

Tamed Ugliness: The Problems of Shaping and Appreciating the Aesthetics of Polish Urban Spaces

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Abstract

This article is an attempt to compile the existing knowledge from many fields about the aesthetics of Polish urban space: the conditions of its creation, its perception, and the problems it currently faces, of which a pressure for absolute aestheticisation appears to be the most dangerous. Through a multidisciplinary literature review as well as an analysis of public discourse and interviews with experts, the author attempts to answer the question about why there is such a large discrepancy in the assessment of the aesthetics of urban spaces in Poland, as well as how this is influenced by cultural, legal, administrative, and historical conditions.

Keywords

aesthetics of public space, urban aesthetics, cityscape, spatial management, Polish cultural landscape, post-socialist urban culture

Introduction

While observing the Polish public discourse, waves of interest in the urban aesthetics become apparent. Every now and then, the discussion surrounding the question about why Poland is so unsightly returns, which usually happens in response to the publicising of the exceptionally unsuccessful aestheticisation or revitalisation of a public space. Public concern for the state of the aesthetics in Poland has been growing as a result of the publication of every high-profile book about its collapse, or with the approaching local government elections.

In the 2014 survey titled *Poles about architects*, conducted by the Public Opinion Research Centre (2014), 67% of Poles stated that they were satisfied with the aesthetics of Polish cities. While these results surprised the Society of Polish Architects and City Planners – which for years had been proclaiming the decline of the aesthetics of the Polish cityscape at conferences and industry meetings – they were widely echoed by public opinion. They were especially surprising in the context of the growing media discussion about the ugliness of Poland.

The media more and more frequently have claimed that: „Our streets look like a fair” (this quote comes from the radio programme titled “Our whole, ugly Poland”; Panek 2013, par. 2). Between 2012–2015, two popular reports were published that were entirely devoted to the poor condition of the aesthetics of public space in Poland (Sarzyński 2012; Springer 2013a). During this period, there was also widespread publicity about the government’s work on the so-called „Landscape Law,” an act that was supposed to save the landscape of Polish towns and villages. Why is there such a discrepancy in the valuation of the aesthetics of Polish cities? Is Poland truly so unsightly, and if so, why do not most Poles seem to notice it?

The research problem of this study is the difference in the valuation of the aesthetics of Polish cities by their inhabitants, experts, and between their opinions and the actual image of Polish urban spaces. The author tried to extract the reasons for the present-day condition of the Polish urban landscape in terms of management, law, culture, and complicated historical and political conditions. Those circumstances, despite their local character, reflect a certain pattern of cultural influence on the space of the entire post-socialist region. In Polish urban studies, no multidisciplinary synthesis of the conditions of the surprising attitude of modern Polish society towards the aesthetics of urban space has appeared yet.

The following considerations are the aftermath of the work titled *The Process of the Aestheticisation of Public Space in Poland* (Gralewska 2014), many years of professional work in spatial development, and participation in numerous expert workshops, consultation meetings, and conferences. This long-term observation of the winding path of this topic in the public discourse allowed the author to adopt a broader perspective on these seemingly unsolvable questions.

Materials and methods

The article focuses on modern large Polish cities. It is in them where attempts to beautify and recreate urban space are the most intense and where the community response is strong. However, this discussion also applies to small towns, where, mainly due to the low involvement of urban planning experts and enthusiasts, Polish aesthetic (dis)tastes are most readily apparent in the urban space.

The author reviewed literature from the fields of history, urban planning, geography, cultural studies, philosophy, and environmental psychology. Public discourse has also been analysed by means of examining Polish laws, public opinion polls, the nationwide media, and social media. Moreover, two individual in-depth interviews were conducted with the then heads of the Public Space Aesthetics Departments of two Polish cities, namely Warsaw and Gdańsk.

For the review, mainly Polish scientific literature of the 21st century was selected. This was justified by the need to adopt the point of view of reflections or research conducted in the Polish socio-cultural reality. Reference was made to reportages from the 2010s documenting changes in the perception of aesthetics and beauty in the face of the boom of social media and their pressure on “fast aesthetics”.

Results and discussion

To understand the aesthetics of space

A subjective feeling of thrill, concentration, admiration for perfection, joy, deep reflection, a desire for closer recognition, a sense of participation in something sublime and permanent, which guides us towards the human community, as well as a feeling of enriching our own identity – all this is called an aesthetic experience (Ziołowicz & Szejnabis-Zdyb 2012). How is space supposed to respond to such a wide spectrum of emotions and feelings? According to environmental psychology, the aesthetics of space involves „actions aimed at defining, understanding and, consequently, shaping such features of the environment that would be a source of pleasant experiences” (Bell et al. 2004, p. 724).

The literature repeatedly quotes that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. „The traditional conception of an aesthetic experience assumes a certain immediacy: I arrived, I saw, I experienced” (Potocka 2007, p. 165). However, beauty and aesthetics are not equivalent notions. The conceptual framework of the aesthetics of space is more than spatial order, but still less than beauty of space. Aesthetics is guided by sensory cognition – beauty is detached not only from existence, but also from nature. For the ancient and medieval authors, beauty „went up”, i.e. it appealed to the intellect, while aesthetics descends to the level of sensual qualities (Jaroszyński 2002). Beauty refers to immaterial, even absolute values, while aesthetics refers to physicality, i.e. to matters accessible to the human senses.

A great deal of knowledge about aesthetics of space is provided by environmental psychology, particularly in the work of researchers such as Denis Dutton (2010), Stephen Kaplan and Rachel Kaplan (1975 after Bell et al. 2004), or Maria Lewicka (2012) et al. Regardless of cultural differences or individual tastes, all people have similar biological and social needs, and are characterised by similar physical features that determine what environments can become ‘affordances’ that allow their needs to be met (Gibson 1979 and 1986 after Bell et al. 2004). Kaplan’s preference model essentially just adds that people are looking for both calming and stimulating impulses in space, but never at the same time. The readability and harmony of space satisfies the need for control.

Features such as the complexity and mysteriousness of the environment enable people to improve their skills and fulfil their need for engagement and growth.

According to Abraham Maslow (1948 after Lewicka 2012), human needs form a hierarchically-ordered system based on the principles of relative advantage, in which the level of satisfaction of each need is significant, as they all influence each other. Expectations of a high level of aesthetics in space generally appear after a relatively high level of satisfaction is reached with regard to all needs lower in the hierarchy. The need for an aesthetic environment, belonging to the group of self-fulfilment, is based on contact/being with something stimulating, which enriches the quality of human life (see Figure 1). Achieving higher and higher levels of needs' satisfaction – beginning from the basic need to survive – is a marker of human growth.

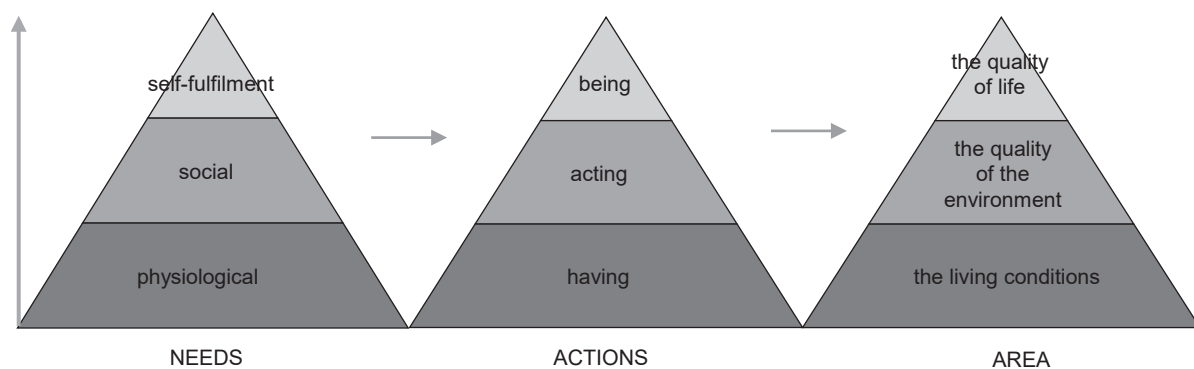


Figure 1. Needs, activities, and areas of life structured in the Maslow's pyramid

Source: own study based on Porteous 1996, p. 7.

From the theoretical point of view, however, the perception of space is strongly dependent on the psychological and cultural construction of the recipient. There are two layers of the perception of space (Lisowski 2003): the objective layer, dominated by rational aspects related to the usability of space, and the subjective layer, based on emotional aspects, where space is a source of aesthetic and intellectual experiences. The first two stages of perception are strongly conditioned by the psychosomatic abilities of the recipient, while the remaining ones depend on the cultural filter (see Figure 2). In this process, we cannot forget about habituation. By constantly operating in places overloaded with stimuli or arranged accidentally, a person becomes insensitive, indifferent to the need for beauty, unable to make demands in this respect.

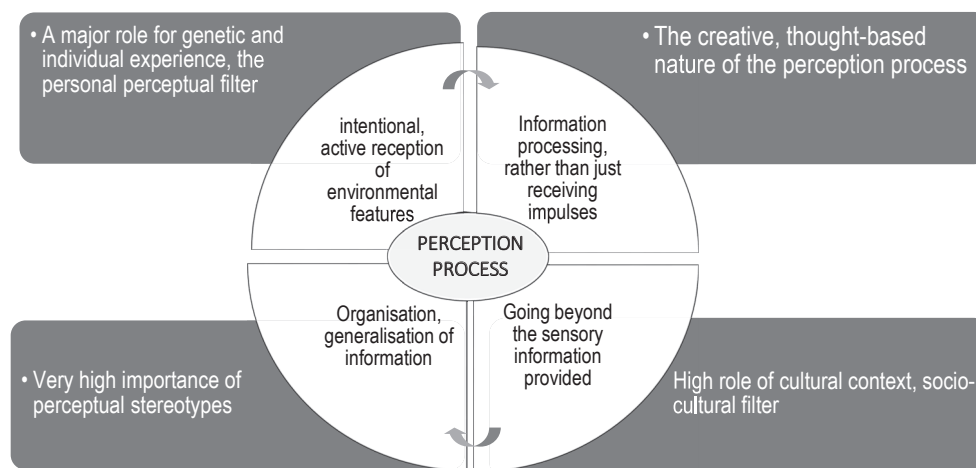


Figure 2. The process of the perception of space

Source: own study based on Kaczmarek and Szafrńska 2007.

To sum up, the perception of the aesthetics of space is generally, but not entirely, a personal issue. Despite the cultural and individual differences or the historical variability of aesthetic needs and the ways of satisfying them, they still constitute one of the universal human needs. Many aesthetic activities, although well-intentioned by their creators, are received critically. On the other hand, actions that irreversibly destroy the beauty of places remain unresponsive by residents and local authorities. In both cases, the question arises: who to blame? The recipient or the author?

Who ruins the aesthetics of the Polish urban space?

Sharon Zukin (1998) wrote that public space, although it belongs to everyone, has always been the subject of great competition for its control. Whoever controls the public space defines the „programme” to represent society. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Polish public space and its aesthetic dimension remain the object of interest of many groups with different, often conflicting interests and needs. In the 2014 study titled *Poles about architects*, the respondents stated that the local authorities had the greatest impact on the appearance of Polish cities (55% of responses), followed *ex aequo* by architects, administration, and building inspection officials (11% each). Investors/Developers ranked only 3rd (8%) and the fewest responses fell on residents (4%).

The control over space has been left entirely to municipalities that continuously are looking for new citizens to pay taxes. „The present transformation often reflects the result of the investor’s cynical self-interest and the ineptitude of public authorities, which translates into the poor quality of our space” (Porębska 2010, p. 156). Questions about the limits of lobbying in Polish local politics are unnecessary. However, it is worth considering the role of the architects and city planners in this game, who direct the discussion on technical solutions of urban projects (in which they are experts), intentionally diverting attention from those whom these projects properly serve.

Local government officials are not and do not have to be experts in spatial order. That is why in many larger cities in Poland aesthetic advisory units are being established. They introduce the look of people who know the urban aesthetics professionally (mainly architects and art historians): in spatial planning, small architecture, public urban art, and even renovation of building facades. However, as Wojciech Wagner, the then (2014) head of the Public Space Aesthetics in the Warsaw Municipality, pointed out, the lack of direct support in legal acts results in a shortage of autonomous driving force and a great dependence on the favour of presidents – and whether they really want aesthetic changes. In Poland, specialists in the field of urban aesthetics still constitute a very small group of officials. There are about 35 positions throughout the country, usually in large provincial cities.

The small number of active experts in the field of spatial aesthetics does not mean a lack of commentators on the visual condition of the Polish space. There is no shortage of them, especially in social media. Their critical comments usually take the form of memes, mocking pictures, criticising failed projects in a shallow and accessible way (see Figure 2). However, these comments do not aim, in most cases, to improve the existing situation or prevent another bad land use project. Their aim is to ward off blame, to point to „the bad guy” who is to blame for Poland’s spatial chaos.

Actions of architects are also viewed critically: „Blocks painted in the colours of the rainbow, gated housing estates, urban sprawl, terrible public space. Polish architects have many sins on their conscience” (Kowalska 2013, par. 1). Architectural designs are too often subordinated to profitability, less functionality, and least of all – aesthetics – and if anything, they are subordinated to satisfying all the expectations of the investor. A private interest often wins with responsibility and professional ethics. However, as architect Jacek Waclawek writes in an open letter to the *Gazeta Wyborcza* newspaper: „We are not spoiling the public space. Give us enlightened and wealthy clients” (Waclawek 2013, par. 6).

The wave-like (over)activity of architects and urban planners commenting on the state of the Polish space often constitutes a mutual flattery of people who in this way express their unity in the aesthetic sensitivity that distinguishes them from the rest of the society. This sensitivity, often acquired during architectural studies, in fact marks them out from the Polish society, which in its educational process has not experienced the teaching of colours, perspective, and composition. In Polish schools, cultural education, including aesthetic education, is limited to microscopically

separated hours of music, art, and literary education (Wuttke and Kisiel 2006). The area of aesthetic education is often underestimated and pushed into the background.

Stary Rynek przed "rewitalizacją"



Stary Rynek po "rewitalizacji", która kosztowała 6,3 mln

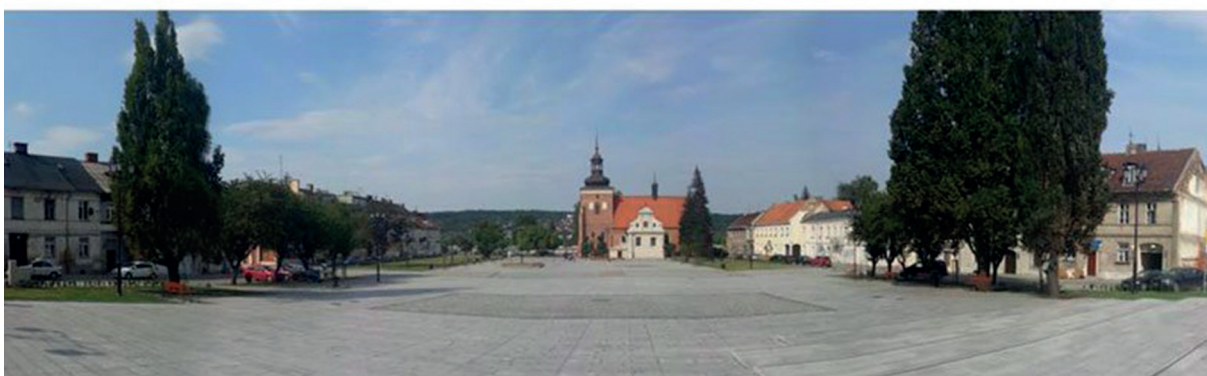


Figure 3. The example of the meme mocking the results of the revitalisation of the Old Market in the city of Wrocław, central Poland. Up: "The Old Market before ,revitalisation"". Down: "The Old Market after 'revitalisation', which cost 6,3 million PLN".

Source: Noch 2014. Fot. Facebook.com/slalomir.bienkowski.

As noted by architect Romuald Loegler, the winner of the Honorary Award of the Association of Polish Architects, Poles have the ambition to live in an aesthetic space, but they do not know where to find the right models (Sarzyński 2012). Apart from glorious exceptions, Polish intellectual elites and professional associations are withdrawing from defining and promoting the canons of the beauty of urban space. There is less and less educational activity, alongside the shortage of good models. In order to change it, it is necessary to leave closed congresses, cathedrals, or studios, and take actions based on public mobilisation. This is neither easy nor profitable.

Who is, then, responsible for the image of the Polish urban space? The subject has not yet been adequately researched in the Polish urban studies. Although geographer Jacek Kotus (2005) asked about the relevant decision-makers in this topic, listing the city authorities, experts, investors, tourists, and residents as candidates, he also leaves the question unanswered. An extensive consideration of the creators of the spatial tastes of Poles was carried out by cultural studies expert Weronika Bryl-Roman (2019), who focused, however, primarily on the aesthetic education system and its insufficiency.

Accusing an impersonal system – i.e. law, education, tradition – is the basis of many publications dealing with the aesthetics of Polish spaces. Is it not the deficit of personality that determines to a greater extent what values a person is guided by, how they act, and what mistakes they make? The lack of trust in the Polish society restricts the limits of the sense of responsibility to the necessary minimum; i.e. responsibility for what one owns. This is reflected in the Polish law, not the other way round.

Law as a tool for regulating the aesthetics of space

The legal system responds to current social problems in the form of constantly emerging and updated legal acts. Although the rules of the aesthetics of space are not directly stipulated in any Polish legal regulations, the law is undoubtedly a tool for the aestheticisation of space (Zeidler and Guss 2021). In the Polish legal system, the aesthetics of space falls within the framework of landscape values and spatial order. Competences regarding the visual aspect of space are scattered in many legal acts and are assigned to various institutions. In the face of fragile and stratified legal regulations, common knowledge of legal regulations is negligible.

According to the Polish law, all decisions regarding spatial transformations should be taken dynamically, be able to foresee the long term, and be considered as a whole (Dymnicka 2013). Spatial planning as a regulatory instrument was created to prevent spatial chaos caused by the maximisation of short-term interests (Markowski after Fojtuch 2021). In the Polish law, the main legal basis is the *Planning and Development Act* (Act of 27 March ... 2003). It gave municipalities all the rights to land development based on local law, consisting of three main tools:

- the study of land development conditions and directions, which covers the area of the entire municipality;
- local spatial development plans, which are the basis for granting building permits;
- land development decisions, also granting building permits.

In the public discourse, the Polish spatial disorder is mainly blamed on land development decisions, which allow almost any construction, with minimal reference to the neighbourhood. Meanwhile, the problem of local spatial development plans is the brevity of their regulations (causing gaps and over-interpretation of the regulations) and the lack of impact on both: the existing buildings and the use of buildings after they have been granted building approval.

Another legal act, the *Act on the Protection of Monuments and Care of Monuments* (Act of 23 July... 2003), determines the tasks of the offices for the protection of monuments and the position of the Monument Conservator, which is „the only institution in Poland performing conscious control over the aesthetics of existing architecture” (Wagner 2009, p. 92) In the territory of the whole country, the entire operational burden is carried by sixteen regional offices (additionally spread over 36 delegations), whose task is to protect all valuable architecture, for example through detailed guidelines for their renovation. In this way, the institution with the strongest legally secured influence on the aesthetics of the Polish space has too few departments and employees to be able to properly exercise this power.

In 2015, in the face of the heated discussion about the aesthetics of the Polish landscape, a dedicated legal act called the *Landscape Act* (The Act of 24 April ... 2015) was adopted. The act allows municipalities to establish the rules for placing advertisements in public space in the act of local law. According to the *Study on shaping the landscape and aesthetics of public spaces in municipalities* (ASM ... 2018), only a few municipalities (1.3%) use this tool and have passed a local law, while a slightly higher percentage (4.6%) work on this project. The act, which was supposed to save the Polish landscape, focused too much on solving the problem of ubiquitous billboards and advertising sheets, and, as architects associated in the Polish Council of Architects emphasise, the biggest problem of the Polish landscape is not advertising at all.

As the then (2014) head of the Public Space Aesthetics Department in the Gdańsk Municipality, Michał Szymański, said, in taking care of the image of the city, the interpretation of legal provisions is crucial. The *Construction Law* in Art. 66 (Act of 7 July... 1994) obliges the owner to maintain the building in a proper aesthetic condition. According to the judgment of the Polish Supreme Administrative Court (Ref. Act: SA / Rz 77/02), the proper aesthetic condition of a building should be understood as maintaining the appearance of the building in good condition as well as ensuring harmony between the building and its surroundings. In theory, both Art. 66 of the *Construction Law* and the judgment of the Supreme Administrative Court allow restrictions on owners who neglect their facilities and thus disfigure the public space. However, if there is no clear regulation that would

directly define who and how should discipline the owners of neglected facilities, this could not be executed¹.

Therefore, an effective regulation of the aesthetics of space is hindered by the interpretation of the right to property, i.e. art. 64 of the *Constitution of the Republic of Poland (The Constitution... 1997)* and art. 140 of the *Civil Code (the Act of 23 April... 1964)*. The current interpretation is so inflexible that it does not allow any changes to private property. In addition, the right to property leads to the right to freedom of building, which has a legal basis in the Polish Constitution. The tribal understanding of property rights is a mainstay of disfigurement of Polish space. "Perhaps in our country it would be premature to introduce a discretionary power. However, Polish laws, full of errors, gaps and inconsistencies, and the adopted line of jurisprudence of administrative courts, are now a direct source of spatial chaos" (Kowalewski et al. 2020, p. 5).

Culture and tradition countering aesthetic urban space

Poles have a peculiar approach to the aesthetics of their surroundings. Cultural historian Roch Sulima (2005, p. 34) notes that "it is hard to imagine today that one of us – in good faith – told a neighbour: you have a mess in your backyard. It would be tantamount to an attack on personal and perhaps national honour". Disorder is familiar, and any attempt to bring order is ascribed to unclear, usually foreign intentions. Any attempts to intervene in this field are treated as symptoms of compulsion, arousing individual emotions of opposition.

Proverbs also tell us that Poles' aesthetic tastes "should not be discussed" either. Poles usually like a lot of completely different things, with an emphasis on 'a lot', 'rich'. In an interview, Tomasz Goźlinski, an entrepreneur and at the same time the originator of the „Bath with a colonnade" described by Filip Springer (2013a), says: „It's not good to have everything in one style. It does not sell well, because everyone has a different taste: one prefers orientalism, someone other classical Luis [from Luis XIV – A.G.], and someone else – Romanesque style" (Rachid Chehab 2011, par. 11). There is no sense of continuity, a certain link between the old and the new, between different ideas. There is also no possibility of cooperation or harmonisation – any centring or compromise in the implementation of plans is commonly treated as a mutual failure.

Another well-known problem is the deeply rooted division into an exaggeratedly decorated facades on the front and backyards hidden from the public eyes, where storerooms, sheds, or scattered things reign. According to Szymański, the guidelines of the Pomeranian Monuments Conservator to the project of regeneration of the Gdańsk Wrzeszcz Dolny district forbade the thermo-modernisation of historic tenement houses... but only from the front. It is important to keep an appearance of order, external representativeness, while from the backyard Poles still prefer to be careless and messy.

The turbulent fate of the Polish nation, and the uncertain and changeable political situation, strongly affected the culture of space management. „Who to blame? This is a difficult question. Maybe still the complacent Sarmatian culture? Perhaps the 'wind from the East,' which brought Byzantine, flashy splendour? Or maybe the years of real socialism, with its overwhelming grey-ness, misery, and mediocrity? Or even the last two decades, with the triumph of mass culture focusing on superficial glitter, with the standardisation of services and goods convenient to large corporations" (Sarzyński 2012, p. 9). On the other hand, it is a mistake to believe that aesthetic individualism has always accompanied Polish society.

¹ The Polish legal system assumes that an administrative decision results from a direct legal basis in a law or regulation. There is a lack of authority to make decisions on spatial management issues in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity. This also generates other limitations: the aesthetics of space is not a task of the municipality according to Article 7 of the Act of 8 March, 1990, on municipal self-government (only spatial order is included therein); therefore, money from the municipal budget cannot be directly allocated to improve aesthetics. This is the reason why many municipalities carry out the process of aestheticisation of public space under the unfortunate slogan of revitalisation.

The changing fortunes of the Polish cityscape and its uncertain future

The need for professional urban design was understood in the Polish territory² in the 19th century. For example, in Gdańsk „there began to be a growing awareness of the inevitability of the process of urban expansion and the need to solve, also on a theoretical basis, the resulting problems. This led to an expansion of knowledge about the functional and aesthetic principles of urban development” (Rozmarynowska 2004, p. 56). This led to an appreciation of the professionalism necessary to solve urban problems, which contributed to the identification of new, previously unknown professions and positions in city halls.

After the country regained its independence in 1918, interest in urban studies flourished again. The interwar period was a time of ambitious undertakings to organise Polish space. Attention was paid not only to economic and infrastructural development, but also to civilisation and culture. Attempts were made to give the country its own flair and style. Poland had one of the best schools of urban planning in Europe, and the solutions created by it were successfully replicated in other countries, e.g. in Germany (Springer 2013a).

Apart from the direct destruction of the urban issue, the Second World War resulted in reluctance and a lack of interest in any activities within the public space. There was no willingness to work on and invest in the aesthetics of space. The period of reclaiming Polish land, or the settlement of the so-called recovered territories (today's western Poland) – as well as many years after it – did not bring anything new to the space. Filip Springer mentions Karpacz, a town in southern Poland: “After the war, nothing happened there. The change of population, the fear that the Germans would return. There were no investments, no renovations” (2013, p. 91).

What the two world wars did not ruin in the Polish landscape, the communism destroyed. „The command economy of the communist Poland ignored public spaces. Both large, ceremonial, and monumental, and especially the intimate inner-neighbourhood ones, seeing them as a threat to its regime” (Łuszczek and Ptasińska 2009, p. 9). Communism effectively destroyed in Poles the sense of ownership, especially of common property, hence potential public spaces remained no one's land, uncultivated.

However, after the great transformation of 1989 (the fall of communism in Poland), capitalism has awakened a widespread insufficiency: a hunger for money, for prestige, for privatisation. The ownership had to be immediately communicated through a flashy form, just like the archaic need to mark territory. The aesthetic standards of post-socialist society were set in opposition to the previous drab greyness, which is why colour, fanciful patterns and individuality were favoured. „After the years of fasting came the years of carnival” (Wrońska for Sarzyński 2012, p. 35).

The dreamed free market has also failed to meet the basic needs of urban residents. Filip Springer vividly describes Warsaw's suburbs, so typical of most large cities in Poland: „A little bit of greenery and some dog faeces, parking lots wherever they happen to be. Nothing here delights, because it was not supposed to delight. It was about satisfying the most primitive hunger a city can have – the hunger for housing. So, there are blocks of flats overlooking blocks of flats” (2013, p. 13). This description shows probably the most important context of the state of the Polish cityscape, namely the many years of neglect of aesthetics, put aside while satisfying the more important needs of the city.

The 21st century is also a new era in the Polish urban culture – the postmodern, individualised era, focused on identification and beauty charm (Kosiński after Łuszczek and Ptasińska 2009). In times when aesthetics is the main currency and the flywheel of the economy, there can be only one direction of change, namely the state of general aestheticisation of the Polish space³. As history shows, following a temporary fashion results in nothing more than another widely argued „*pastelo-*

² For a better understanding of the context, it should be reminded that Poland as a country did not exist at that time, because it was under the Prussian, Russian, and Austrian partitions; the country regained its independence in 1918.

³ The aestheticisation of space is a process which aims to improve the visual condition of space and shape it in a coherent and distinctive way to strongly affect the imagination and senses of the recipients. In Poland, the aestheticisation of space takes three forms in particular: top-down renovation directed by the authorities, bottom-up spontaneous beautification of public spaces and the so-called 'taking art to the streets'. There is a full range of conceptual and organisational solutions in the processes of aestheticisation of space, depending on their participants, methods, or location; the author has devoted much attention to them in her other works.

za" (i.e. thermo-modernisation of buildings using a multitude of often incompatible colours; painting facades in flowers, trees, etc.; Szarzyński 2012; Springer 2013a), „betonoza" (i.e. excessive use of concrete in public spaces; Mancwel 2020), the unification of spaces, with all of them leading to the removal of uniqueness in the nature of Polish urban landscapes.

Conclusions

The poor condition of cityscape in Poland today is the result of the accumulation of many problems and the constant relegation of aesthetics to the second gear. It seems that what has built up over many generations of Poles has still not been cleaned up. Meanwhile, Poland, like most countries in the world, has been hit by an avalanche of new rubbish: plastic, fakes, and others. The untidy Poland still lacks the legal and administrative tools and mental models to protect its citizens from another wave of rubbish.

Looking pessimistically, as the art historian Grzegorz Piątek does, a generational change among decision-makers and legislators is necessary for significant shifts to take place, for example in the Polish Law (after Wybieralski 2013). On the other hand, representatives of the Committee for National Spatial Planning (Kowalewski et al. 2020) are optimistic about the power of virtual pressure, giving as an example the success of social pressure for protection against climate change. However, the author of this article believes that any change in this matter requires going beyond „the bubble for the aesthetically sensitive" (Springer 2013b, par. 7), moving away from blame-shifting and reinforcing the „us versus them" divide. This seems less and less possible in present-day Poland.

In this way, the average Pole⁴, who has some memory of the greyness of communism, in which many goods were unavailable and public property was nobody's property, seeks their place in the times of postmodern splendour. The current legal system is confusing and unclear, but they know that property rights are sacrosanct: „My house is my castle" they said. It took them a lot of effort to buy their own flat or house. They or their housing association makes sure that their yard, and especially the front, is presentable and pretty. Looking at the dense new blocks of flats in the neighbourhood, the evenly trimmed greenery, and new furniture, the person recalls their childhood memories of a rough, concrete housing estate surrounded by vast, open, unspoilt space. Their housing estate is a space straight out of a catalogue, an advertisement, television. Have they heard experts and architects proclaiming that Poland is ugly? Maybe on another street, in another city. Their own front yard is beautiful and well-maintained.

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⁴ According to the government's Statistics Poland, in 2021, the average Pole was 41 years old.

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