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Permanently unsatisfied needs of Wrocław citizens

10 years ago Eugeniusz Bagiński wrote: *the priority investments in Wrocław are the road improvements and building the bypass* [priorytet w całości inwestycji w mieście – to remont dróg. Wniosek następny, komplementarny z wnioskiem poprzednim, to budowa obwodnic] [1, p. 112]. The opinion survey carried out in the years 1996–1997 among 1481 citizens showed that the system of transport was the most important disadvantage of the city. Surprisingly, a similar study I conducted in 2007 among 3288 citizens yielded almost the same results: the most common requests of respondents were the road improvements and building the bypass [2]. Therefore a question emerges: what did actually change in Wrocław during the last decade? Does the opinion of respondents

reflect the factual problems of the city or is it just a stereotype?

This paper describes the changes in the needs and in the expectations of Wrocław citizens in the years 1997–2007. The comparison between attitudes of respondents was possible due to using the same question in the two above mentioned surveys. This question was: “If the decisions concerning Wrocław depended on you, what would you indicate as the most urgent issue for the city?” [Gdyby od Pani/Pana zależały decyzje dotyczące miasta Wrocławia, to co Pani/Pan uznałaby/uznał za najpilniejsze (pierwszoplanowe) dla Wrocławia?]. The answers reveal the unsatisfied needs of the inhabitants of the city – see Table 1.

Table 1. The most urgent issues for Wrocław in the years 1997 and 2007. The first 5 answers. Number of respondents answering the question “If the decisions concerning Wrocław depended on you, what would you indicate as the most urgent issue for the city?”: 1481 in 1997 and 3258 in 2007. Source: [1, p. 113] and my own research

Tabela 1. Najpilniejsze sprawy dla Wrocławia w opinii respondentów w latach 1997 i 2007. Pierwsze pięć odpowiedzi. Liczba respondentów, którzy udzielili odpowiedzi na pytanie „Gdyby od Pani/Pana zależały decyzje dotyczące miasta Wrocławia, to co Pani/Pan uznałaby/uznał za najpilniejsze (pierwszoplanowe) dla Wrocławia?”: 1481 w 1997 r. i 3258 w 2007 r.

Źródło: [1, s. 113] i badania własne autora

Answer	1997		Answer	2007	
	Number of respondents	% of respondents		Number of respondents	% of respondents
Road improvements	486	32.82	Road improvements	1308	40.15
Building the bypass	305	20.59	Building the bypass	1087	33.36
Facades of buildings	221	14.92	Public transport improvement*	682	20.93
Renovations of the old buildings	138	9.32	Renovations of the pre-war residential areas	417	12.8
Reconstruction of the transport system	134	9.05	Traffic jams reduction	233	7.15

* including: increasing the speed, the frequency and the length of public transport, raising the quality of means of public transport (buses and tramways), building an underground railway system

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The suggestions put forward by the citizens may be divided into 2 groups: transport improvements and renovation of old buildings. Throughout the years they remain generally invariable, some slight changes occur only in their proportion to each other.

Firstly, the growing importance of transport problems may be observed. Previously they constituted 3 of 5 positions and now 4 of 5. The first two places are permanently occupied by the road improvements and building the bypass. Other answers in this group are: reconstruction of the transport system (1997), public transport improvements (2007) and traffic jams reduction (2007).

The most important suggestion made by the citizens – road improvements – is accepted by the local authorities. Many roadworks are carried out in the city, including surface exchange and widening the streets. However, these improvements result in increased traffic congestion which in turn brings further dissatisfaction of respondents and significantly affects the image of the city.

The problem of traffic jams is quite a new issue in Wrocław. Its appearance in the opinion of respondents reflects the dynamic development of car transport in the recent years. Wrocław is often perceived as the most congested city in Poland, though such a statement is not entirely true. An experiment conducted by the journalists of “Gazeta Wyborcza” in 2008 shows that the average speed of a car driving in the rush hour from the Wrocław



Fig. 2. Persisting problem of Wrocław: pre-war residential areas. Śępa-Szarzyńskiego Street (photos: J. Jerczyński and Ł. Damurski)

Il. 2. Stały problem Wrocławia: przedwojenne kamienice. Ulica Śępa-Szarzyńskiego (fot. J. Jerczyński i Ł. Damurski)



Fig. 1. Persisting problem of Wrocław: transport. Tęczowa Street (photos: K. Nowak and Ł. Damurski)

Il. 1. Stały problem Wrocławia: transport. Ulica Tęczowa (fot. K. Nowak i Ł. Damurski)

city centre to the suburbs is 14.4 km/h whereas in many other cities it is much lower (e.g. in Warszawa 11.5 km/h, in Kraków 10.4 km/h, in Gdansk 8.1 km/h) – see [6]. Speed maps drawn using the GPS also prove that Wrocław is not as congested as other big cities in Poland – see [5].

Notwithstanding the actions taken up by the local authorities and the stereotypical judgements about Wrocław the prevailing opinion of citizens remained unchanged during the last 10 years. Apparently, their requests have not been granted so far: many roads still require improvement, the bypass is not finished and congestion is substantially increasing – see Figure 1. In such a situation the citizens may feel that one of their fundamental needs – the need of communication – is not satisfied. And it is not only about the transport between the home and the workplace, but also about the communication in general. Ironically, the promotional campaign of the city is organized around the slogan “Wrocław. The meeting place”. How can it be a “meeting place” if almost all its citizens sit in one huge traffic jam?

The second group of respondents’ suggestions deals with the condition of Wrocław’s residential areas dated back to the late 19th and early 20th century – see Figure 2. In the survey of 1997 there were two answers connected with this topic: “facades of buildings” and “renovations of the old buildings”. In 2007 the problem of old buildings declined in importance and was represented by one answer only: “renovations of the pre-war residential areas”. This change of

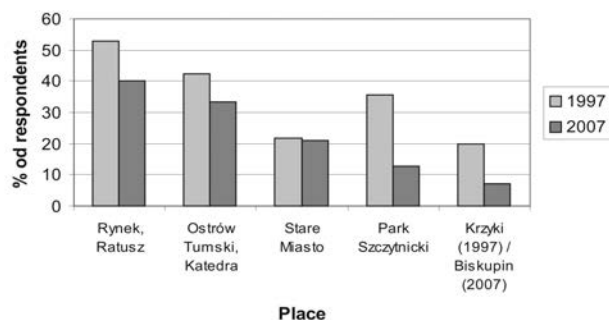


Fig. 3. Places liked most in Wrocław in the years 1997 and 2007 (the first 5 positions). Source: [1, p. 37] and my own research. Number of respondents who answered the question: 1453 in 1997 and 3275 in 2007

II. 2. Miejsca najbardziej lubiane we Wrocławiu w latach 1997 i 2007 (pierwsze pięć pozycji). Źródło: [1, s. 37] i badania własne autora. Liczba respondentów, którzy odpowiedzieli na pytanie „Które części, fragmenty miasta Wrocławia najbardziej się Pani/Panu podobają?”: 1453 w 1997 r. i 3275 w 2007 r.

proportion may be explained by two simultaneous phenomena. Firstly, as it was already stated, the situation of transport in Wrocław worsened during the last 10 years and in consequence, its position on the list of citizens' discontents grew, pushing down the problem of pre-war buildings. Secondly, some positive changes were introduced in the historical urban space of Wrocław: selected buildings were refurbished, both in the city centre (Rynek, Solny Square, Świdnicka Street, Ruska Street, Oławska Street, Szewska Street) and in more distant areas (like Bema Square, Dubois Street, the main Train Station, Grunwaldzki Square). This starting urban renewal partly satisfies the needs of respondents, which is visible in the results of the study.

Another interesting aspect of the people's opinion about Wrocław concerns places liked and disliked. Juxtaposition of the results of the 1997 survey and of the 2007 survey proves that the most approved places remain generally the same in the last decade (see Fig. 3). Conclusions drawn from this fact may be as follows. Places like Rynek, Ostrów Tumski, Stare Miasto and Park Szczytnicki are very consistent, unvarying landmarks of Wrocław and become some kind of icons of the city: well known, easily recognized and widely approved. Second, that these most liked places satisfy the needs of citizens and therefore may serve as a model for other areas of the city.

On the contrary, the list of the places disliked has changed significantly since 1997 (see Tab. 2). The Traugutta Street has dropped to the 2nd position and the first place has been taken by a more general category “derelict urban areas”. City centre and Śródmieście, previously on the second and fifth positions, have vanished. The blocks of flats residential areas (Kozanów, Nowy Dwór and others) retained their ranks.

Visible changes in the citizens' opinion show the persisting problem of post-socialist residential areas (answers “blocks of flats”, “Nowy Dwór” and “Kozanów” comprised 3 of 5 most disliked places in 2007) and suggest that these places require immediate improvement if the city landscape is to satisfy the needs of Wrocław inhabitants. Simultaneously, the negative image of pre-war residential areas (in 2007 represented only by 2 places: “Traugutta Street” and “derelict urban areas”) has enhanced probably due to the above-mentioned spectacular renovations in the city centre and some further areas.

Table 2. Places disliked most in Wrocław in the years 1997 and 2007 (the first 5 positions). Source: [1, p. 42] and my own research. Number of respondents who answered the question: 1226 in 1997 and 3236 in 2007

Tabela 2. Miejsca najbardziej nie lubiane we Wrocławiu w latach 1997 i 2007 (pierwsze pięć pozycji). Źródło: [1, s. 42] i badania własne autora. Liczba respondentów, którzy odpowiedzieli na pytanie „Które części, fragmenty miasta Wrocławia najbardziej się Pani/Panu nie podobają?”: 1226 w 1997 r. i 3236 w 2007 r.

1997		2007	
answer	% of respondents	answer	% of respondents
Traugutta Street and surrounding area	35.4	derelict pre-war urban areas	24.85
City centre (Stare Miasto, Grunwaldzki Square, Piłsudskiego Street etc.)	17.86	Traugutta Street and surrounding area	18.57
New residential areas (Kozanów, Kosmonautów, Gaj etc.)	16.88	blocks of flats residential areas in general	17.95
Nowy Dwór	13.95	Nowy Dwór	17.55
Śródmieście	12.97	Kozanów	11.77

To conclude we may notice that most of the urgent changes proposed by the citizens in 1997 have not been implemented. The gradual improvement of transport infrastructure is not big enough to be visible to the respondents and the renovation of some old buildings hardly complies with their persisting requests¹. The performance of particu-

lar municipal policies and programmes aiming to clean up the image of Wrocław (like for example [3, 4]) is quite poor. They should be given a high priority so that the next decade could bring considerable positive changes in the condition of Wrocław. We need to make every endeavour to solve the transport problems and renew the derelict pre-war residential areas. If not, they will become the dominant negative elements of the image of the city.

Eventually I need to note that regularly conducted, comparable opinion surveys are a very good source of

¹ Or maybe the needs of citizens are growing faster than the spatial development of the city.

knowledge about the citizens' needs and expectations. They also reflect the changes in the quality of life as perceived by the local urban communities and therefore may serve as a measure of the development of the city. The citizens' opinion may be interpreted not only as a direct reaction to the changes in the city's landscape, but also as a reflection of civilizational level of a particular urban area. For example the unsolved problem of Wrocław roads and transport system gives a strong warning to the

local authorities about the condition of the city. Another big issue – disliked post-socialist blocks of flats – suggest that this kind of architecture is not approved by the citizens and that it does not offer a desired quality of life. The good news about the civilizational development of Wrocław are that many pre-war residential areas are ranked higher than 10 years earlier and that many roadworks are under way, giving the hope to improve the image of the city in the future.

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Niezaspokojone potrzeby mieszkańców Wrocławia

Pomimo dynamicznego rozwoju gospodarczego Wrocławia w ostatnich latach najpilniejsze potrzeby mieszkańców pozostają niezaspokojone. Wyniki badań ankietowych wskazują, że w latach 1997–2007 wrocławianie najczęściej zgłaszali dwie grupy problemów: niewydolny system

transportowy i zaniedbane obszary przedwojennych kamienic. Co jest źródłem stale utrzymujących się mankamentów Wrocławia? Jakie działania należy podjąć w celu poprawy wizerunku miasta? W prezentowanym artykule autor poszukuje odpowiedzi na te pytania.

Key words: Wrocław, citizens' needs, image of city

Słowa kluczowe: Wrocław, potrzeby mieszkańców, wizerunek miasta