one district slightly similar to Praga. Wola is the district on the left bank of the river, it has also post-industrial sites as Prague, but there's still a great sense of abandon which can be felled. And this nature combined with old factories, presents a unique stillness.³ But I couldn't spend there much time, which I regret.

In contrast to these two districts, you have Żoliborz, Saska Kępa and Powiśle which are quite fashionable points these days. Especially in contrast to Praga they seem to be so tidy. But it doesn't mean they aren't special. For instance in Official's Żoliborz there's an extraordinary atmosphere⁶ and you feel like in a fairyland! The same for Powiśle.² *As trains rattle and rumble over the shadowy viaducts one thinks of London's east end. Yet London this is not.*² Saska Kępa is famous for its unique inter-war villas.¹

That would be all! I'm leaving tomorrow but you can see by the lecture of my postcard that I've got pretty interested by this city.

See you soon! M.





Warsaw, 25th June 2014

Dear Friend!

Finally, I decided to choose Warsaw for my one-year exchange. I'm sorry I didn't have time to speak with you before the vacations, but there was a lot of bureaucratic work to throw off before my departure! I heard that the university in Warsaw is good, but the city itself is a little bit "hard to digest", all in concrete. I came here several days ago and as promised, I'm sending you a postcard!

The photo you can see on the front cover is actually the place where I'll be leaving for the upcoming six months. It's my student residence, a very special one and I can't deny my astonishment when I came here the first time. I'm proud to say that I live in the most peculiar estate in the whole Warsaw.

^{16b} I must admit that living conditions aren't perfect and I'm a little bit worried for the winter time, but the unique atmosphere ^{16c} of this place recompenses all the doubts. There are many more of such lovely houses and I feel like we're creating small student village. You forget sometimes that it's actually in the city. You can take advantage of both, urban life and the nature.

Speaking about the nature, we were recently invited by one of my Polish friends to his garden. It's an allotment in the city... It's really unique and untypical ^{21a} to have a grill party when next to you there's an old man cutting grass on his parcel, after a middle-aged lady sunbathing right behind the fence. All of this with the view of the residential blocks in the background. I've seriously thought that I'm in some kind of grotesque comedy at first. *There you can see a real and sincere urban Eden. Old bathtubs standing in the garden plots, apparently used to store water for irrigation, and this view is quite absurd, but symbolic ^{21a} look like white ice. Additionally you have rhythm of seasons, because it's something totally different*

a winter walk on the plot, and then completely contrasting in the summer. ^{21a}

Along with the Polish cuisine I had to start doing some sport. A friend from the student residence convinced me that there's a very special bike path, *one of which runs unpaved through a forest along the Vistula River by the Zoo, National Stadium and Temat Rzeki club. It's one of the loveliest urban bike paths in Poland and probably in all of Europe.* ²⁸ It was definitely too far for me, so despite its beauty I think the next time I'll stay in the neighbourhood.

As I was coming back to my place by bus, I saw crowds entering a park. The Baths (that's the name of the park) has a unique character and history, ^{8a} it's really extraordinary!! ^{8b} Beautiful, quiet, *one could search in vain for a similar pearl in Europe.* ^{8c} In its closest proximity you have Ujazdowski Park, which faces a peculiar estate- the ordinary wooden Finnish Houses, but what makes it so special ^{4a} is the location; just in the city centre! It's really one of the most exotic and climatic places ^{4b} in Warsaw. *All together with the green surrounding of the escarpment it's an extraordinary place for a romantic walk.* ^{4a}

Finally the last magical place I've discovered till now is at my university library's roof! You climb up a little bit and than an unexpected impression of all this green area at the River bank "explodes" in front of you. In the end, the grey city is truly green, *this space is remarkable addition to Warsaw!* ^{12a}

I hope you enjoyed my "adventure diary" ;)

That's all for now!

Bye bye!!

M.





Warsaw, 21st of November 2009

Dear Filip,

I've finally seen by myself this magnificent^{4e} and at that the same time, monstrous creature which stands in the middle of Warsaw! You get out of the main railway station and it's the first thing you see which stands out not only by its size but also the remarkable appearance^{4d} and the contrast it produces to anything else, that surrounds it. *An architectural icon,*^{4f} *greatly recognizable, you can head into him and always find yourself in the center.*^{4d}

Here, they say it's a unique relict of communism,^{4a} but from what I've heard there're buildings in Moscow which resemble the Polish version. Or is it the right way back... In fact, it's a very rare example,^{4d} unalterable!^{4b} I'll explain you later when I come back. It'd take too much space for a postcard! But can you imagine that they actually thought of destroying it? Even several times since the fall of the communism. I think you need to be delicate when speaking to any Varsavian about this building, because you never know if you deal with its big fan or a true hater. For this reason I also find it as a strange architectural phenomenon,^{4c} because how can it be possible that for such iconic building there're so many critical voices? *The Palace lent a particular and unique identity of the city,*^{4d} it gives a new scale and since the fall of the communism, tries to co-create with other skyscrapers new image of the city, more Westernised. It's Warsaw's most important symbol^{4g} and there's no denial upon it!!

Now look at its scale on Google Maps, all together with the Parade Square on which it stands, make you feel so tiny. Except of the Palace there's almost nothing in this big space, well except of two things. Firstly, the cars which make this square one of the largest car parks in Europe.^{4d} Secondly, a covered market place called KDT (Kupieckie

Domy Towarowe-Merchant Department Stores). The citizens call it the ugly tin shed. Both elements make you feel like the country has just started to learn how to live in the capitalism...

For the first time I saw the city coming out from the central station, but for my departure I had to take the train from the Eastern Station. To my astonishment I saw a very unusual²² residential block. I had impression that it's the longest building²² ever built! It's like it was never ending. But I checked its length on the internet and *The Kijowska street building, often called the 'dachshund' or 'tapeworm', is 508 m long.* At that's still impressive for me. On the other hand I wonder how is it to live inside of such thing...

On Warsaw's example I think that a uniqueness of a city may not always be something evident to recognise. You need to look askance at it, especially in Warsaw's case.

Best,
H.N.

photo credit: <http://theionist.blogspot>. The Palace of Culture and Science





Dear M,

Coming to this city, I didn't expect to see the biggest marketplace^{14b} of a scale which haven't been seen in the Western Europe.^{14e} I think it's one of the last things you await on your visit to any of the European capitals!

The Bazaar's situated on the right riverbank on the former place of the communist 10th-Anniversary Stadium. Normally your tour in Warsaw starts at the Krakowskie Przedmieście Street or the Old City, both the most popular spots among the tourists. Very tidy, nothing in particular, just a nice place to hang out. And then when you ask someone: do you have something truly unique^{14a} and typically Warsaw^{14f}? Firstly, people hesitate a little bit, but then they answer you with a particular spark in their eyes: the Stadium and Prague district! You choose the first because it's closer, actually very close from where we were standing... So we took the tram and in 5 minutes, we were there.

Directly in the city you'll not cross many foreigners. If you do eventually it's going probably to be at the Stadium. Here, at the Jarmark Europa (The Bazaar Europe in English) from the very moment of your entrance you feel like it's a multinational melting pot. It's such a funny contrast between the "normal" space of Warsaw and the inside of this marketplace.

So now you understand that's an *ethnographic peculiarity*,^{14a} but what you don't know yet that at the same it's very important place from the cultural perspective. It's *the most cosmopolitan and democratic place in Warsaw. Everyone comes here, parents with their kids, artists, building workers, hipsters, Polish, Russian, Vietnamese*.^{14d} For this reason it's so specific!^{14f} Once, after a night spent in the city centre, we came here in the morning and... We had to stand in the queue with some students to get a pho soup! It became

something traditional here... Now I can understand that the Bazaar's somehow the border, which divides the city into two particles: the Western (left) and the Eastern (right side). All these without any planning become an informal centre, amazing!

I think this place started to be the synonym of Warsaw.^{14a} If you look at the history of this city, the Bazaar somehow perfectly matches the continuity of the urban traditions, even if it's something which wasn't planned to ever exist. In my opinion this quality of temporariness is so intense, more than in any of the public spaces in Warsaw, which along with its provinciality makes it special to any one who enters it, especially for the Westerners. What a pity it'll be soon demolished... With some additional time, it could have a potential to transform in the most interesting space in Warsaw.

Now I also understand the hesitation of the person I asked is there something particular in this city. Varsovians treat this place as a part of their day-to-day life, inseparably connected with the city. It's harder for them to see its uniqueness...

Come here and see this singular phenomenon,^{14a} until it's too late!

Many hugs,
D.D.





WARSZAWA CENTRALNA

Warsaw, 15th April 2013

Hey grandma!

You wanted me to describe you in detail my trip to Warsaw. As you're not eager to speak with my on Skype I've decided to sent you this postcard, which I think it's very nice btw.

We started with the most recognizable touristic venue⁵ of the city, the Warsaw Rising Museum. I must say w the exhibition made a huge impression on us. Than our guide said that since now we know a little bit the city's recent history, it's good to see two examples of things among which: one is a rare^{7b} example of a building which survived the war, and other, which is actually a compilation of many buildings, had been been heroically reconstructed after the 1944. I'm speaking about the beautiful and elegant Hotel Bristol and the Old Town. From what we've learned this last place is very symbolic^{9a} for the city as only a small part of the pre-war Warsaw was given a second life and rebuild. From this place we could see a new tour rising, but it's still lower than the Palace of Culture. You know, this huge building in the middle of the city. On the other hand, when our guide saw all these faces rising up to see the new skyscraper, he said that it's a unique project,^{1a} designed by a very famous American architect, who by his Polish origins, knows *how to reflect Warsaw's soul and light*.^{1b} Well...

Since we were not far from the city centre, the guide introduced us to one of the two gems of the modernist architecture. It's good to know that despite the hard times of the communism leadership, there were some very important realisations made! At first, we went to the Main Central Station. I remember an article in the Neue Zürcher Zeitung. I must say I agree with its author that this building can be truly remarkable,^{6a} but needs just some refurbishment. Apparently, before the Euro 2010, when a general work had been done to change its condition, the station was the most trashy place in Europe!

^{6c}Next to a solarium you could buy a meat; the toilets where

a meeting point of different people and just around the corner you could buy a coffee... Than we went to Warszawa-Powisle, a former railway station, which is now a very popular bar. Not so long time ago, it was also neglected but today it's proud the *gem of Warsaw's modern style*.³⁰ At the place, we took a small break and the guide showed us the photos of a non-existent building, also from the same period. It made a big impression on me. Even though it was a landmark building¹¹ for the citizens, the decision was taken to demolish it. Now you have another shopping mall.

The last point of our trip, was the trace of "the buildings-you-would-never-found-interesting-if-I-didn't-show-them-to-you" - as our guide stated. So we went to the former Jewish district to Próżna Street. I think it's very special place, one of its kind. A *sad symbol of what remains of Jewish Warsaw*.²⁴ Because of its historical value it can't be demolished. Uff! Just recently two tenements houses had been restored but the other side looks really creepy without the plasters on the facade and windows. Than the guide showed us phenomenal²⁵ wild thickets in the city centre such as Skra sport complex. We went also to Praga district, on the right side of the river, where we visited Kamionek district which is very specific and very interesting,^{19a} old Koneser factory with the oustanding cultural institutions^{2b} and....Praga's courtyards with its *incredible composition of colours and textures*.^{13a} In the end we went to the Targowek Fabryczny - a very bizarre but interesting space with unique wooden buildings.¹⁸

Well, that's it! I hope you recognise some of the places. I know it's been thirty years for you since you been here, but who know?

With kisses, your granddaughter

issue: unique buildings. category: S,M / I,III,IV,X,XI,XIII,XIV

photo credit: Radek Kolkowski: Eastern Elevation of the Central-Warsaw Station and a part of the Emili Plater Str.





Greetings from Warsaw!

I decided to take a break for a weekend from our city and go somewhere else for a small trip! Thomas' coming from London along with his wife so I need to do something special shopping for them. Warsaw seemed to be a perfect solution!

As usual I went to the Banacha Bazaar, you know this famous marketplace in the Stara Ochota district. It's really an exceptional place ²⁶ for me. It brings some many people together: *flowers sold 24/7, the Vietnamese place across from the bazaar, several stalls with used cloths, the really nice lady selling books, the Christmas tree seller in the winter, the few older men playing checkers together and selling rubbish, the clockmaker who complains about junk watches and repairs them with great sadness.* ²⁶ You see, I'm not from here, but I feel this place is partially mine also. So I bought some originals presents for my brother and his wife: a watch for Christine and a very rare example of Mickiewicz for Thomas. They'll be very glad, for sure! A part from it you can buy all the things for a dinner and of very good quality.

As I got hungry from watching all this delicious-looking food, I decided to search for some restaurant. I knew one very good spot, but I had to go back to the city centre. On my way to finally loose my hunger, I passed by Grzybowski Square. I love this unusual place! ²³ Just like in place, which I've just mentioned to you, you find a similar feeling of this special social mix. Here on the other side, you have *old ladies walking their little dogs, local tamps, Catholics going to the large All Saints' Church, Jews sightseeing the former ghetto area, the Nozyk Synagougue and the nearby Prozna Street, residents of the behind The Iron Gate residential estate which looks like a forest of blocks of flats and businessmen*

going in and out of the nearby Deutsche Bank building. ²³ So I'd decided to spend there some time on the bench. After all the day was really beautiful, even for wintertime.

I found my restaurant finally! Well, it's not actually a typical place where you can eat. In Warsaw you can have a very cheap but traditional meal at the milk bar. I know that in other cities they have them to, but it started in Warsaw and I think that the milk bars here have a special atmosphere they *offer you truly old school dishes, which have practically vanished from Western menus.* ²⁹ At the time I was there, there was even a BBC's journalist asking me questions about this phenomenon ²⁹ for his documentary. For me it's our secret "weapon" ;)

That's it; I'm taking train back home. We'll talk probably when I come back but I think it's a nice thing to receive a postcard from someone.

bye bye
M.

PS: You asked me recently if I know some spots in Warsaw to hang out in the evening. I recommend you the Pavilions in the city centre. They're completely original and unique as compared to other bars around the city! ²⁷





Greetings from Warsaw!

It's been some time so I've decided to offer you this "beautiful" postcard instead of writing a text message. Consider this as my apologies!

If you turn it, this was my first view of the city. In my opinion it represents in a best way the Warsaw contrast,²⁹ *between the new and the old, glass and brick, the large and small.*²⁹ This aesthetic chaos stands abreast with the spatial... It's also a perceptual archetype of Warsaw. I was speaking to somebody of the city, I've showed this photo and the person said: oh yeah, it's Warsaw, it's very chaotic you know. It's like they have a matrix with this name embossed in their minds!

It can't be denied that the communism and even the more distant past has led both to this situation, but apart from these "aesthetic of obstacles", I must admit that living in this city is not as simple as I thought it would be. Typical for Warsaw²² is this lack of *an urban mix of lifestyles and cultures*. It really *can hardly be seen*. Plus, people here are in such a constant rush. Do you remember the Old Town of Warsaw? They say that the reconstruction after the war was furiously fast and out of sudden buildings were standing anew. They say it's a special Warsaw tempo.²⁰

I wrote "I've heard" because I speak already the language, maybe not fluently but enough to communicate and to understand a very peculiar situation! I was walking through the Praga district, which is on the right banks of the river, to make an interview with one artist. I was evidently lost and an old man who was sitting on a chair in front of his workshop, looked at me with a pity and tried to ask where am I heading to. As he started speaking, I've realised that the city has a *particular dialect*.²⁸

Apart from this I must say I love this mix they make in here, this special central capital fussion.¹⁷ I can even say it's another stylistic form of the city next to the chaos. You eat for instance Italian pasta, sun-dried tomatoes with Zywiec beer, and rucola with ciabatta, chewed with teeth. And all this you can experience at one of the characteristic features of Warsaw¹² the wild Vistula surrounded (or separately) by the extensive the green areas. Warsaw such an amazing changeability as a city!

see you soon!

b.



photo credit: David Crowley, Warsaw Trade Centre.





Dear boys,

You may think that mommy made some shopping in Warsaw and you won't be far from the truth! I wasn't planning to buy anything here, but as I was strolling down the street I saw these stalls. Here you can buy *not only strawberries during summer, but medicines, plastic bags, socks, kettles. H&M and Esprit on your left, and stall with shoe laces on your right. The more I think about it... it is not what's on these stalls but who sells stuff - very interesting kind of people.* ⁸ The temptation was big so I bought some things which...you'll be both wearing for wintertime! *That's very 'Warsaw' like and will unfortunately disappear.* ⁸ Too bad because I feel that it's ironically our cultural heritage and it's claimed to be a characteristic feature of 'authentic' Warsaw life before and during the socialism. ²⁴ Oooh, and I still remember the times when *the goods available at 'Ciuchy' were a distinct and unmistakable feature of Warsaw life.* ²⁶

The same situation is with Warsaw neon, ^{27b} that you used to love that much when you were kids! I couldn't find the one you described me that was supposed to illuminate the Constitution Square. Probably it was taken down. But I didn't forget this phenomenon ^{27a,b} when it was a useful landmark. ^{27a} I must say I preferred this old type of adverts. They didn't try to seduce you like it's today in the times of the "Alice in Wonderland" *world of advertising in the West* with their cities. It was *denoting a commodity or service rather than* the above. I think that's the reason for which the communist Party let them ever exist... What a pity that Warsaw loses a *part of its local iconosphere*, ^{27c} truly unique.

Since the last time I was in the city, many years ago, I don't remember that the city had that many guarded

residential estates. I can presume that it made living in Warsaw so different from other cities. ¹¹ *Private security guards, high walls, video surveillance and fences,* ¹¹ all became typical elements of Warsaw. Isn't it just sad...

I was about to take the train back home from the Main Central Station, but I saw something, which shocked me deeply. I promise you, this'll be my last observation! I totally forgot from the last trip to the Capital that *combining the functions of "urinal" and "dustbin" is a pervasive habit in Warsaw...* ⁹ *Weird as it seems*, but I feel like the presence of the garbage confirms to the citizens that they feel like home!

I prefer our city where we don't have such "*companions of ours*". ⁹ At least I have some clothes for you!

See you soon!

Your mother





Dear Friend,

I think I've just found new inspiration for your stories! I met my friends from Warsaw last Thursday and they told me some magnificent legends about their city. I'll try to briefly present them to you. You can either choose something for your work or just tell the kids. Well, there're just few, which may be boring for them!

I think that there is little of such places like Warsaw which would be as myth-making. The first Warsaw legend to be told is definitely the one Warsa and Sawa, the founding myth of the city. It has few versions but I'll present to you just one. Wars was a fisherman, Sawa was suppose to be a mermaid captured by an evil merchant to whom she became a slave. One night when the mermaid was crying, Wars came to rescue her. Ever since she promised the citizens of Warsaw to help them in need. The name of the city comes from the combination their names (WarszSawa). ^{4a,e}

Already in the in the XVIIIth century Warsaw legends spoke obsessively about underground labyrinths. One of creatures which lived there was basilisk, *terrifying creature, described as a rooster, snake or turkey, with a tail snake and frog eyes.* ^{4g} Another main character of the Warsaw myths, the Golden Duck, was supposed to live in the basements of the Ostrogski Palace guarding the treasure which could be shared with its founder only under certain conditions. Another legend considering this place has to do with an existence of a underground city from where no-one could ever come back. Can you believe that even Chopin's mother used to tell him this story?? ^{4a}

That'll be all for the kids, now something interesting for the older ones! We wondered how the people from Warsaw

were so motivated to rebuilt their city. Apparently what underlie the reconstruction of the city was a motivating myth of the last Polish king who ironically *has often been represented as vain and ultimately lacking in courage, the image of an elegant and enlightened Warsaw over which he ruled at the very moment Poland's enemies were plotting its effacement has remained a potent* ^{4d} catalyst for people to rebuild their city.

Can you also believe that Warsaw had its big gangs in the 20s and 30s, *a world of tight-knit communities and colourful scoundrels,* ^{4d} just like from Martin Scorsese film Gangs of New York. Poles could do Gangs of Warsaw, but there was a famous series in the 80s, which spoke about it. Than you have a myth related to one of the Warsaw's skyscrapers, hotel Marriot, become *a legend equal to the Palace of Culture. In the 1990s it served as the informal headquarter for the first American businessmen coming to Poland, who - as the hotel denizens- soon earned the name Marriot Boys.* One of the journalist documenting this phenomenon wrote: *"Their presence turned the hotel into a small island of American luxury (...).*" ^{4b} Then you have the *oppositions between the Stadium-Bazaar and Krakowskie Przedmiescie street Str., and between the provincial Praga on the right bank of the Vistula River and the historical centre of Warsaw on the left bank.* ^{4c} This division is very often mythologised as the *virtual boundary between the West and East.* Uff, and finally you have the latest thing. Probably you heard something about a legendary ephemeral installations ^{4h} in Warsaw? They don't exist anymore, you can still see them on archival footage of Google Street View!

That's all! Say hello from me to your kids. M.

THE
UNIQUE
CITY OF
WARSAW

*In search of peculiarities in the post-socialist capital of Poland,
as future conditions for the city's development.*

Magdalena Nowak, PDM 2014/ 2015
prof. Enoncé : Jacques Lévy

How people think of a place is less tangible, but more important than just about anything else.”

Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*

Cities are unique like minds.

Andrzej Leder, *Psychoanalysis of urban space*

FOREWORD

In the book *"Invisible Cities"* written in 1972 by Italo Calvino, the writer argues that *cities must be conjured from memory and desire, past and present, real and unreal.* ¹ Following the thought of the author we can assume that at least one of these features makes them indistinguishable from one another. Memory, which is characterised by the fact of belonging to one specific place, creates a symbolic relation that can significantly influence the life of its inhabitants as well as the architecture.

In the mid-1980s, just short after the publication of the aforementioned book, the term globalisation has already been increasingly in use. This cultural and economic phenomenon *may be accompanied by a decrease in the uniqueness of once-isolated communities* ² and it is often perceived as a process, which leads to their unification. Pursuing the thought of Italo Calvino, cities should be able to resist any kind of tendency to their unification. For this and following reasons, the process of globalisation will be not considered in this work, as it does not influence the notion of uniqueness.

When considering a travel destination most of people have certain expectations to experience something different from their daily life. Tourism is about visiting something unique. If we take a glimpse at the Google Image and then consequently enter some randomly chosen names of the European capital cities, on a first glance every city feels to be different. It is represented by different landmarks, in a slightly different urban context, but again, does it make them unlike? *The issue of an urban landscape, which gradually lost of its materiality and has been downsized to the visual representation of a city* ³ characterises our times and the way we judge the cities. On the examples of Paris or Madrid we can ask ourselves a question what makes these cities so unique thus so popular to the tourists? Is it their image, their inner urban pattern or the citizens with their punctual memory of space that all together or all separately, create this unparalleled anywhere else sense of place?

The post-Soviet states marked by the political regime had undergone a process of a partial homogenisation of their physical and abstract space. After the fall of the communism and at the dusk of the capitalist-oriented market, these countries had to redefine their social hierarchy and adapt to new cultural expectations. Both factors led to a change in the cities' fabric. In the case of the previously isolated spaces ² of post-Soviet cities, the aforementioned threat of lost of uniqueness seems appropriately interesting.

1. www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/culture/la-et-cm-invisible-cities-review-20131022,0,1096665.story#axzz2j1rdABKv

2. www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Globalization#Cultures

3. Levente Polyak. *Exchange on a street*. Autoportret 1(36) 2012

Poland is between the fast developing and most populous countries of the ex-Soviet block. Its capital city became one of the new magnets for the European economy. Despite this fact, the footprint left by the previous system has led to a situation in which Warsaw *continues to be viewed as grey and homogenous by commentators from the USA and Western Europe.* Moreover the city *has a high level of involvement of international capital in urban development, which seems to be excessive despite the effort to maintain a balance.*

⁴ This significant interference in the city, changes furthermore the city's already complicated position. *But in certain aspects of society, politics and economics a partial resistance to internationalisation can be observed* ⁴ which enables to preserve its characteristics.

The issue of Warsaw's specific features is naturally disputable as well as the previous statements about the city's negative image, which are both *a matter of degree and perspective.* ⁵ Moreover, as a post-socialist city it is often being compared to Berlin thus undermining its unique peculiarity. On the other hand, the city starts slowly to understand that what was once its defect, for which it was often criticised by the foreign public, can now become its advantage. For this reason and many others to be presented in this work, Warsaw is to be considered unique. There are very strong voices from different cultural and social backgrounds claiming that the city is as scarce as hen's teeth or like a black swan in comparison to other European capitals.

4. Tuna Taşan-Kok. *Budapest, Istanbul, and Warsaw: Institutional and Spatial Change.* Eburan 2004 p.38.

5. David Crowley, *Warsaw*, Reaktion Books Ltd, London 2003 pp.24,185

METHODOLOGY

In order to investigate the notion of Warsaw's uniqueness, the word unique, along with its synonyms, demands to be introduced and their meanings explained.

With the use of the first step, the word unique and its synonyms will be looked for in a conducted research of an unlimited resource: surveys, reviews, blogs, guides, books, memoirs, films and songs or from a simple research on the Google page. The decision to open the analysis not only to scientific mediums was taken to present the issue as objectively as it is possible. Random people may sometimes better than scientists grasp specific processes, which demand active participation in urban life. By such choice of methodology, it is worth highlighting that a degree of subjectivity of this research needs to be considered. The authors may come from Warsaw, different Polish cities but the survey is also opened for foreigners. The range of the comparison is limited to Europe and in some cases precisely to the Western Europe, Central Europe, Poland but also confronting differences between districts and urban elements of Warsaw. The topic of Warsaw uniqueness is presented from different points of views: sociological, urban, architectural, from behavioural studies, sentimental (tourists included), anthropological, economic etc. The profession or position of each author (categories/sources) will be mentioned in order to be finally compared and sum up in the conclusion. The research is taken in three languages: Polish, English and French and given texts are being divided into four categories/topics: social, space, verb and memory, and the specific issues are being given names.

The fourth part of the work puts together two approaches by a means of two different representation's forms. Firstly, the format of a postcard introduces the biggest degree of subjectivity to which the word unique is often used. It presents an emotional approach of imaginative visitors or inhabitants of the city, who sometimes may perceive some peculiarities of Warsaw from a different point of view. On the other side, by this means different superstitions concerning the city are being presented as well. Secondly, additionally to the postcards, the scientific research is also disclosed, which delves more into the problematic mentioned in the postcards. Finally, to terminate the topic of Warsaw's uniqueness the elements that are claimed to by particularly Varsovian will be introduced. These are the features, which pose in their names the adjective 'Warsaw'. They will be divided in five categories: architectural, urban, characteristics, specific elements and urban stories.

The reason for the presentation of Berlin and Warsaw's examples of critical reconstruction, temporariness in public space, homeowner associations are related to an overall conclusion which emerged during the work and will be further explained in the final chapter. The aim of the conclusion is to give the frame for the future project in the up-coming semester. Also by confirming Warsaw's uniqueness, the goal of the work is to answer the question whether the city should be treated differently when it comes to architectural propositions?

CONTENTS

1. Meaning of uniqueness and its synonyms.
2. Postcards (separately attached)
3. In search of Warsaw' Uniqueness.
4. Typically Warsaw
5. Berlin & Warsaw: examples of critical reconstruction, temporariness in public space, homeowner associations.
6. Conclusion

MEANING OF UNIQUENESS

WARSAW IS

(choose optionally)

FR

bizarre
qui est seule
seule de son espèce
qui existe en un seul
exemplaire
qui est la même pour
plusieurs
personnes ou choses
qui se distingue des autres
par son originalité et/ou ses
qualités
qui étonne par son caractère
unique
singulière
exceptionnelle
particulière
ne concerne qu'un seul individu
isolée
à nul autre pareille
sans exemple
tordue
trouble
inquietante
fou
extravagante
fantastique
parfaite
fantasmagorique
incompréhensible
excentrique

EN

onliest
special in some way
being the only one existing of
its type
unusual
unique to
belonging or connected to one
particularly person, place or
thing
different
uncommon
exclusive
particular
rare
individual
unexampled
single
solitary
of that one kind
unique
one and only
solo
lone
alone
separate
incomparable
matchless
solely
peerless
unequaled
unrivalled
unparalleled
unsurpassed
distinguishing
eccentric
impossible
remarkable
symbolic
peculiar
irregular
phenomenon

PL

niebywała
unikalna
incydentalna
niepowtarzalna
okazjonalna
okolicznościowa
rzadka
święteczna
jednostkowa
jedyna
unikatowa
nadzwyczajna
niespospolita
niezwykła
nietuzinkowa
znakomita
wybitna
niesamowita
niespotykana
epizodyczna
sporadyczna
loteryjna
wyjątkowa
rzadko spotykana
szczególna
fenomenalna

The word unique means *being the only existing one of its type or, more generally, unusual, or special in some way* (Cambridge Dictionaries Online). Some of these connotations despite the fact of describing the same word differ in meaning. The word and its synonyms clearly denotes positive and negative connections, which can be distinguished with the word unique.

POSTCARDS
(separately)

CATEGORIES

SOURCES:

- I. Architect
- II. Sociologist
- III. Artist
- IV. Journalist
- V. Citizen of Warsaw
- VI. Urban activist
- VII. Anthropologist
- VIII. Philosopher
- IX. Blogger
- X. Urban planner
- XI. Curator
- XII. Warsaw's municipalities
- XIII. Other
- XIV. Historian of art
- XIV. Geographer

CATEGORIES

TOPICS:

SO -Social

S - Space

V - Verb

M - Memory

The following issues may belong to more than one topic.

SO

- gated communities (S,V)
- the river (S,V)
- civic cafés (S,V)
- lifestyles
- urban voids (S,M)
- housing (V)
- urban dynamics & structure (S)
- blocks (S)
- atmosphere (S)
- warsaw uprising (M,S)
- social changes
- borderland (S)
- districts (S)
- unique buildings (S,M)

M

- urban voids (S,SO)
- warsaw uprising (S,SO)
- underground city (S)
- like phoenix from the ashes (S)
- city and memory (S)
- ruins (S)
- fortress (S)
- unique buildings (SO,S)

V

- gated communities (S,SO)
- the river (S,SO)
- civic cafés (S,SO)
- housing (SO)
- the river (S,SO)
- gated communities (S,SO)
- the river (S,SO)
- expectations

S

- the river (SO,V)
- gated communities (SO,V)
- civic cafés (SO,V)
- urban voids (SO,M)
- urban dynamics & structure (SO)
- blocks (S)
- the ugliest city
- atmosphere (SO)
- green space (S)
- warsaw uprising (M,SO)
- underground city (M)
- like phoenix from the ashes (M)
- city and memory (M)
- ruins (M)
- borderland (SO)
- skyline
- wild africa in europe
- laboratory
- fortress (M)
- unknown
- districts (SO)
- unique buildings (SO,M)

IN SEARCH OF WARSAW'S UNIQUENESS

“An awareness of the elements that make up a city has a huge influence of how the city is understood, and consequently on decisions about changes to the city and the functioning of urban space in the future.”

Małgorzata Kuciewicz, *Diagram City*

The Glory of the City, ed. Bogna Swiatkowska, Fundacja Bec Zmiana, Warsaw 2012

WARSAW GATED COMMUNITIES

The case of the Polish capital represents something different in the issue of this global phenomenon.

Primary it stands out by its massive scale ¹ but also the exceptional ⁶ number of such estates. In 2005 the research led by a German student Henrik Werth resulted in creation of a general map which pointed out all such isolated structures in the Capital. That enabled deeper understanding of the specific character of Warsaw situation on a European scale ^{1,3,5}. Why does this city is so special apart from the aforementioned reasons? Well, at first it is worth to explain what stands under the notion of a gated community: *it is defined as walled housing estate with limited public access and internal regulations.*¹ (Atkinson and Blandy, 2006) The Varsavian example is much more complex in terms of space, social issues and localisation in the city. Firstly, *the language of prestige is enhanced by terms suggesting privacy, exclusiveness and uniqueness.* Its most distinctive feature is that living inside such urban structure is suppose to reveal positive feelings, create a good atmosphere, and give a sense of protection ¹. In Warsaw case, the gated communities are perceived as the only “islands of beauty” but also “islands of luxury”¹, standing firmly with their aesthetic image or even referring to traditional values, as in opposition to the chaotic urban tissue.⁵ The spatial disorder and the enclosed territory of the gated community becomes a value of itself. ⁵ This issue was also resonated in the exhibition which took place in May 2006 “Warsaw- the Capital of the Third World”, which seems a remarkable title in this context. The spectacular example of Marina Mokotów, which is also the most extreme⁸ example, is sometimes being referred to as the “city within a city” ⁵ which is visible in the official discourse and promoting advertisements. This can be assigned to heterotopia concept by Michael Foucault. In this situation gated communities are the spaces of otherness, (...) *that are simultaneously physical and mental.* ¹⁰ They form *another real space, which is meticulous and well-arranged as our space is disordered.* ¹ The notion of heterotopia and its equal mental impact introduces us to the second argument for considering this phenomenon on a local scale of Warsaw city: they are the most essential and evident sign of post-socialist urban and social structure.¹ The emerging middle class is often accused of being partially to blame for the unprecedented development of the gated communities. This represents a new economic situation in which people can simply afford living in these *reconstructed or refurbished places* ². The advertisements of gated communities sell a false image of the prestigious places only for “chosen ones”, but in fact *they are populated by many different people with different income levels, needs, expectations and personal traits.*⁷ So what does Varsovians search for apart from the material things? Since 1989 the switch of the political system and the entry to the capitalist economy had led to dynamic transformations of the urban and social structure of Warsaw and the gated communities are the radical examples of this movements. This was the reason for the *on-going negotiation*

of class identity⁶ with the aforementioned processes in the background. It seems that such urban structure was suppose to highlight the differentiation of the society, contrast between poverty and wealth⁵, and the lack of the expected changes from now self-aware society. The third aspect which is very special in the case of Warsaw is the location of the gated communities: in the city centre - like Marina Mokotów, as well as in the suburban space. This phenomenon altered both landscapes in a radical way.¹ We need to look in detail not only as a result of spatial disorder, but also a feature that makes the image of the city which results also in the aforementioned exhibition in 2006 which also attracted the attention of the foreign public by presenting numerous of different examples of the gated communities. For the Western observer, that this is very peculiar urban habitut which astonishes *more than the city's gaping open spaces and its alleged barbarity*.² This process of expanding presence of gated enclaves has been identified by a *few professional interpretive communities (...)* as a phenomenon of ghettoization of Polish urbanism.² (Jałowiecki and Łukowski, Gettoizacja polskiej przestrzeni miejskiej, 2007). *The inhabitants of Warsaw achieve civic order and security at a cost of spatial exclusion and social isolation*.² Furthermore, the comparison of gated communities to ghetto seems to be a voice of minority in the discourse over this structures as *a kind of spatial disease*.^{1,2} The phenomenon of gated communities has developed along with weak parallel development of public spaces in newly built estates. Often such entities poses no offer for its inhabitants of a way of spending time within the frame of the local community. It may be for this reason that recently there has been spotted a unique phenomenon of the growing attractiveness of public spaces in the central area.⁴ Also this important issue is highly connected to the attitude of the municipalities to the urban planning. In fact it is their lack of commitment¹ which is very characteristic for Warsaw itself, as *discourse protagonists they are practically invisible*.¹ On the other hand the investors who have in their offer gated communities and plan other such investments in the future, seems to have no issues in developing the city's space. In this way *the wider neo-liberal context is more palpable and thus criticized in the case of the capital city than in any other metropolitan area in Poland*.¹ What speaks more about this phenomenon and the issue of isolation, thus a lack of proper urban regulations, is that such "cities within cities" create they own urban infrastructure.⁵ Especially the topic of the guarding industry which developed due to massive gated communities seems very interesting. One of the most striking example of this dast developments is the fact that in Warsaw there are 25 000 bodyguards⁵ (basis on (<http://www.10ozl.org>, accessed March 14, 2009) who work not only in the city's offices and shops, but also gated communities. *This is two and half times more than the number of policeman in the city*.⁵ This dynamic branch could grow due to the absence of such possibility from the state institutions. The first gated community was built in Warsaw in the late 1990s as a estate of single-family houses in the suburbs' of the Capital which were imported from the United States.

Despite this fact and the problematic of the gated communities issue there is also a voice showing that this phenomenon is actually nothing new and culturally strange ¹ in Warsaw. An article written in 1997 by Andrzej Osęka, probably at the time of the construction of the aforementioned estate, reveals that this idea on the Varsavian ground is an return to the pre-war Warsaw tenement house. ¹ At these times it was a concept of home-castle, and *the entire architectural complexes are being enclosed and guarded like fortresses. Now, however, high technology prevails: electronics, cameras and computers are replacing humans.*” ¹ (Osęka 1997) Still, it is essential to understand the role of the gated communities in forming the city of Warsaw. As de Certeau (1984) pointed out: *“they work both as synecdoche and asyndeton of the urban and social changes.”* ¹ (also M.de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*

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THE RIVER

The Vistule with its wild and untamed river bank is a sensation on the European level.^{3,7,8} It is very rare to have a natural landscape in the centre of a capital. Many cities undergo a process of re-naturalization and spent a significant amount of their budget in order to make their rivers appear wild and untouched by human hand. New York, London or Tokyo are among many examples where the development which was driven by *commercial property prices*³ that came along with an underinvestment of public spaces, are trying now to look more eco-friendly. Once even, an American visitor was discussing the Warsaw river with the city's mayor, Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz. He directly asked for the cost of the investment which the city had to pay in order to have such a magnificent landscaping. "Must have cost an arm and a leg"³ - he stated. The reason for which cities grant to organic form of their rivers is the conviction that the balance between the urban and natural is essential for the creation of the high standard of living. It is also a condition for the *sustainable development and the respect for the natural environment*.⁴ In Warsaw case the original ecosystem is placed on the right side of Vistula and the urban waterfront is on the opposite side- *in most cities these environments never come together*.⁶ The left bank of the river had been recently incorporated into the city as *a unique and popular party spot*.¹ Still, it seems that the city turned its back on the river as there are almost none new investments in buildings in its neighborhood, with the exception of the Copernicus Science Centre.⁵

For this fact it is suprising to acknowledge that the city's identity was always strongly related to the urban structure and typical architecture, but certainly to the river as well, long before it became a popular meeting point. Vistula was also a topic of the vedutes by Canaletto in which the painter created scenic landscapes of the river and the city which is being reflected on its surface. *From the very beginning the city skyline became an important feature of the river valley landscape and, conversely, the close view of the river valley from the city was an intrinsic part of its townscape*.²

This unique situation is not a result of a consequently established plan to preserve the natural environment. The neglecton of the river, which maintained its untouched and wild phenomenon⁴, has its long history. It is hard to imagine that in the times before the Second World War, regulation plans existed which were suppose to enteriely re-shape the river banks. The city of Warsaw was to resemble more of the Western European capitals such as Paris or London. Fortunate for the city, the plannes had never been executed and today Warsaw can highlight this dual phenomenon.

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CIVIC CAFES

In the second decade from the fall of the communism, a new type of citizenship had emerged in the capital of Poland. Warsaw-specific ¹ phenomenon of the so-called “civic cafés” is based on the loyalty and attachment of the inhabitants of a certain neighborhood and city.¹ This unique urban feature consists of both: *historical continuity and change*. Before the Second World War and even during the partitions of Poland, cafés were the particular type of gathering place ¹ for intelligentsia to meet and to discuss politics, literature and common national issues. During the communism these places became a unique enclaves in public space within a system which was suspicious of the intelligentsia from the start. The non-café resembling more of a bar were open especially for the middle and working classes had slightly different character in which passing more time than just a simple consumption was already considered as conspiratorial behavior.

Today this particular citizenship became *symbolically very powerful* ¹ along with new urban activism and movements, which also established its strong position in the dialogue with the municipality. Its significance was noticed when the City Hall took it under the consideration while launching unusual competitions for spaces to lease which it was the owner. For example in 2009 only cafés with a cultural profile could be chosen as new tenants for two given localisations in the city of Warsaw with a preferential rents. This is how the famous Nowy Wspaniały Świat and Ogrody began their existence.

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LIFESTYLES

The post-socialist period can be characterised by the emergence of a particular lifestyles which have a very tangible geographical dimension,¹ precisely just in Warsaw case. Firstly, the rising of gated communities had underlined the changes which happened in urban structure of the city. The class-based society, which despite of the formal image of the previous political system, always existed even in the communism era, now had became a society which is based on different lifestyles and is visibly divided according to this. As some researchers conclude, this significant sociocultural phenomenon¹ produced by the gated communities led to a creation of specific milieu.¹ These places are often called “island of luxury” or “marble cages” which is to highlight their spatial isolation as well as alienation of their residents from the outside society.

Secondly, there exists an equivalent of an English term “champagne socialist” which is Warszafka. This diminutive term is used today in a derogatory sense in order to *criticize Polish elites. It encapsulates the idea of detachment, cosmopolitanism and lifestyle revolving around consumption which remains thoroughly local, or even parochial, at the same time.*¹ It also needs to be understood in a terms of a shift from placial to spatial phenomenon.¹ In this frames this unique Warsaw condition does not regard the city itself but the relation it has with others.

There is yet another unusual phenomenon in Warsaw.² It is worth mentioning that the sphere of bars and supper clubs is very particular in this city. Starting from an appropriation of the post-communist party buildings into a meeting place, and what comes with this a shift from a symbol of communism to a true signification of the capitalism.² The Warsaw Party Headquarters were built in 1951 according to the plans by Wacław Kłyszewski, Jerzy Mokrzyński and Eugeniusz Wierzbicki. Since 1991-2000 the building was occupied by the Warsaw Stock Exchange. Nowadays, there *banks and other financial institutions*² but additionally a new cultural program has been incorporated. Many informal meetings takes there place, as well as events and happenings. In general Warsaw has the biggest amount of the supper clubs in comparison to other European cities. There are round 500 of these for a circa 1 700 000 inhabitants of Warsaw. But these spaces are normally empty as people do not have money to achieve spending there time regularly. Finally even theatres try to attract new audience by exposing their plays in the clubs, and the clubs come also temporary to install their activity in the theatres' space.

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URBAN VOIDS

Warsaw is recognized as a peculiar example concerning its spatial organisation. Significant war destruction which reached 86% of total building mass for the left bank of the city and the introduction of the communism regime, both led to a creation of a rather special case in urban development - spatial voids.

Since 1945 *the ownership of all land within the city boundaries passed to the control of the municipal authorities.* ⁴ This was followed in 1949 by a law which 'communalized' or took under state control all existing housing. ⁴ This situation happened uniquely in Poland ⁴ and the most significant traces of these decision are visible in the capital city till today. The problem of property claims puts into question the ideology of "shock therapy" *as a simple switch from the socialism to capitalism.* ³ The new political system was not enough effective to influence on and change the old socialist traditions. This quasi-objective phenomenon was simultaneously *being imposed and renegotiated in a non-transparent way. (...) The spatial concentration of privatization and re-privatization issues in Warsaw gives to these problematic a special, urban twist.* ³ One of the most significant and most spectacular examples ³ of such situation is the Parade Square in the city centre. It is a place where The Palace of Culture and Science is situated. It was built in 1952 and since than no other building is standing on the parcel of 24 ha. The city could earn enormous amount of money - 600 mln pln ⁷, but the claims of dozens of property owners disable or significantly delay any new investment. It also shows

The second reason for the omnipresent existence of voids is a unique feature ¹ of Warsaw structure which is a star-shape of open spaces that operates on whole scale of the city. The decision to follow the pre-war plans in the communism era had a goal to offer the city new and hygienic space as well as low density to assure better living conditions., which at these times were catastrophic.

There are also positive voices which find the existence of voids as a manifestation of specific dynamics and their very specific charm ⁵ which create a characteristic local folklore.

Finally the symbolic emptiness ² of the post-war Warsaw opens a new field of *intellectual exploration and reflection* ² in which void - a memory - and it its 'management' does not limit itself to simple act of its removal and filling it with a suitably programmed new memory. The question stays open of how to combine both features. This issue has yet been solved along with the property claims till this day.

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HOUSING

A very specific feature of Warsaw ¹ is the housing shortage. After the Second World War and at the dusk of the socialism in Poland, new housing had to be built immediately as the population of the capital city was increasing without having any living conditions being provided. Throughout many years since the end of the war, Warsaw was constantly being filled with prefabricated structures of block settlements (*Wielka płyta* in Polish). These dwellings were highly criticized for lacking privacy of living *where the sounds and smells of neighbours seemed to seep through the plaster*. ² In contradiction to this situation as well as to the system and its omnipresent surveillance, the minority of people, especially connected somehow with culture, were trying to make their places more public. This is how one of the earliest examples of this phenomenon was created - Tarczyński Street Theatre, organized in 1955 in Warsaw apartment of a famous Polish poet Miron Białoszewski. ²

Despite the negative side of the block housing, an amazing and appreciable effort was taken but the demand for new flats remained unmet. Today, the population of Warsaw is rising slightly and the issue stays the same. The reason for such situation is the *decrease of the average household size*. ¹ The construction activity with 6,1 new dwellings per 1000 inhabitants (source: GUS - Polish Central Statistical Office- 2006) significantly exceeds this amount in any other large Polish city. ¹ This fact does not change Warsaw situation on the European scale - it remains the most poorly housed capital city. ² There is an estimated housing shortage of 40 000 flats in the capital which limits the mobility of workforce and *inhibits diversity in household structures*. ²

Furthermore, the administrative and political local structures are still under transformations which leads to a strong position of private actors. A special kind of governance was addressed to this sector, as public actors were still weak. Such *instability causes a certain form of housing market and urban regime constellation which differs from Western European cities*. ¹ For this reason, the result of the aforementioned governance creates a very special situation in Warsaw where a *heterogeneous development of housing construction* ¹ is being observed in different city's districts. There exists no common policy in this matter. In a matter of public housing Warsaw stays under the Western European average (15 to 25 percent range) but tops the list among Eastern European cities with 14 percent of share in the housing market. ⁴ Still, too many dwellings are being built which remain financially unreachable for a person with an average (low) ² wage and with demanded high rents. The aforementioned *wielka płyta* begins to *decay and crack* ² under the pressure of time and demand.

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URBAN DYNAMICS

It has been already 25 years of living in the capitalism and for the first time since many generations the Varsovians witness a period of a final continuity of changes. ² *Warsaw had been developing down through the centuries in a rather uncoordinated, non uniform way. There have been years of dynamic changes, long periods of stagnation and decline connected mainly with the general political situation in the country.* ² The city has a unique identity ⁴ created from its abnormal history of development ¹ and *urban landscape which reflects how difficult past and promising future can be united.* ⁴ One can also observe unusual and unfamiliar ² co-existence of a present dynamic development with a prevailing respect for the past.

Before making several recapitalisations concerning recent urban shifts and the development of the local governance, this topic can not be discussed without making few remarks concerning the previous state which gave already some basis for the urban transformations. The socialism times cannot only be perceived from the remarkable reconstruction ² of the Old Town. The *large-scale Stalinist planning projects* ² influenced significantly the urban structure of not only the city centre but also by the construction of the great dwelling districts. For these reasons Warsaw received the title of the most sovietized city in Poland ⁸: *(it) has an unenviable reputation in the minds of many: often invoked as the epitome of the brutal environment produced by Soviet aesthetics and planning, its name conjures up a grey, faceless world of tower blocks and Orwellian governmental buildings; its image – perhaps more so than that of any other city in the former Soviet block – inextricably tied to the fate of the Communist system.* ⁶ Between the years 1970-1990 the city started to expand on the south-west direction from Warsaw which was considered as an essential phenomenon ¹² of these times.

The fall of the communism has begun even more unexpected urban development which for such a short period of time is till today very unusual in a 'normal' city's history ¹ - *Warsaw urban space after 1989 became a showcase for such accelerated change, enabling observation of key issues shaping the contemporary, post-political city.* ⁵ Warsaw can be analysed from *the most significant phenomenon of the post-socialist urban transformation, which includes such factors as urban sprawl, the shrinking of open spaces, the development of hypermarkets (as we call them in Poland), the underdevelopment of public spaces, the revitalisation of brown fields, townscape changes, and events surrounding the Palace of Culture in the city center.* ¹ In the 1990s Warsaw was the second largest building site in Europe ⁶ where the remarkable size and speed time of construction ⁶ led sometimes to sterile design of homogeneous dwellings. An archetype ⁶ of such mega-estate became Northern Ursynow which was designed by one team of architects for one hundred thousand people. Such rapid changes created also incredible contrasts ⁹ where old and new urban structures become close neighbours. In Paris for instance, new districts are being created, but the old one do not change in character as it is happening in Warsaw. ⁹

Nowadays the city need the answer of whether a certain limitations of this development needs to be provided as like in Wola district where the landscape which is the unique condition in the city² is being under a threat of disappearing under the pressure of expanding financial districts.

On the other side these great changes have not strengthen the position of Warsaw on the national level. In fact a specific and quite unique characteristic of this city is *the extremely low primacy at the level of the national urban systems, which have a strongly polycentric structure. Warsaw (1.7 million in 2004): 4.4% of the country's inhabitants live in the city, while the Warsaw agglomeration (2.5 million) houses 6.5% of Poland's total population.*¹¹ Another quite unique feature is that the capital had undergone two simultaneous changes: *functional and physical reconstruction*¹¹ of the central district and introduction of new urban functions in places which were lying idle since the World War II.¹¹ There exists a conviction that an integration with new buildings is impossible, highlighting at the same that Warsaw is the place which constantly indeterminate, has a potential to create a city of the future - one of the few in Europe.³



*Through the context of the post-socialist transformations a different form of governance*¹³ emerges in Warsaw. The city presents an extreme example¹³ of certain instability of municipal borders, the administrative structure and political power. For instance between the 1995 and 2005, the municipal area of Warsaw changed from 485,3 km² to 516,9 km². This happened because the previously independent areas had been unified and one central administration with a leading function of mayor had been created. Until 2002 these different municipal areas had a high degree of independence, *competencies in the field of urban development and planning as well as the acquisition of new investors.*¹³ There was a strong but false belief that such structure will lead to a good development of the city as a whole. The discontinuity of the local governance, when the mayor has been changed nine times since the 1990 has also influenced this negative situation and *the unstable public authority.*¹³ This essential precondition of an urban regime in a city has led to a different situation in Warsaw concerning the importance of the private actors in the field of housing. In order to build trouble-free, private investors started to use an exceptional procedure which is *simpler and practically excludes the public. First, an investor must put forward a proposal. Then there is an administrative procedure in which only legal subjects can participate (this means no citizens, unless they form a legal association). Subsequently a decision is made about land development conditions (warunki zabudowy), based on the "good neighbour rule" (zasada dobrego sąsiedztwa). This rule is vague enough to make any interpretation dependent on the particular decision of one particular clerk.*¹⁵

To conclude, the governance system in the capital had been created as a response to this instability of public actors, and not as an answer for the growing complexity of the world and new challenges as it happened in other cities.¹³ The weak governance, *lack of transitional urban master planning*, and *distinctive laissez-faire*¹⁴, which is particularly visible in Warsaw,¹⁶ has led to a phenomenon of demolition plans not only of the buildings raised before the 1989, but also the modern structures. This significant transformation is especially visible in the city centre where a high-rise business district is emerging, *with the skyscrapers as the key signifier of Warsaw's urbanity*.¹⁴ at the place of building which were in use not such a long time ago. It seems that the lesson from the North America has not been learnt where the city of the *1970s and 1980s with glamorous skyscrapers turned out to be a false measure of urban health*.¹⁴ The vast development of such business districts may highlight the importance of the city in the European or global system. But there are two more simultaneously occurring phenomenon.¹⁷ The first supports *the metropolitan development of the capital (...) and the prevalence of non-economic potential*. The second one, is that Warsaw which is considered as a 'latecomer' *in the field of the metropolitan competitiveness (...) is a scene of major consolidation in the structure of the global economy but will never be the center of these processes*.¹⁷ This specificity even more puts a question mark over the primacy of the aforementioned business districts and strengthens the necessity of searching the urban identity somewhere else.

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URBAN STRUCTURE

If a typical European city has contributed to a lofty metaphor of an urban palimpsest, Warsaw qualifies for a more mundane notion of an urban patchwork, one not yet entirely stitched together, ⁶ but also a distinct nexus of different modes of urbanism. ¹ Its case is particularly interesting because it does not reflect a European city ideal: German functionality, French-city aesthetics and finally it is not inhabited by the citizens full of respect for the rights. ² Warsaw is none of these things ² and its value is based on precisely this difference. ² It is a city full of history yet in a different sense than most other Eastern European cities, which are presently re-discovering and re-narrating parts of their history. ¹ An extraordinary modern city ¹ which suffers from the amputation of the majority of its historical urban tissue, but at the same time possessing a unique condition of being at the same time historical, yet not amply defined because of its massive wartime destruction. ³ The reminiscences of the typical XIXth century tenement housing are very rare ¹ to find and the city presents itself as an overlap of different layers of a densely built-European city, the wide-stretched and large-scale socialist city and the intrusive neo-liberal city. ¹ Visible in the urban tissue culture successive layers made from Warsaw intriguing and ambiguous space, architectural, cultural and sociological phenomenon, which can be a model area for taking new risks. ⁵

Moreover, despite the socio-spatial changes since the 1990s some specificity of the socialism urban methodology has been prevailed such as monofunctional districts which separate the working spaces from other uses. *A dynamic activity of the developers as well as a demand for new offices* ¹ created a new phenomenon ¹ which took place in the post-industrial districts such as Sluzew or Wola. The heavy industry plants have been gladly used by the investors and the old brown fields have been converted into new business parks. As the local municipality could not react on time to this specific rapid changes, these districts are characterized by a lack of urban planning which leads to a serious undermining of public spaces. On the contrary just a few cities in Europe ⁴ has as much of the public space as Warsaw does. The city is surely not on the cutting edge concerning this topic, but as it has less inhabitants in comparison to other European capitals, it has still “places to be wasted” - playing grounds, local squares or unidentified spaces. The unique problem ³ of the city is the omnipresence of the parking lots at the squares, that could potentially enjoy the eye.

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GREEN SPACE

With its image of a post-socialist city imbued of greyish and depressing prefabricated housing estates, Warsaw is normally not considered as a green city. In fact the omnipresent of nature is actually typical for Warsaw ^{4,5} and until the 1990s the city consisted in nearly 30 per cent of agricultural activity, *over one-hundred and sixty square kilometres*. ¹ This one of the most visible phenomenon of Warsaw ¹ forms a unique urban structure ¹ of green ventilation corridors created ninety years ago. *The star-shaped open land system* is now being constantly reduced due to a lack of consistent urban planning. The last document on *urban development policy directions* ¹ was adopted in 2006 and has not properly protected these green spaces from greedy investors as *desirable locations for new constructions*. (...) *Warsaw with its star-shaped system of urban open spaces had been a perfect example of the "Balanced regional hierarchy" model of the sustainable city. The decisions to designate green corridors for new housing and business parks neglected the principles of sustainable development.* ¹ The current situation significantly influences functioning of the city w in many cases, starting from the climate conditions, ventilation or temperature etc.

In order to create a *humanist city based on light and space* ² another project had been worked out, which aimed also to highlight the green structure of Warsaw. *In total the projected green-belt was to measure four times the length of New York's Central Park*, but the only part which had been actually developed according to this plan was the Powisle district, near the city centre.

Apart from the large-scale systems the city can also be proud from its "punctional" green elements for instance *the las bielanski forest preserve - one of the few preserved areas in the world and the only one in Europe where a part of primeval forest is located within the city limits*. ³ Ursynow on the other side is a place which is valued by its inhabitants essentially for its green spaces where *greyish and box-looking housing estates are set one to another with big green spaces, which does not exist in the Western European cities*. ⁷

The city structure is no longer easily understood when the urbanized areas are not divided by green spaces and the whole city is becoming a vast built up territory. Easy access to recreational lands close to living places, which had been available for all, has now become a privilege for only a few. ¹

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BLOCKS

Every third citizen of Warsaw lives in a block, which gives a total amount of round 650 000 people. This form of housing mostly famous for the cityscape of the post-socialist cities, on an example of Warsaw presents a significant difference. Instead of homogeneous design, these places differ from each other by their proper character and unique taste.²

Whereas in Western Europe building estates are usually considered as places for the underclass, the phenomenon² of Varsavian equivalents lies in a social mix. Warsaw's block estates do not resemble ghettos of the Western Europe, full of frustrated people, where a 'normal' citizen would fear of getting lost among the big and anonymous building mass. In case of this specific city, we have a full social cross-section which is one of the examples of the *material legacy of the socialist city, (...) a set of specific socio-spatial features*³ that emerged over the communism times: *It has a lot to do with the previous system which, as we can observe, has left also some positive phenomenon. Because the fact of having few enclaves of luxury or just poverty prevents us from 'burning' suburbs.*²

A significant phenomenon in Warsaw is the Iron Gate Estate which consists of nineteen massive housing blocks, each of fifteen floors, just in the city centre. The former Jewish district upon which the abovementioned estate had been built, presented one of the worst living conditions in the pre-war capital of Poland. The density of the city in general was shocking and at these times was one of the highest in Europe - 10 000 people per km². The district had been entirely destroyed over the war actions and the space become one, spatial tabula rasa opened to new ideas. The example of the Iron Gate Estate built between 1965-72 was a dream-come-true of Le Corbusier whose Plan Voisin demanded demolition of a whole Parisian district to put his ideas into effect. The new municipality and the architects of the winning competition project, Jerzy Czyż, Jan Furman and Andrzej Skopiński, all had been pushing towards a design that would offer its future inhabitants new living conditions thus new quality of life. Today over 25 000 inhabitants occupy the Iron Gate Estate and the place has become popular among young people and exchange students.

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THE UGLIEST CITY

In 2009 Warsaw was chosen the most ugliest city in Europe^{1,2,3} according to users of the Trip Advisor, one of the biggest tourist website in the world. The result was published on May and a passionate discussion broke out in the end of the month. Half of Warsaw inhabitants or simply anyone connected somehow with the city started defending it, or as the other half of the respondents, expressing their support for the verdict. The discussion took place on a site of one of the most popular Polish magazines - Gazeta Wyborcza. Several participants of the argument stated that the worst part of the city is the centre, or to be precise its lack: (...) *the Centre in its present form is the Wild West*.¹ Moreover, the places which are recognised as the main tourist attractions such as Krakowskie Przedmiescie (the main boulevard) or the Old Town, are found either aesthetically inappropriate or just not interesting. The first example: *rather emphasizes the ugliness of the rest of the city, than it gives it a charm*,¹ whereas the other is a place *where nothing happens*.¹

The main train station, a place which should be a visiting card of Warsaw, is considered as a *nightmare*.¹ The same person also claims that the great defect of the Capital is also the dirt and the omnipresence of the cars. Walking, she states, is impossible in this city just as much as transpassing through a street due to the primacy of the cars in urban planning. She highlights that the city was made mainly for a fast passing through by car and not from the pedestrian level.

Another person compares Warsaw with other Polish cities such as Krakow, Gdansk, or Wroclaw. He claims that Warsaw *emerges as a concrete monster*,¹ and what follows is a city which contains of architecture in which *nothing fits anything*.¹ Someone else states that this is *the modernist architecture, neglected facades of the building, lack of small architecture in places where it should be*¹ which is responsible for this shameful nomination of the ugliest capital city in Europe.

The reason for the official image of Warsaw has also, according to the readers of the magazine, its roots in the sociological situation of the Capital. Someone highlighted that no one cares for the city because of the inner division between the original Varsovians and people who have just came here recently in search of a work.¹

As the city of Warsaw is *gray, patched together and woebegone*³ it probably cannot compete with *the timeless beauty of Rome, Paris and Stockholm*.³ On the other hand, only 8% of the responses indicated Warsaw as the ugliest city. It was a little bit more than for Berlin (7%) and Brussels (6%). Finally, the survey was made among 2370 people.

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LIKE PHOENIX FROM THE ASHES

*A postulate of uniqueness is perhaps the only thing that is truly common to all European capitals.*¹⁴ Such conviction about one's specific peculiarity may have its roots in an incomparable history, rare architecture, unequalled sociological situation etc. Warsaw, in this context, is a uniquely peculiar and unusual city,¹ which combines probably each of the above. Primary the reason which supports such thinking is that the Polish capital has a different story¹⁴ of a city that had *literally survived its own death*. It deserves to be considered unique because it is a „heroic city”, „a city of national remembrance”, a „resilient city”, and finally as the one which was „rebuilt from the ashes”.⁵

Warsaw experienced more severe than any other city the ruthless forces of two totalitarianisms, German Nazism and Soviet Communism.^{4,13} The first, after the failure of the Warsaw Uprising, had obliterated the city turning it into *the worst siege of all modern history*.² Taking it down methodically³ as no other city in Europe had encountered before, not even Berlin or Stalingrad, the city of Warsaw was left with approximately 85% of the urban structure in ruins and the population downsized to only 163,000 citizens¹² in 1945.

The post-war reconstruction of the city was particular because it took place on an actual cemetery,⁹ using the ramble of the buildings which existed not so long time ago. The new incomers were about to inhabit the city since only small part of the pre-war society survived. This was the reason for which the decision to bring the city back to life was taken rapidly and a unique construction¹² finished in a remarkably short period,⁷ along with the fact of leaving untouched the human remains.

The Soviet domination had significantly influenced the reconstruction process, along with an incorporation of a special land decree which simply switched all private property to a national estate. Despite these negative events, the remarkable achievement⁷ of the planners deserves to be acknowledged. Over 500 000 rooms had been built for the society which increased sevenfold in the 1960. Five bridges crossed anew the Vistula river, 280 000 trees were planted and the city was cleared of over 150 000 mines.⁷ But the building works, set up on *poor materials and primitive equipment*,³ begun symbolically with the reconstruction of the historical parts of the city. At the same time, a new part of the city emerged consisting of the *undistinguished low-rise sprawl, some of it the patched-up remains of the rare buildings*.³ Along with the bridges, new urban communication plans were under progress, which were found of particular importance¹⁵ for Warsaw.

Warsaw is the only capital in Europe⁸ which had been entirely destroyed, but the city is no longer considered the same as it used to be by the people who inhabited it before the war destruction: *Indeed, I live in a geographical point 'Warsaw', but this is not Warsaw!*⁸ It could be also deemed eccentric¹ because one merely can find *historic traces, memorials, or modern reconstructions of*

*destroyed buildings*¹ as it happened elsewhere. Still, the reminders of the past are ubiquitous. *There is no denying that Warsaw was ruined on a unparalleled scale by the historical misfortunes of the 20th century.*⁴ On the other side, the situation of the Polish capital turned to be its unexpected advantage over other major European cities.³ The Varsavian lack of the original urban tissue, contradictory to the forms of Western European cities, could serve as a showcase for the modern architecture.³

It is disputable whether Warsaw has used well this advantage, but the fact is that many people perceive the city as phenomenon for another reason. The weird urban structure¹⁰, half totalitarian, half anarchistic is thought to be something unique and special¹⁰ for Warsaw. This characteristic feature may have its roots in a different geopolitical situation¹⁴ from any other Eastern European capital.

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WARSAW UPRISING

The city suffered from many historic ups and downs, being probably one of the most complicated cases of an urban evolution in modern Europe. The most significant moment among many difficult ruptures of its continuity is definitely the Warsaw Uprising. It changed entirely the urban and social components of the city

This specific event remains the largest single military ³ operation which started on the 1st of August 1944. Till this day it is also considered as unique phenomenon ¹ *in the history of Poland and the Second World War*, ¹ where two groups co-operated in order to drive out the Nazi forces from the Polish capital city: the civilian underground movement and the army. This alliance created also the Polish Underground State which governed the country. By the end of the Uprising, the city had been methodically annihilated by the German Nazi Army. The history does not recognise any other case of such destruction. ³

At the same time the repeated tragic history of the city somehow toughen Warsaw's citizens who consider to be a *community of people who have high aspirations and infinite determination* ⁴. Certainly, without such attitudes, the decision of the city's reconstruction could never be taken under consideration.

Today its unique identity ⁴ is visible precisely through the urban landscape created by a common effort of its inhabitants. Warsaw became a city which will always remember of the past and simultaneously set new goals for the future in the name of the continuation. Finally, the Warsaw Uprising added a new layer to the already-rich compilation of the urban mythology of Warsaw.

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UNDERGROUND CITY

In regard to its specific history(ies), Warsaw underground creates a part of local myths and stories: *urban narratives of survival, heroism and social resistance linked to the sewer systems and tunnels which are an iconic and highly symbolic part of the national memory.* ¹

Firstly, the uniqueness of this concrete mythology of underground tunnels is directly linked to the dramatic war circumstances. The water and sewage system functioned as a shelter which secured from a reach of the enemy's bombs, turning buildings into deathly traps. They also enabled the defence of the city during the German Nazi Army occupation, but most importantly over the Warsaw Uprising in 1944. Many people could survive by the strategic use of the underground system and *only by traversing these labyrinthine sewers, insurgents and war casualties were able to escape the violence of warfare in the city of Warsaw.* ¹ These specific war experiences led to a crucial transformation of the urban mythology, incorporating at the same time the narrative of the underground in the national, but most essentially in the local Varsovian context: *physical reality was then projected onto an affective, psychological dimension of urban life.* ¹ (...) *Heroic, martyr-haunted post-war Warsaw was a city celebrating itself for being that capital of ghetto, of ruins and graves ever after.* ¹ This led to a peculiar cultural inversion in the way the people started to comprehend the surface - as something that can be neglected, and the underworld, which due to its highly symbolic meaning, ought to be protected.

In the post-war Warsaw, the underground became a crucial element of the urban footprint of the city. It defined the future spatial structure of the reconstruction and the city *over the course of half a century Warsaw has been restored according to a pre-existing "master plan" of extant underground infrastructure.* ¹ Moreover, the new socialist government had deeply investigated the underground labyrinths to prevent the events from the 1944 to be repeated this time under the communist system.

The contemporary example of the Warsaw Metro is also an interesting case, which presents additionally a specific understanding of the underground in this city. The metro was a long attended urban element since the 1925. *The Metro is an exceptional example since it evokes heroism in a twofold sense. On the one hand, it is associated with the noble and subversive underworlds exploited during the Uprising of 1944. On the other hand, it represents the culmination of the struggles and sacrifices of many generations. It is probably the most immaculate subway system in Europe, free of wanton degradation by its users.* ¹

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CITY & MEMORY

What creates a mental content of a city which suffered from the war obliteration? Can and should the memory of the past events co-create a contemporary city's identity? Finally, a question rises whether it is appropriate to manifest it in the urban structure of the city? In case of Warsaw, the answer for all the above questions is yes, considering the fact that *the memory is the most characteristic feature of this city*.²

Here we can observe a *remarkable and sometimes unwelcome sense of longing*.¹ The memory of the past events is a building material of the present. This is manifested not only in annual reconstructions of the historic events by disguised citizens of Warsaw. The symbols of the unforgotten memorization are also embodied in the omnipresent monuments which *Warsaw contains more than most cities*,¹ but also in the guise of memorial boards fixed to the buildings' walls which confirm *the place of the site in the grand narratives of the city*.¹ *The most ordinary urban traces, even simply the name of a street, had and continues to have what Barthes might call a "lacerating" effect*¹ as if people were guided through the city with the use of their inner mental or even emotional map rather than the real physical one that reflects the present state.

Warsaw provides an incomparable example of the symbolic role a place with a name plays for people.⁴ *In deciding to reconstruct the city from the ocean of ruins, judgements were also made about the meanings that Warsaw's buildings and street were to carry*.¹ The reconstruction of the eldest part of the city, the historic Old Town, was important for precisely the above reason. *Although Stare Miasto was not terribly useful in any practical sense, it provided an indispensable symbolic focus*.⁴ *In order to reclaim the ruined city the Old Town had to be rebuilt and once it was reconstituted, the rest of the enormous task of reconstruction seemed worthwhile. "Warsaw" was once again something, some place. Life could go on*.⁴

In a city that had to reinvent itself in 1945 and then again 1989, which also lost a great part of its urban landscape and urban histories, a *specific obsession with cultural heritage and its commemoration*³ seemed to be a natural outcome. This 'mania' has intensified due to a spatial confusion created by the transformations which took place in the capital city.

All these aforementioned elements of the local memory are essential reference points for the people who in majority did not experience accidents described on them, but were those to whom the stories of the past had been told.

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RUINS

On the day of its liberation in January 1945, Warsaw presented *the worst urban scar in the world*² as described by a correspondent of LIFE magazine John Hersey (9 April 1945, p.17). The American journalist was in shock seeing the city where *the walls enclosed nothing, the crumpled antiquities, the piles of rubble and above all the thoroughness of ruin* presented the city which was no longer understandable having lost almost every trace of its past.

On the other side, the created situation of an urban *tabula rasa* established *exceptional circumstances*¹ to a possible reconstruction of the Polish capital. The decision to re-shape the city by taking little of its original layout, was convenient from the perspective of the communism Party. The dictatorship aimed to incorporate new *iconographic arsenal*² to the urban system of the rising city. The situation of a ruined Warsaw was also an *unusual opportunity*⁴ for the architects and planners. Before the outbreak of the Second World War, they had already projected modifications of the city which could offer better living conditions for its citizens. Before the 1939 it stayed just an impossible dream, since the 1945 it was made realistic and possible.

The myth of ruins became a *central symbol* of the new propaganda, along with the heroic decision of rebuilding the city. The new epoch was to be finally a time of *genuine humanism*,¹ where the citizens of Warsaw would be finally offered a city they “deserve”. The decision of building *unusually wide streets, squares*¹ and monumental buildings in the centre of Warsaw was reasoned by the argument of creating a spacious city, full of fresh air. The major function of these spaces was in fact crowd control and a possibility to organise parades for the sake of the Party and new system. *This image left no doubts as to the clear propagandistic character of the projected rebuilding of Warsaw.*¹

At the same time, the city destruction created an enormous amount of rubble, ranging from 20 to 25 million m³, according to different sources. The heaps of rubble was lying up to four meters above street level in the terrain of the former ghetto. The site gave a *specific context*⁴ which influenced its reconstruction. The new district of Muranow used rubble as a *unique building material*¹, by taking advantage of *special nature*¹ of its components. The redish colour was to symbolize the trace of the Jewish society which had been almost entirely exterminated during the Second World War. This visible presence of already phantom society by the re-creation of the city with the rubble *testifies to a unique discontinuity which defines Warsaw's contemporary identity.*⁵

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SOCIAL CHANGES AND TRADITIONS

Warsaw was never considered fully homogeneous concerning its social structure. It is very characteristic ⁹ of this city that the majority of its citizens have not their origins in the capital. The source of this situation dates back from the Second World War which led to a uniquely peculiar and unusual ¹ situation in which *major social and demographic changes occurred*. ¹ In the pre-war times the city had one of the worst ⁸ building and population density ratio in Europe, with an estimated number of 10 000 people per km². The post-war death toll reached 720 000 victims among which 98% of the Jewish population was exterminated. At the outbreak of the war, Warsaw was the most abundant Jewish center in Europe, and in many ways the most important center of Jewish culture in the world. ³ Only small percent of the pre-war society continued living in the city, the rest of the population who did not get killed or emigrated, was forced by the communism regime to leave the city. The new incomers who came in majority from the rural regions, were tempted by the opportunities offered by the capital city. This new Warsaw's population was not used to the urban life.

The reconstruction of the Warsaw's urban layout as well as the social disposition were both in hands of the communism regime which officially took over the control of the Polish state in 1952. One of its first decisions concerning the capital city was to inhabit the city centre with the working class. This solution stayed in contrast ⁷ to the Western Europe practice after 1945 where the same social group was forced to search for an accommodation in the suburbs or slums. Among the examples of such policy is the Warsaw's MDM estate (Marszałkowska Dzielnica Mieszkaniowa) which had been planned for approximately 42 000 new residents. *The architects of this complex intended to realize the whole socialist citizen for whom no functional division between work, leisure functions, culture and politics* ⁷ was maintained. The consequent use of this policy is probably the reason for which Warsaw structure, in contrast to the cityscapes ¹ found in other urban centers, does not reflect social divisions neither in its appearance nor topography. Also in Warsaw this particular social context has led to a situation in which *the large number of elderly people and people with low income still live in the central parts of the city*. ⁶

The communism epoch conducted another very specific social experiment ¹⁰ where people of different social status and professions occupied the same living space. This phenomenon is visible till these days and creates quite interesting case. On the other side it is an *obstacle in search for an identity of streets and districts. People mentally live somewhere else, they have different priorities, possibilities and cannot communicate how a courtyard or a garage descent should look like. This is one of the reasons for which Warsaw is so chaotic*. ¹⁰ At the same time, a new phenomenon ² has recently emerged where civil participation groups co-operate in order to resolve their local issues and enhance their districts.

Warsaw has particularly⁴ high migration rate in the country. From the side of the international flows, the city is still unique because its foreign residents are more diverse and their communities are more established.⁵ Due to a higher concentration of “new” minority ethnic groups in the capital, the opportunities to encounter people of different ethnic backgrounds are more frequent and the exchange is deeper in Warsaw than in other Polish cities.⁵ The former Bazaar Europe on which place stands today the National Stadium, was the first place ever for many Varsavians to meet, interact or work with people from Asia, Africa or Eastern Europe. At that time it was the biggest open-air trading place, not just in Poland but all over Europe.⁵ Places like the non-existent Bazaar Europe are the fundamental characteristics of Warsaw’s everyday life.¹ Despite its closure the “peculiarity quotient” in civic experience is sustained in a form of unregistered street market stalls known as “camped-bed business”. This unregulated phenomenon is directly related to the communism traditions which had been brought along with the rural inhabitants of Warsaw.

The peculiar situation in which the great majority of Warsaw’s society has its roots outside the capital, may have led to a creation of specific attitude towards the city. People simply lack a local attachment, which was characteristic for the pre-war times. The then inhabitants of the city titled it *the Paris of the North* even though it had many more defects than it has today, not to mention the tragic living conditions. Warsaw is still marked by its own inertia, a set of the local, path-dependent denials and clichés. Poles who see their capital in sceptical, self-deprecating, martyrological and quasi-objectivist terms, thus evidencing a peculiar mixture of inferiority and superiority complexes.²

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BORDERLINE

The history of the past events and the current situation have both exposed a uniqueness^{1,2} of Warsaw as an *idiosyncratic borderland city*¹.

The specificity of the city in regard to this matter can be explained by the fact that the Polish capital lies at the interface between the West and East fields of European influences. This unique² and strategic position was also the key factor for the city's foundation. Due to its location, Warsaw was a host-city to many different cultures and national minorities who used to live next to each other, not without social clashes. Still, this mosaic of various cultural forces created a specific atmosphere³ of a melting pot.

Nowadays the Western and Eastern influences are visible in the city's urban structure. The dynamism of changes in the cityscape, the North-American shopping malls and the modern skyscrapers are combined with the monumental socialist's whoppers, icy winters and *the prevailing drabness of the buildings*,² all typical for the Eastern elements.

On the other hand, the characteristic³ of Warsaw is not a clash of the two forces, but more their disappearance. This is not a place where these cultures interact creating something ingenious, they do not enmesh one with another. *They simply create a specificity³ of an atmosphere of omission, mediocrity, unfinishedness, breaking the things which are in the process of emergence, which never reach their full and finished state.*³

Perhaps with all these aforementioned features Warsaw will never be a *fancy, world-class tourist destination*.² Additionally, the city itself finds its position uncomfortable, *between polluted East and mythical West*,¹ but at the same time it is reluctant to finally *fully re-invent its identity around the strategic uniqueness*¹ of its location.

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SKYLINE

When the new building tower *Złota 44* projected by Daniel Libeskind was presented to the public, the author and its office highlighted a very important characteristic of the future construction. According to the architect, the skyscraper was supposed to *link the city together by paying respect to the city's repressive past, but also, more importantly, by giving the way to hope for the future.* ¹ The architect expressed also a strong belief that the *Złota 44* will contribute to a creation of a unique skyline. ¹

Whether or not the goal was obtained, it is very peculiar for Warsaw to express a persisting hope that high-rise buildings will change the image of the city. Such skyline created by the physical presence of the skyscrapers would be a specific manifestation of the undergoing changes under the capitalistic system and a confirmation of the economic prosperity of Warsaw.

In fact the Warsaw's panorama is quite unusual in Europe. ² The reason for this unorthodox situation is the presence of the skyscrapers in the city centre. This is not so obvious regarding the fact that usually the centres are the place where the old, historical thus low substance of the city is prevailed which enables construction of the new high-rise structures which are normally built outside the City, like La Defense in Paris, or Canary Wharf in London. *So you have to appreciate that in Warsaw, everyone will find examples of interesting solutions both in terms of architecture and urban planning.* ²

It is certainly not a surprise that the city's landmark ³ is at the same time the highest building in the city - the Palace of Culture and Science with the height of 237m. It is considered as the most outstanding building ³ of the Warsaw skyline, which is often used as an orientation point for the citizens.

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WILD AFRICA IN EUROPE

In a place, which lost its original context and a sense of continuity, forms of absurdity and certain wildness have emerged that encloses the *hidden memory of the trauma*.¹ Warsaw is *still lost in translation*,⁴ missing the artefacts to which it can relate to. For this reason the forms, which emerge in the city and define its spatial character *are monstrous, grotesque and correspond to the chaotic coincidences, as a scarring with "wild meat" over the dermis*.¹

As a succession of this coincidence of conditions, the perceptual archetype⁴ of the Varsovian space has become *unsurprisingly* the chaos or the urban sprawl otherwise. In Warsaw case this phenomenon can be also named in other words by the 'chaotic principle' of spatial spread, which *has remained one of its persistently unique features also after the 1989*.³ Nowadays situation of the Polish capital makes it resemble more of the African cities (*conceding all the differences*) than its *West European* equivalents.³

The by-product of the Warsaw's urban sprawl, the voids, has been given name of the "*scary wild fields*"⁴ that reveals directly the attitude of the masses towards these sort of spaces. In contrast to other cities, which faced the same issue at the dusk of the political changes, Warsaw stands out negatively. The empty spaces are understood as without *urban potentiality*⁴ especially the one that would be *defined outside the framework of the capitalist marker*.⁴ On the contrary, the presence of the urban voids interlocked with green spaces have led to a unique situation⁶ which does not occur in any other city.⁶ The transition between the build and the empty area makes one feels lost the urban sense of the space, which is considered as positive by the citizens of Warsaw.

The "chaotic principle" of spatial spread created, as anywhere else, suburbs. But *by the end of the decade the capital's suburbs had acquired some truly spectacular and exotic displays of ostentation (albeit often in the 'defensive' mode of fortress). Modern castles with tin-clad turrets and bogus rustication behind moat-house gates were an unmistakable measure of the riches that could be made - whether legitimately or not - in any economic crisis*.⁵

The appear of the last representation of the wildness and peculiar form of exoticization² relates to a disappearing world of the past communist epoque. The rapid development of the capitalist history of the city has led to a situation in which the material creations of the previous era *acquired an exotic otherness*.²

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POLAND'S LABORATORY

The chaotic spatial characteristic of Warsaw started to be recently perceived as a promising result of the actions taken by its citizens. The cityscape is gradually being conformed to the individuals whose activities oscillate between pragmatism and creativity as well as the urban development itself is *more organic and spontaneous*.¹ The city, under such conditions, is being shaped by *a natural process of selection*.² The situation where the instruction and plans are less important than instinctive decisions taken by the city's citizens, has introduced a new polemic describing Warsaw as a *unique laboratory after 1989*² where chaos become a positive outcome of creative decisions (creative chaos) that testifies to the legibility of its existence.

*(...) With it comes the increasingly widespread awareness that it is this situation of controlled experimentation rather than the trop of nostalgic museum which is more compatible with the master metaphors of contemporary development.*¹

Ever since this discussion, there is a predominating conviction about the future of Warsaw, where the city will finally *become a full-blown laboratory*.¹

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EXPECTATIONS

Warsaw has an reputation of grey city, a *faceless world of tower blocks and Orwellian governmental buildings*. ² Its image probably more than any other city from the former Soviet block is inextricably tied to the fate of the Communist system. ² As the epitome ² of the Soviet aesthetics and planning, the Polish Capital seemed to be *oppressively predictable* ² by contrast to the cities of the Western Europe. On the examples of vast monumental spaces or the omnipresent buildings blocks, *it lacked their excitement and sensual range*. ²

Furthermore, concerning the fact that unlike *the Western countries centres which are slow to distinguish between Central (post-communist) and Eastern (post-Soviet) Europe*, ³ Warsaw (due to a condition of its *own inertia*) ³ is somehow stopped in a state between the previous system and the current one. That only magnifies the image of an underdeveloped city that endures among the foreign public. The roots of such situation are also to be found in the fact of prevailing *a set of local, path-dependent denials and clichés* ³ that enable any changes to update the current state.

On the contrary, due to its central position between the West and East European cultures, the city is expected to become a platform of dialogue between different cultures. Warsaw is somehow predetermined to finally reach a state of openness and creativity nourished additionally from various sources of influence. It is definitely a city that has a potential to exceed the expectations ¹ under the condition of its forthrightness.

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BERLIN & WARSAW

TEMPORARINESS IN PUBLIC SPACE

BERLIN



photo credit: <http://www.flussbad-berlin.de>

Badeschiff by artist Susanne Lorenz, AMP and Wilk-Salinas Architekten. 2004

The project was originally a temporary art installation to enliven the district along the Spree river. Following its success among the citizens it was converted into a permanent attraction. In 2005 the pool was equipped additionally with a roof which from now on enabled its use all over the year. *To minimise building cost there were exclusively used standard materials and processing was just done with a minimal complexity. To guarantee a fast assembly and disassembly it was of great value to create uncomplex joinings and the ease of manual assembly.*²

WARSAW



photo credit: J.Rajkowska

installation *Oxygenerator* by artist Joanna Rajkowska. July - September 2007

The project was presented to the public on Grzybowski Square. *In the middle of the lawn, a 140 square metre-large, 1 metre-deep pond was arranged, surrounded by greenery, shrubs and water lilies, and equipped with air-ozonating and fog-creating equipment. The pond was surrounded by seats for visitors. Artist's attempt was to create a place exempt, as it were, from the dominant conventions, a place virtually ideal, an enclave of fresh air in the centre of the city. Its temporariness, unusualness, lack of a pre-adopted script create a space that only others can fill. The artist makes the initial gesture, which will be developed and interpreted outside her control.*³

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HOMEOWNER ASSOCIATIONS

BERLIN



photo credit: Kaden Klingbeil Architects

E_3 Housing in Berlin by Kaden Klingbeil Architects

The idea is to create an open urban block in contrast to the typical reconstruction of Berlin, with its prevailing perimeter block development with buildings spanning from fire gable to fire gable and having identical eaves heights. The complex could only be developed with a client collective because issues like individual decision making, sustainability and special urban design features can only be called for by a critical client as opposed to a developer whose primary interest are the expected financial return.² The building hides under its white render a wooden construction. Its surface reaches 970 m².

WARSAW



photo credit: [http: S.A.M.I. Architects](http://S.A.M.I.Architects)

Residential and commercial building at the Cinnamon Str. Na Skraju Homeowner Association

The situation in Warsaw is particular due to the scale of the homeowner associations, which are in majority massive whoopers. Their members cannot interfere significantly in the cooperative's activity. The slow transformation is visibly taking place and smaller H.A.'s emerge. It is also related to the fact of cost's diminishing and adjusting their functioning. The members are better organised and at the same time have greater impact on decision process. The group mostly interested in such changes are young people. In Poland one quarter of population are the owners of housing association flat. The scale of the above investment reaches 14800m² with 236 apartments, 10 service and 495 parking spaces.

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CRITICAL RECONSTRUCTION

BERLIN



photo credit: Georg Slickers

Bonjour Tristesse, Álvaro Siza Vieira 1982/1983

The philosophy of the redevelopment of Berlin contains a postulate of the experimental critical reconstruction. The goal of this decision was to *recapture the “mythos” of the city at an earlier time*.⁴ The future investments had to follow several conditions: maintain the original partition of lots, obey the strict height and shape policy, *favour stone and ceramic exteriors over steel and glass*, finally to *restore pre-war street patterns and building lines*.⁴

The building by the Portuguese architect challenged *existing conventions and typologies (...)* activating the *creative potential of the ‘as found’ as a strategy to enhance collective memory and promote political engagement through conflictive consensus*. It was constructed for the event of the International Building Exhibition in Berlin, at the place of an urban void left by the war. The plan differs significantly from the traditional rectilinear plans of the building from the neighbourhood, dating back to the late XIXth century. The building consisted initially of four big apartments on each floor, accessible by four staircases with additional social equipment on the ground floor. The plan had been modified and today there two staircases offering the entrance to 46 apartments.

WARSAW

- to the knowledge of the author the critical reconstruction did not take place in the Polish Capital

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CONCLUSION

Warsaw like any other city in the Central Europe, considers itself unique. From the conducted research, which presents the point of view of many professions as well as the opinions of the individuals, the sociologists are among those who gave their voice (in field of their expertise) in practically every issue touched in this work. For this reason, the social condition of the city may be considered as the particular Warsaw characteristic.

In the terms of the architecture heritage Warsaw can be compared to similar European cities. The priceless pieces from nearly every decade *are scattered throughout Warsaw's urban context*,¹ rarely creating a coherent structure. This seemingly chaotic principle of Warsaw is no longer to be treated neither as a negative consequence of undergoing changes nor negligence despite the recent polemic in this matter. In author's opinion, the unique feature of Warsaw's cityscape that is strongly related to its history, is the temporariness of the structures or the phenomenon, which can be often mistaken as chaotic. The city of Warsaw seems to be developing under the condition of the natural selection to which the factor of the instability is favourable as the best available options are being prevailed and further developed. At the same time and somehow in contradiction to the above, some of the positive temporariness fail to be preserved despite their successful merge with the urban tissue (on example of the Oxygenerator by J.Rajkowska). In authors mind this situation has its roots in lack of *awareness of the city's chances to constitute a "full-blown urban laboratory"*², but Warsaw has been it unconsciously ever since its foundation. Despite the fact *the narratives of transitional, liminal urbanity have not been embraced by the Warsaw public so far*² the situation is still advantageous to re-introduce this notion.

The comparison of the three elements between Warsaw and Berlin has its reason in: firstly, repeated exemplifications of both cities to each other; secondly due to the existence of the seemingly similar position in relation to their status. The capital cities of Germany and Poland are both perceived from perspective of the changes which they undergo as the post-Soviet cities (East Berlin). This situation of Warsaw is characterised by one specific difference. In Warsaw case, the changes from Soviet to capitalist condition happen simultaneously, without any time logic and chronological order. For this reason also, the author supports the idea of treating Warsaw as urban laboratory with one specific difference. The experimentation should see it limits precisely in taking lesson from Berlin and creating its own example of critical reconstruction of the XXIst century. *Warsaw had to reinvent itself so many times to start anew.*⁴ In relation to this, the postulate to maintain a certain continuity of urban Warsaw traditions is merely sentimental, but comes from a logical reasoning. If one system worked somewhere it can work else where, under two conditions: similar background

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and a degree of adaptation. After all *a truly critical reconstruction requires the reflection of history in the living substance of today's buildings in accordance with our present culture.* ³

What is that makes the city of Warsaw livable and full of energy is this undefined unfinished structure that nourishes the imagination and enables diverse action to be undertaken. ⁵ To finally conclude, Warsaw, with all the aforementioned features, has a potential to become the most contemporary European city, which wisely after the taken lessons may re-use and re-adapt the existing patterns creating a new condition under which it could be named truly unique.

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