

QUANTITY OR QUALITY? THE ASSESSMENT OF LANDSCAPE PHYSIOGNOMY OF THE NEWLY ESTABLISHED RURAL PUBLIC SPACES IN POLESIE REGION

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Abstract. The paper presents an original method for assessing the landscape physiognomy of the rural public spaces. It takes into account both the purely aesthetic qualities as well as those that affect the functionality, attractiveness and significance of a given space. The following features are evaluated: coziness, availability, the nature of the edges, presence of greenery, presence of water ecosystems, presence of landscape dominants and landmarks, opening and view connections, presence of negative elements, local identity and tradition, bendiness, and the nature of light. The method has been applied to evaluate the selected rural public spaces of the Polesie region realized in the years 2008–2015. The study revealed that 40% of the analyzed places were rated positively, 33% neutrally and 27% negatively. The article examines the types of spaces which obtained the highest and the lowest rating position, as well as features that affect this assessment. Besides, the analysis of main advantages and disadvantages of newly created public spaces show direction of their improvement.

Key words: rural public spaces, rural landscape, landscape evaluation, Łęczyńsko-Włodawskie Lakeland

INTRODUCTION

The changes that have been taking place in Poland after the political transformation in 1989 are very intense and multidirectional. They seriously affect both, the socio-economic and spatial development of rural areas [Kay *et al.* 2012]. One of the essential elements of this structure are rural public spaces, which old functions are restored and/or a new ones are added. In recent years a strong, though not the only one, impulse for their renewal are EU funds [Wójcik 2010].

Unfortunately, the success of local governments is usually measured as the amount of used resources not as the quality of the investments.

In the case of the public spaces one of the factor determining its attractiveness is the quality of the landscape. It affects not only the aesthetic perception but also the way in which a given space is used and the intensity of such exploitation [Gehl 1987, Coley *et al.* 1997, Campos and Golka 2005]. Besides, the quality of public space affects the degree of residents identity with a given place and decided whether this place forms an image of a village [Wejhert 1984, Chmielewski 2001, Madurowicz 2006]. This paper presents an original method for assessing the physiognomy of the landscape of rural public space which takes into account both the purely aesthetic qualities as well as those that affect its functionality, attractiveness and significance for users. This method has been tested on a representative sample of 43 rural space located in the Polesie region that have been created in last years. The aim of the paper is therefore twofold. On the one hand it aims to present the authors' method of quality assessment, on the other to assess the newly created rural public spaces based on the comprehensive landscape values criteria. These analyzes are intended to illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of the assessed investments. Such information can be helpful for local governments, designers and users which decide about the future shape of the rural public spaces. Moreover, the study aims to answer the question whether the amount of the space investments can be transpose into the landscape quality and how to improve this quality.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study area is the Łęczyńsko-Włodawskie Lakeland – tourist region located in eastern Poland. It includes twelve municipalities: Cyców, Hańsk, Ludwin, Ostrow Lubelski, Puchaczów, Sosnowica, Spiczyn, Stary Brus, Urszulin, Uścimów, Włodawa and Wola Uhruska. The first stage of the analysis was to develop a list of investments connected with the management of rural public spaces realized in 2008–2015. The data source was the questionnaire which was sent to the local governments. Officials were asked about the location, scope and costs of investments related to the management of public spaces in analyzed period. Then, were selected 43 most representative and typical projects, which were subjected to detailed evaluation. During the fieldwork each of them were evaluated by the authors of the paper based on the following criteria [Soszyński *et al.* 2016]: (1) coziness (the right scale and compactness – the spaces not exceeding 25–30 m are perceived as comfortable); (2) availability (physical and psychological openness; linking with other spaces or objects; readability); (3) the nature of the edges (type of public space' boundaries and its surroundings; the presence of active edges; the type of service facilities and building entrances; degree of fragmentation; the lack of „blind walls”); (4) presence of greenery

(type, quantity, and diversity; the presence of traditional and native species; role of greenery in shading, shielding from the wind and obscure of disharmonious objects); (5) presence of water (availability and visibility of natural reservoirs and maintaining of its ecological role; the presence of artificial reservoirs; security); (6) presence of landscape dominants and landmarks (type of dominant; highlighting of important sites; imagery and clarity of space); (7) openings and viewing connections (view values; quantity and quality of view openings; viewing connections with open landscape; the lack of viewing barriers); (8) the presence of negative elements (substandard buildings; billboards and road signs; technical infrastructure); (9) local identity and tradition (reference to tradition and local identity; creative inspiration and continuation of tradition; the presence of elements and attributes which shape the identity of a place); (10) bendiness (adaptation of walking routes to the lines of visitors movements; the lack of movement obstacles, right angles and long, monotonous straight lines); (11) the nature of light (type of illumination and its role in the creation of intimacy and 'mood' of public space). Each of above criteria were evaluated in three-point scale corresponding to the positive (1 point), neutral (0 points) and negative (-1 point) assessment, and supplemented by a brief characterization of a given public space. Next, on the basis of the cumulative valorization the attractiveness of the landscape of each analyzed places was defined.

RESULTS

In the analyzed period 85 different investments connected to the transformation or creation of public spaces were realized on the study area. The predominant share of the works were undertaken by the local governments (79 investments). Much less initiatives resulted from the efforts of locals (3), tourist organizations (2) and forest managers (1). Most of the realization aimed at renovation or creation of playgrounds located near the community room, firehouses or school (54 investments). Besides, some of the schoolyards are accompanied by sports facilities (including gyms) (13) or amphitheater (1). Some of the realization consist of only an arbor or a bench situating near the community room or firehouse (10 investments). In most of the analyzed municipalities it was also created a small square, mostly located in the front of the municipal office or the community center (8 sites). The third type of analyzed investments are recreation areas (17 areas) created for tourists but also constituting an important meeting and recreation place for residents. They include: beaches, tourist shelters, promenades and recreational complexes.

Analysis showed that points given to public spaces range between -7 and 10 (Table 1). Negatively, between -7 and -3 points, were rated 12 sites constituting 27% of analyzed set, neutrally, between -2 and 2 points – 14 sites (33%) and positively, between 3 and 10 points – 17 sites (40%). Therefore, it can be concluded

Table1. Partial and cumulative evaluation of the physiognomy of the landscape of analyzed public spaces

Public spaces	Coziness	Availability	Edges	Greenery	Water	Dominants	Views	Negative elements	Identity	Bendiness	Lightening	Total
Cyców – sport field	-1	-1	-1	-1	0	0	1	-1	-1	0	1	-4
Cyców – square	0	1	1	-1	0	1	0	0	-1	0	1	2
Zaróbka – firehouse	0	0	-1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-1
Kopina – firehouse	0	0	0	-1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1
Głębokie – beach	1	1	0	-1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	5
Hańsk – village center	-1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	-1	1	3
Osowa – community room	0	1	-1	-1	0	1	1	0	-1	0	0	0
Dubeczno – community centre	-1	0	0	0	0	0	-1	0	-1	0	0	-3
Ludwin – village center	-1	1	1	1	0	0	0	-1	-1	-1	1	0
Dąbrowa – playground	1	-1	0	0	0	0	0	-1	-1	0	0	-2
Rozkopaczew – school	0	-1	-1	1	0	0	0	0	-1	0	0	-2
Jez. Miejskie – beach	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	-1	1	0	0	4
Puchaczów – square	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	-1	1	4
Stara Wieś – playground	-1	1	-1	1	0	-1	0	-1	1	0	0	-1
Turowola – playground	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	4
Brzeziny – firehouse	0	-1	-1	0	0	0	0	-1	0	-1	0	-4
Sosnowica – community centre	-1	-1	-1	-1	0	-1	1	0	0	0	0	-4
Jez. Zagłębcze – walkway	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	-1	-1	0	1	5
Pieszowola – firehouse	1	0	1	0	0	0	-1	-1	0	0	0	0
Orzechów Stary – firehouse	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	7
Zawieprzycze – castle	1	0	-1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	-1	4
Spiczyn – square	1	1	1	0	0	0	-1	0	0	-1	1	2
Kijany – estate	0	-1	0	-1	0	0	0	-1	-1	-1	0	-5
Stary Brus – community room	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	-1	0	1	4
Kołacze – firehouse	1	0	0	-1	0	-1	0	0	-1	0	-1	-3
Wołoskowola – firehouse	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	-1	3
Urszulin – village center	-1	-1	0	0	0	0	-1	-1	-1	-1	0	-6
Urszulin – recreation area	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10
Grabniak – beach	1	0	-1	1	1	1	1	-1	1	1	1	6
Wereszczyn – village center	-1	0	0	1	0	1	0	-1	1	0	0	1
Dębowiec – community room	1	0	-1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	-1	4
Uścimów Stary – sport field	-1	0	-1	-1	-1	-1	1	1	-1	-1	1	-4
Uścimów Stary – school	0	-1	-1	-1	-1	0	-1	0	-1	0	-1	-7

Uścimów Nowy – firehouse	1	-1	-1	-1	0	0	-1	-1	-1	0	0	-5
Okuninka – promenade	-1	0	0	0	1	0	1	-1	0	0	1	1
Orchówek – promenade	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	6
Wolczyny – forest shed	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	4
Sobibór – firehouse	-1	-1	-1	-1	0	0	1	-1	0	0	0	-4
Wola Uhruska – school	0	-1	-1	1	0	-1	-1	-1	0	0	0	-4
Wola Uhruska – beach	-1	1	0	1	1	0	1	-1	1	1	0	4
Uhrusk – school	0	-1	-1	-1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0
Stulno – community room	-1	-1	-1	1	0	1	0	1	1	-1	0	0
Zbereże – firehouse	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	3
Totality	4	0	-11	6	7	11	14	-6	0	-6	9	x

that the quality of analyzed public spaces is very diverse. The area of the highest quality occurred to be a recreational area in the Urszulin village (10 points). High ratings also gained the surroundings of a firehouse in Old Orzechów (7 points), a promenade in Orchówek (6 points), and the beach in Grabniak (6 points) (Fig. 1). Generally, high scored were given to the recreational areas and areas located near the firehouses and community rooms. This high rating position mainly derives from the appropriate use of environmental values, such as the presence of water, greenery, scenic openness and valuable landscape dominants. Besides, many of high scored places possess specific features referring to the local tradition.



Fig. 1. Recreation area of the Rotcze lake in the Grabniak village (fot. D. Soszyński, 2016)

The lowest rating position was given to the surroundings of a school in Stary Uścimów (-7 points), surroundings of a firehouse in Nowy Uścimów (-7 points), a village center in Urszulin (-6 points), and the public space in the Kijany estate (-5 points). Therefore, low-rated occurred to be almost all areas lo-

cated near the big schools and sports grounds, as well as spaces in housing estates, some firehouse, and – which is especially worrisome – all of analyzed spaces located near the community centers. Low ratings derives mainly from the features of the spatial arrangement, such as the lack of active edges, spatial isolation, poor-quality fences, the lack of positive features such as high quality dominants and forms greenery, and the lack of objects references to the local traditions (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Playground in the front of a firehouse in the Sobibór village (fot. D. Soszyński, 2016)

The cumulative evaluation revealed clearly that the most important features enhancing the qualities of newly created public rural spaces in Polesie are: properly used natural, cultural and landscape values of a given site and the relatively good lighting determining their perception after dark. The most important problems of many places occurred to be: non-unjustified bendiness (geometrical sidewalks which do not correspond to the actual movement of pedestrians), the presence of disharmonious elements (billboards, garbage cans, centrally located parking lots, neglected buildings and elements of technical infrastructure), poor accessibility and the lack of features creating the identity of a place. Besides, negative impact on the assessment has the lack of active edges and a large share of edge of a negative character (fences and buildings facilities).

CONCLUSIONS

Conducted analysis showed that positively assessed public spaces outnumbered those assessed negatively. But in other words, it can be confused that only 40% of analyzed public spaces were rated positively. Moreover, they high rating position derives primarily from the environmental, cultural and scenic values i.e. natural features existing for a long time, requiring only its maintenance or high-

lighting. Low-rated were features on which decide space managers and architects such as the presence of objects creating the identity of a place, proper formation of greenery, maintenance of view opening, or the assurance of active edge. In conclusion, it may be said that a relatively large number of projects does not necessarily transpose to its quality. Constructive criticism indicating basic deficiencies and negligence as well as indication of positive examples should lead to the quality improvement of rural public spaces in the future.

The valorization also shows that the issue of development of public space should not be directed to only one selected entity, even if it is a school or a community center. Such procedure leads therefore to 'the appropriation' of these places by one group of interests and as a result to their physical and psychological isolation. It should be also emphasize, that the quality of the space does not necessarily depend on founding amount. Among the high rated public spaces are also places created by the low cost and with significant participation of residents.

It seems that the study and its results confirmed the accuracy of the method used. It allowed to assess the quality of rural public spaces, taking into account both the purely aesthetic qualities as well as those that affect the functionality, attractiveness and significance of the space. Certainly, its wider application would require an assessment conducted by a larger number of observers, which would reduce its subjectivity. However, taken into account only a small group of evaluators, the results show the advantages and disadvantages of a given space or analyzed types of space. Therefore, they have practical applications in the process of transformation and creation of rural public spaces.

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ILOŚĆ CZY JAKOŚĆ? OCENA FIZJONOMII KRAJOBRAZU NOWO POWSTAŁYCH WIEJSKICH PRZESTRZENI PUBLICZNYCH NA POLESIU

Streszczenie. Artykuł prezentuje autorską metodę oceny fizjonomii krajobrazu wiejskich przestrzeni publicznych. Uwzględnia ona zarówno walory czysto estetyczne, jak i te, które wpływają na funkcjonalność, atrakcyjność i znaczenie danej przestrzeni dla użytkowników. Ocenie podlegają cechy, takie jak: kameralność, dostępność, charakter krawędzi, obecność zieleni, obecność wody, obecność dominant i wyróżników krajobrazu, otwarcia i powiązania widokowe, obecność elementów negatywnych, tożsamość i tradycja lokalna, nieprostokreślność, charakter oświetlenia. Metoda zastosowana została do oceny wybranych przestrzeni publicznych zrealizowanych w latach 2008–2015 na obszarze Polesia. Na podstawie przeprowadzonych analiz tylko 40% analizowanych miejsc oceniono jednoznacznie pozytywnie, 33% obojętnie i 27% pozytywnie. W artykule omówione zostały typy przestrzeni ocenione najwyżej i najniżej, a także cechy, które zadecydowały o tych ocenach. Ukazano w ten sposób generalne wady i zalety wszystkich realizacji a tym samym kierunki działań zmierzających do poprawy stanu przestrzeni wiejskiej.

Słowa kluczowe: wiejskie przestrzenie publiczne, krajobraz wiejski, waloryzacja krajobrazu, Pojezierze Łęczyńsko-Włodawskie