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RESIDENTIAL ATTRACTIVENESS OF THE INNER CITY OF LODZ IN THE OPINIONS OF CITY INHABITANTS

Abstract: In contrast to inner cities in Western Europe that have undergone the processes of urban regeneration, revitalization and resurgence over the last 20-30 years, inner cities in socialist cities (during the state-socialist era) have traditionally been associated with deteriorating as well as physically an demographically ageing, old built up areas in poor physical condition and in public ownership. System transformation and the return to market economy as well as establishing real local self-governments in cities created favourable conditions to change this situation. The aim of the work was to establish the level of residential attractiveness of inner city area of post-socialist Lodz in the opinions of the city inhabitants. The study included 700 inhabitants of the city. The analysis focused on exogenous factors connected with the features of the assessed area, on the assumption that such studies may have not only cognitive but also practical value, because they will show what features of the inner city increase and decrease its potential as regards attracting inhabitants. The results showed that Lodz's inner city is an area with a relatively low residential attractiveness in the opinions of city's inhabitants. Among the most important reasons for this state of affairs were the condition of the buildings, filth, noise, lack of safety and low social status of the residents.

Keywords: City of Lodz, inner city, post-socialist city, residential attractiveness.

Introduction

The residential attractiveness of inner city areas varies globally, as well as across Europe. In West-European countries the inner-city neighbourhood changes have lasted for several decades, and have been much studied. Especially gentrification and reurbanization literature suggests a shifting attractiveness of inner city areas to various groups as the successive stages of neighbourhood change [see Lees, Ley 2008; Kabisch, Sagan 2011]. Recently more contributions to neighbourhood change debate point out that not only people with alternative-life style and young urban professionals, but also other groups (*e.g.* young adults in traditional families, students, middle-

class families, long-term residents) classically disregarded by mainstream gentrification theories, have been active in processes of inner-city regeneration [Kährlik *et al.* 2012]. However, during the last decades the inner cities in many western countries became more and more attractive for residence for different groups of people with specific socio-demographic characteristics, housing preferences and residential behaviour [Kabisch, Sagan 2011]. In contrast to inner cities in Western Europe that have undergone the processes of urban regeneration, revitalization and resurgence over the last few decades, inner cities in East Central Europe have traditionally been associated with deteriorating as well as physically and demographically ageing, old built up areas in poor physical condition and in public ownership [Szelényi 1996; Kabisch Sagan 2011].

In Poland, like in most other CEE countries, during the socialist period, central authorities took no interest in the central parts of cities. Deprived of rightful owners, overpopulated, neglected and underinvested for years, the central areas of many cities were yielding to gradual physical degradation. Moreover, as a result of the new residential areas developing in the outer zone (especially modern large housing estates), the better-off and better educated inhabitants started to leave the central areas, which led to social degradation as well. These processes referred in literature as housing filtration [see Clark 2010].

System transformation and the return to market economy as well as establishing real local self-governments in cities created favourable conditions to change this situation. The processes currently observed in Polish cities, *i.e.* privatization (including re-privatization), revitalization and gentrification, connected with the regeneration of the physical and social tissue of central areas, take place at a different pace, depending on the economic condition of cities and various local factors. These include: the location and size of the city, its position in the settlement system and administrative hierarchy of the country, the level of human and social capital, as well as historical traditions and development paths [Węclawowicz 2007].

In literature, it is assumed that the residential attractiveness of a given area is composed of its environmental, urban-architectonic, aesthetic, functional and social assets, which can be measured using different indicators [Bartoszek *at al.* 1997; Jałowiecki, Szczepański 2006]. Earlier empirical studies demonstrated that the inhabitants' assessment of the attractiveness of a given area, as well as their housing preferences are influenced by exogenous factors, related to the features of the evaluated area, as well as endogenous ones, related to the assessors' character traits [Bartnicka 1989]. The perception of residential attractiveness is conditioned both objectively (functionality, housing standard, urban conditions, landscape assets, *etc.*) and subjectively (the level of housing aspirations, aesthetic preferences, emotional attachment to the area, emotions, stereotypes, *etc.*, associated with it). A measure of the residential attractiveness of individual urban areas is their presence in the spatial preferences and dispreferences of the city residents, also referred to as residential preferences.

1. Research aim and methods

The aim of the work was to establish the level of residential attractiveness of Lodz central area in the opinions of the city inhabitants. The analysis focused on exogenous factors connected with the features of the assessed area, on the assumption that such studies may have not only cognitive but also practical value, because they will show what features of the inner city increase and decrease its potential as regards attracting inhabitants. It is vital, especially in the context of the revitalization of this area, conducted at present and planned for the future.

Research, whose results have been presented in the article¹, was conducted using the standardized, face-to-face questionnaire survey technique. The questions concerned the presence of the central areas of the city in Lodz inhabitants' residential preferences and dispreferences, as well as the factors which affect them. The survey was conducted in 2009, among a representative group of adult inhabitants of the city, chosen with the use of random-quota sampling method. The first stage of sampling was based on four criteria: sex, age (6 age cohorts), education and place of residence (so that the inhabitants of every urban unit of the city could be represented). The second stage was conducted using the random-route technique.

2. Respondents

The study included 700 inhabitants of Lodz, aged 18 to 75. Over one half of them (54%) were women. The most numerous group consisted of persons aged 25-34 (21%) and 45-54 (20%). Over one fifth of the respondents formed one-person households, every third one – two-person households, and 27% – 3-person households. Representatives of larger households (4 and more persons) made up 20% of the sample group. The largest group of respondents had secondary and post-secondary education (41%), and was followed by those with elementary and basic vocational education (33%). Slightly over one fifth of the respondents were university graduates, holding BA and MA degrees. Almost half of the persons taking part in the survey (47%) had a steady job, and 5% – had an occasional job. In the group of the persons who did not work, 26% were old age pensioners, 9% – the unemployed, and 2% – people taking care of the household. Nearly 75% declared that they had been living in Lodz since birth. The distribution of the respondents' places of residence was proportional to the distribution of the whole population of Lodz.

¹ The article is an original text, based on the results of research commissioned by the Lodz City Council. The author took part in constructing the conception of the research and obtained the client's permission to present it in the form of an article.

3. Research area

Lodz is the third largest city in Poland, inhabited by 742,7 thousands people (2012). It is situated in the central part of the country. The urban development of Lodz is the reason why the city lacks a clearly defined centre in the form of a city square. Two squares, Plac Wolności (Liberty Square) and Rynek Staromiejski (Old Town Square) do not perform the function of a central space. The symbolic centre of Lodz is its main axis – Piotrkowska Street, which together with all adjacent areas, has been performing this function ever since it was built, *i.e.* since the 1920s [Wolaniuk, Przewłocka 2002; Wolaniuk 2009].

The Lodz's inner city area is sometimes identified with the Śródmieście, which is the historical core of the city². Śródmieście is one of five districts, covers the area of 6.8 km², and is situated along Piotrkowska Street (north-south) as well as Narutowicza and Pomorska Street (east-west) – Figure. 1. The area is dominated by old buildings (65.5% were erected before 1945, and 49% – before 1918), the majority of which is the municipal property (in 2002 – 41%). A considerable part of the 33,400 flats there (11% of the housing resources of Lodz) represent low standard. One-room flats make up 12.3% (the average for Lodz – 7.5%), and small flats (less than 30 m²) – 12.5% (the average for Lodz – 10.7%). Less than a half of these flats are equipped with all basic technical and sanitary conveniences³ (the average for Lodz – 76.9%). Since the late

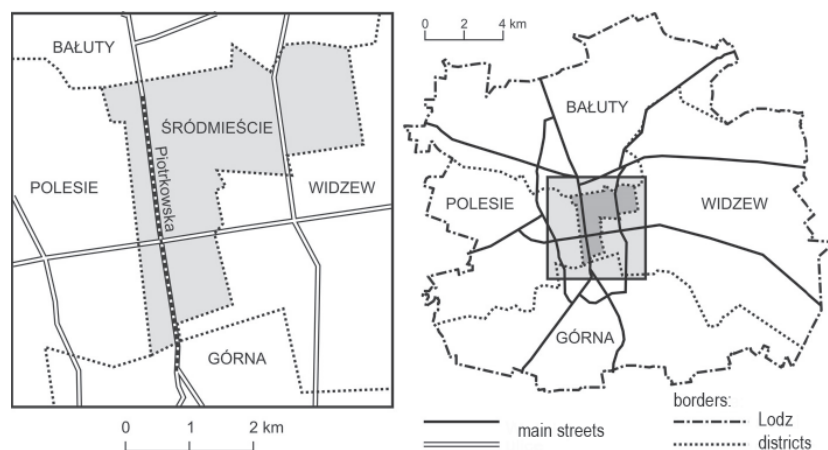


Figure 1. The central area of Lodz

Source: Author's compilation.

² As the aim of the article is not the delimitation of Lodz city centre (which was dealt with by Liszewski and Wolaniuk in their work in 1988), the term “centre” is being used here in a rather colloquial sense. It was agreed that it could be done because further in the article the author presents the results of a survey conducted among Lodz inhabitants, which refer to their colloquial awareness.

³ They include the water distribution system, sewers, bathroom and central heating.

1980s, the inner city, like the whole city, has been experiencing depopulation. The number of the population in this district in 1988 was 101,000, in 2002 – 85,000 and in 2013 – only 70,000 (Lodz Statistical Office data).

Often identified with the very centre of the city, the main axis of this area – Piotrkowska Street, is 4.13 km long, and including its old town extension – over 5 km. The buildings along this street were erected mainly in the 19th and in the first half of the 20th c., forming a compact built-up area. Its main feature is the characteristic filling of a long plot of land from the front, with side and transverse outbuildings, which form characteristic narrow yards [Wolaniuk, Przewłocka 2002].

Piotrkowska Street is built up mostly with tenement houses, usually 3-4-storey high, of varying standard, also within individual buildings (including the front and the outbuilding part). In the southern section, the buildings are more varied due to the presence of so called “Manhattan” – an area with the highest modernist residential houses in Lodz (16-25 floors), erected in the 1979s, which are a spatial dominant feature of the cityscape.

Piotrkowska Street is a multifunctional street with many metropolitan institutions whose influence reaches beyond the city. It is divided into two main parts: the northern one (from Liberty Square to Piłsudskiego Street) – more prestigious and better equipped with various metropolitan services, and the southern one (from Piłsudskiego Street to Independence Square), where the concentration of services is smaller [Wolaniuk 2009]. A large part of the northern section of the street is a promenade where vehicle traffic is limited.

Before the Second World War, the broadly understood Lodz centre (comprising Piotrkowska Street and the adjacent areas) was inhabited by the richer population. However, during the post-war period, as a result of the development of new housing areas in the outer zone of the city, and mainly due to constructing huge block housing estates, the central area lost its residential prestige. The buildings (except small areas built up in the 1930s), which were not renovated for the next few decades, were decapitalized and physically degraded. As a consequence, the better-off and better educated inhabitants started to gradually leave the area, which led to its social deterioration as well [see Liszewski 2009; Marcińczak 2009]. Contemporary studies concerning the social composition and condition of the inhabitants show that estate units located around Piotrkowska Street (in the form of a ring surrounding the strict centre delimited by this street) are characterized by a low level of human and social capital [Szafrńska 2008], an unemployment rate higher than in other areas, and a relatively large share of inhabitants taking advantage of social welfare. These are “socially weak” areas [Liszewski 2009]. Police statistics show that the strict city centre situated along Piotrkowska Street is characterized by high crime rate and is one of the least safe regions of Lodz [Liszewski 2009; Mordwa 2013].

4. Study results

A large majority of respondents (70%) declared that they did not feel satisfied with the place where they live. The least attached to their place of residence (the highest percentage of negative answers) were the inhabitants of the inner city (Figure 2).

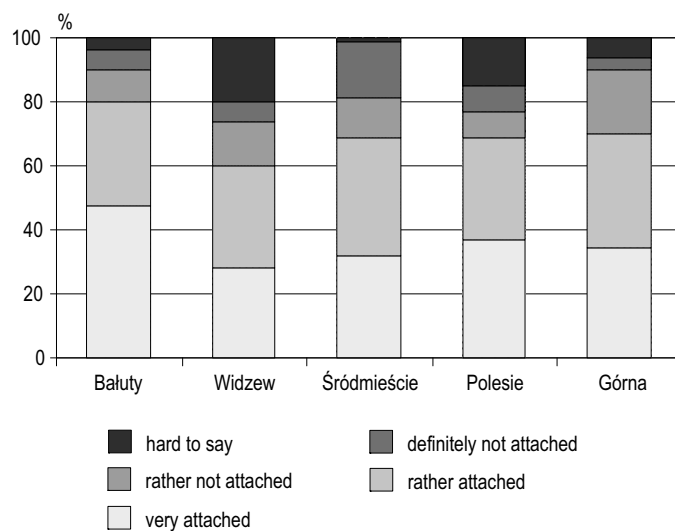


Figure 2. The feeling of attachment to the place of residence by districts (N=700)

Source: Author's compilation based on the results of a survey conducted for the City Council of Lodz*

* All further figures and tables included in the text come from the same source.

The inhabitants of this district also declared the lowest level of satisfaction with their place of residence (only 3.21 on the 1-5 scale) (Figure 3).

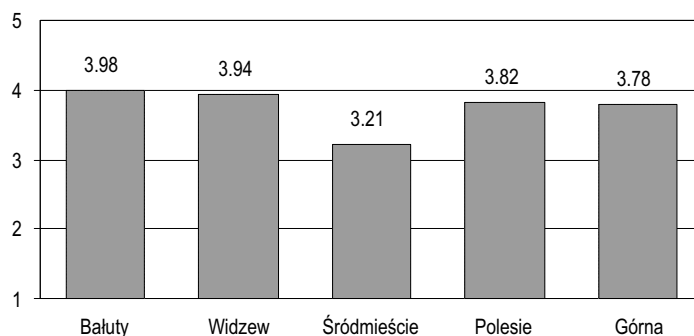


Figure 3. Lodz inhabitants' satisfaction with their place of residence by districts (Scale 1-5) (N = 700)

Despite their strong emotional attachment, over one third of the respondents would like to move out from the place of their residence if they had an opportunity to do so. A large majority of them would consider moving to another part of Łódź. The largest percentage of such persons lived in the inner city area (Figure 4).

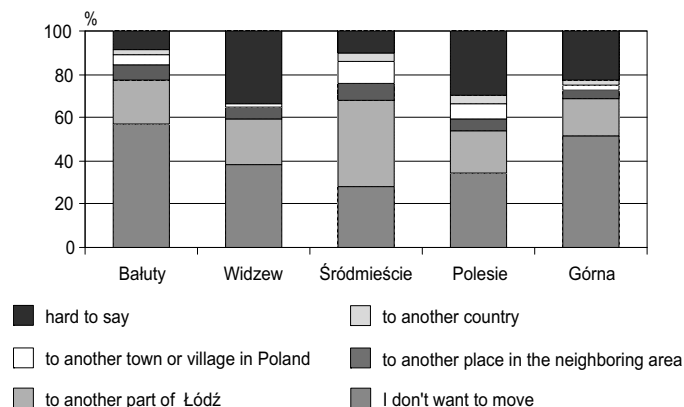


Figure 4. Migration preferences of Łódź inhabitants by districts (N = 700)

When choosing the most attractive place to live, the respondents were not univocal. They usually pointed to whole districts of Łódź, such as Bałuty or Widzew. On the other hand, among smaller areas identical to an estate, post-war block housing estates (mostly the newer ones), *i.e.* Radogoszcz and Olechów, as well as the older Retkinia,

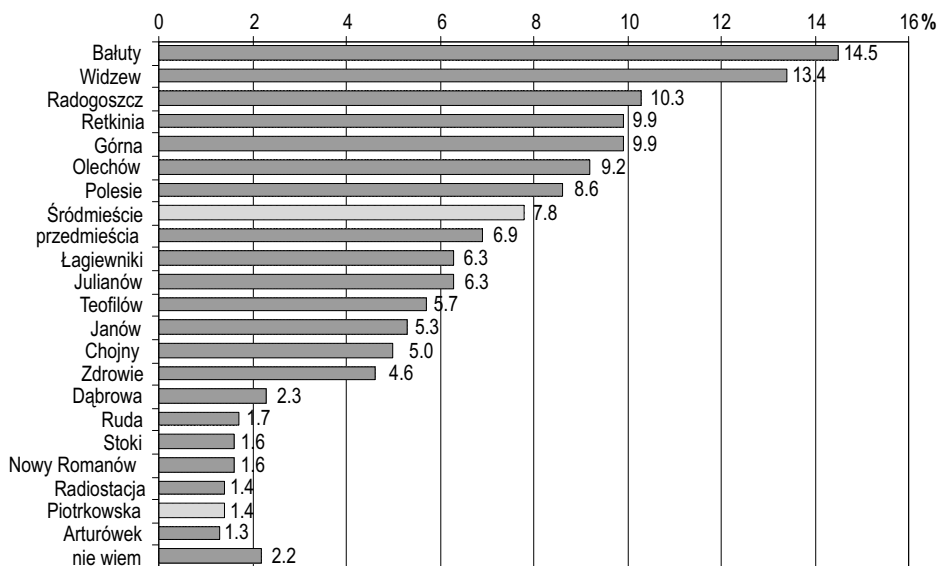


Figure 5. The most attractive places of residence in Łódź – an open question – answers in % (N=700)

created in the second half of the 1970s, were highly evaluated. They were followed by the suburbs of Lodz (not specified) as well as areas traditionally regarded as residentially attractive, *i.e.* Łagiewniki and Julianów [see Kaczmarek 1996]. The inner city was chosen by nearly 8% of respondents (54 people), and Piotrkowska Street was spontaneously pointed to as an attractive place to settle down only by 2 persons (Figure 5).

The respondents who chose the inner city as the most attractive part of Lodz to live pointed mainly to the practical and functional, as well as aesthetic and cultural (to a smaller degree) assets of this district (Figure 6).

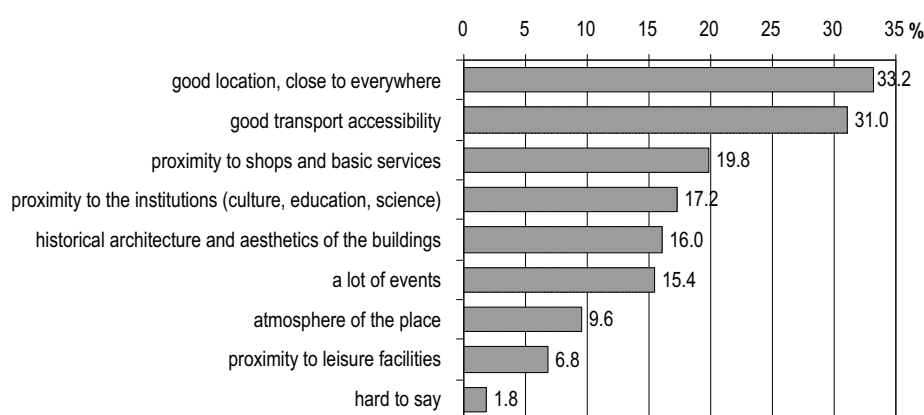


Figure 6. The causes of the high residential attractiveness of Lodz inner city – an open question, post-categorized – answers in % (N = 54)

The inner city was quoted much more often as the least attractive place to live in Lodz, because nearly half of the respondents regarded it as such (Figure 7).

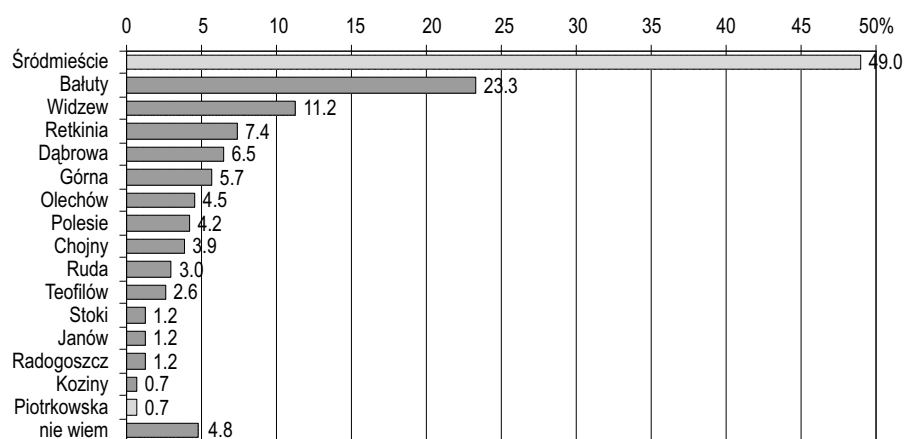


Figure 7. The least attractive residential places in Lodz – an open question – answers in % (N = 700)

The inner city was pointed to as the least attractive mainly due to the devastation of the buildings, lack of safety and high crime rate, noise, heavy street traffic, old, substandard buildings and the type of inhabitants (Figure 8). Piotrkowska Street itself was considered to be the least attractive place in Lodz by 5 persons who pointed first of all to the noise, filth, heavy street traffic and high cost of maintenance.

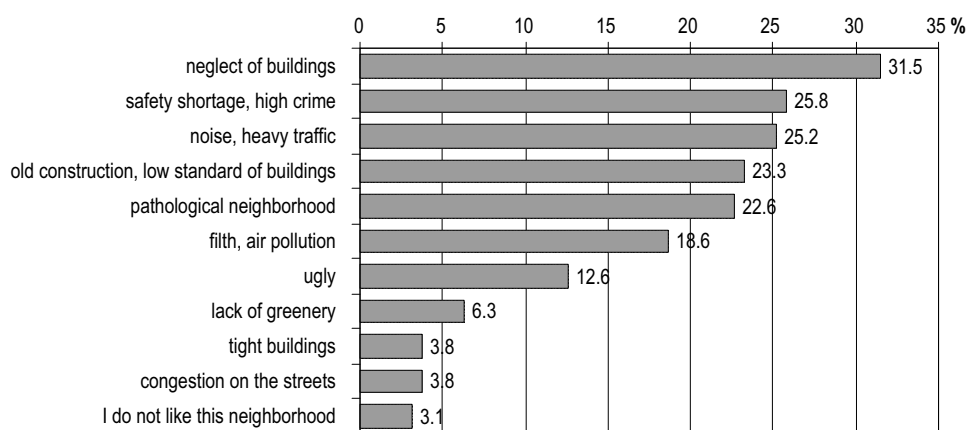


Figure 8. The causes of the low residential attractiveness of Lodz inner city – an open, post-categorized question – answers in % (N = 343)

The assets quoted by the respondents as the most important in the evaluation of a place of residence included ecological (environmental), aesthetic, functional and social advantages (Fig. 9).

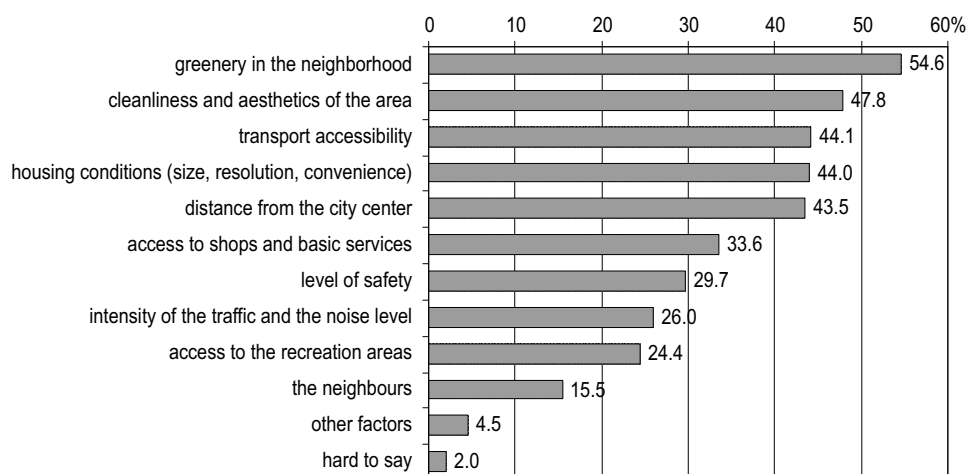


Figure 9. The most important assets of the place of residence taken into account in the residential preferences of Lodz inhabitants – an open, post-categorized question – answers in % (N = 700).

As regards the preferred types of buildings, few respondents (less than 8%) chose tenement houses dominating the city centre, over a half – detached one-family houses and nearly one fourth – blocks of flats. Tenement houses are the least attractive architectural form for over a half of the respondents (Table 1).

Table 1

The most and the least preferred residential buildings
– closed question (N = 700)

Types of buildings	Attractiveness evaluation (in % of indications)	
	most preferred	least preferred
Detached one-family houses	52.6	1.9
Block buildings from the socialist period	15.6	15.7
New block buildings erected after 1990	8.7	10.7
Inner city tenement houses	7.9	51.9
Apartment buuildings	6.6	6.8
Terraced houses	3.9	3.1
I don't know	4.7	9.9

Source: See Fig. 2 (Tabs. 1-5).

The few respondents (only 55 persons) who appreciated the attractiveness of the inner city tenement houses, most often stressed the aesthetic assets of this architectural form as well as their individual preferences (Table 2).

Table 2

The causes of the high residential attractiveness
of the inner city tenement houses of Lodz
– an open, post-categorized question (N = 55)

Answers	%
Attractive architecture	23.5
I like them, I like such buildings	14.8
Large flats	12.3
I have always lived in a tenement house	9.9
Special atmosphere	9.9
Good relations with the neighbours	7.4
High flats	4.9
Attractive flats	4.9
Low cost of maintenance	3.7
Solid	3.7
Comfortable	2.5
High standard flats	2.5

A much bigger group (363 persons), for whom tenement houses were the least attractive form of buildings, stressed their devastation, poor state of repair, low standard and lack of greenery around (Table 3).

Table 3

The causes of the low residential attractiveness
of the inner city tenement houses in Lodz
– an open, post-categorized question N = 363)

Answers	%
Negligence	25.1
Poor state of repair	15.9
Lack of modern conveniences, low standard of buildings	11.2
Lack of greenery around	7.5
Ugly, neglected yards	6.7
High maintenance costs	6.2
Filth	5.5
Pathological neighbourhood	5.2
Lack of safety, high crime rate	5.2
Cold, flats, hard to warm up	4.5
High flats	3.5
Unfunctional flats	3.5

All respondents were asked whether they would like to live in Piotrkowska Street and a great majority of them (75%) gave the negative answer (Table 4).

Table 4

Willingness to live in Piotrkowska Street (N = 700)

Answers	%
Definitely yes	4.4
Rather yes	5.5
Rather not	14.3
Definitely not	60.7
Hard to say	15.1

The main reasons why the respondents were unwilling to live in Piotrkowska Street included the level of noise, crowdedness and street traffic (Figure 10).

A great majority of the few (10%) respondents who would like to settle down in Piotrkowska Street would prefer to live in revitalized, pre-war tenement houses (Table 5).

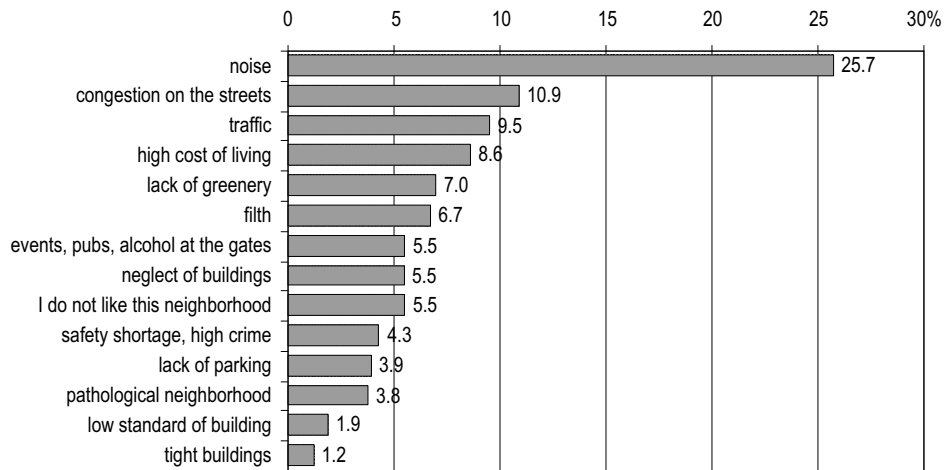


Figure 10. The causes of the low valorization of Piotrkowska Street as a potential place of residence – an open, post-categorized question – answers in % (N = 525)

Table 5

The types of preferred residential buildings in Piotrkowska Street (N = 70)

Type of building	%
Revitalized pre-war tenement house	57.1
New tenement house	18.6
Socialist block of flats	14.3
New apartment building	8.6
I don't know	1.4

Taking into account the valorization of individual sections of Piotrkowska Street, the respondents believe that the buildings which are more attractive to settle down are located in its northern part, between Liberty Square and Piłsudskiego Street. The sections most frequently quoted as attractive were Jaracza-Zielona Street and Liberty Square – Rewolucji Street. The southern part of the street was evaluated much lower. On the one hand, it may result from the greater attractiveness of the northern section of the street, on the other hand, however, it may be caused by the fact that as the more representative and better equipped with shops and services it is more often visited by the inhabitants of Lodz and, consequently, better perceived.

Conclusions

The analysis of the study results showed that Lodz's inner city is an area of a relatively low residential attractiveness. Answering the open question about the area

where they would least like to live, nearly half of the respondents pointed to the inner city. An equally small group of Lodz inhabitants would like to live in Piotrkowska Street.

The causes of the unwillingness to live in this area included first of all the neglected state of the buildings, filth, noise, lack of safety and pathological neighbourhood. The few respondents who pointed to the inner city as the most attractive area to live usually mentioned good location, the charm of old buildings, as well as the large number of events held there and the close proximity of various establishments (shops, services, cultural facilities). The inner city area is appreciated more by the younger and better educated Lodz inhabitants, as well as by those who form one-person households. It is also evaluated better by the respondents who already live there.

The results confirm those obtained in previous studies, which proved low valorization of the central area of Lodz [see Groeger 2004; Szkuřat 2004; Tobiasz-Lis 2013]. In this respect, the situation in Lodz is exceptional in comparison to other large cities in Poland due to the age and ownership form of the housing substance in the city centre (a considerable majority of pre-war buildings belonging to the city), as well as poor state of repair and low standard. The long-degraded and decapitalized inner city full of tenement houses was an “escape” area for years, stigmatized by the inhabitants. Despite the fact that 25 years have passed since the beginning of the transformation, the situation has been improving very slowly. The revitalization of the centre of Lodz and renovation activity promoted by the city authorities, which could change this situation, are limited and too slow to significantly raise the residential attractiveness of this area in the next few years.

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