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The city space and maladjustment

*Unfortunately, I know how much
separates the blocks from the houses.
It's too far to see up close
reasons for fear, causes of anger.*

Masala: Blokowiska / Posiadłości (High-rise blocks / Houses)

When the representatives of the social sciences analyse factors influencing human behavior, its personality or identity, they seek to develop theoretical constructs that describe the determinants of human experience and activity. As Charles Tittle writes, these can be simple constructs or ones of a more complicated nature; from the point of view of rehabilitation they specify the variables used to create models explaining the mechanisms of behavior whose manifestation is described as social maladjustment.¹

The environment is a significant variable from Tittle's point of view. It is one of the basic meta-concepts in pedagogy. It denotes the external area in which a subject must operate and a proving ground for the acquisition of social experience. There is also the space where the socialising processes are realised that are intra-subjective, shaping identity and being perceived as the experienced and lived in world. The term is usually qualified by space (urban, rural, local, family home) as well as by the nature of social processes (peer, family) and, finally, by the relationships that take place in it (educational).

From the point of view of understanding the processes that contribute to the functioning of youth, the environment is an important sphere both in terms of place of upbringing, defined in terms of spatial environment, as well as in terms of the interpersonal relationships forming it, because – as once stated by Thomas Szudlarek – “Places and

¹ Ch. Tittle, *Control Balance: Toward a General Theory of Deviance*, Boulder 1995, p. 1.

identity are quite clearly linked.”² The importance and role of the environment in the global sphere is testified to by the authors of the excellent study *Rethinking Youth*:³

“Climbing trees or assimilating the rules of the road, the wandering of nomads through wild wilderness or visiting the City Zoo, surviving a scorching desert or a swimming during a monsoon – these examples show how diametrically different the local living conditions are that mold a man’s personal relationship with his surrounding environment, and how he perceives the world around him [...]. The physical properties of our environment have a significant impact on how we react to it and how we try to shape it.”⁴

The link, indicated by the authors, between a subject and their environment is not always harmonious in character. Sometimes with disharmonious results in social development including defective adaptations that leads to the internalisation of attitudes that are contrary to social interests and values. This is demonstrated in studies concerning environmental determinants of behavioral disorders, degeneration and educational neglect, in other words key areas of analysis in correctional pedagogy. It can be assumed that causes of social failure understood in this way can be sought in specific areas of human life, and as delineated by the family home,⁵ a part of town⁶ or by socio-economic processes that determine how an entire urban agglomeration functions.⁷ From the perspective of a huge loss suffered by rehabilitation in Poland as a result of the departure of Prof. Bronisław Urban, one cannot help but mention the role of the peer group – an essential element in the formation of human identity during adolescence.⁸ It is worth presenting briefly the basic theoretical considerations by which the authors explain these dependencies, referring them to a common ground as represented by the spatial aspect of the environment. Study into the environmental determinants of deviant behavior is an area of special interest, not only for teachers but also for sociologists and criminologists investigating the relationship between space, place of residence and experiences of interaction within a peer group.⁹ It becomes, therefore, an important plane for prevention activities and rehabilitation.

The *Milieu* and its specificity

The term “environment” can be described as a key concept for many areas of knowledge. It is generally a defined area, whose constituent elements, both animate and

² T. Szkudlarek, *Miejsce przemieszczenie, tożsamość*, „Magazyn Sztuki” 1998, nr 19.

³ Cf. J. Wyn, R. White, *Rethinking Youth*, Sydney 1997.

⁴ Ibidem, p. 61.

⁵ Cf. B.M. Nowak, *Rodzina w kryzysie. Studium resocjalizacyjne*, Warsaw 2011.

⁶ Cf. M. Michel, *Lokalny system profilaktyki społecznej i resocjalizacji nieletnich*, Warsaw 2013.

⁷ Cf. M. O’Brien, M. Yar, *Criminology. The Key Concepts*, London–New York 2008.

⁸ At al.: B. Urban, *Agresja młodzieży i odrzucenie rówieśnicze*, Warsaw 2012.

⁹ M. O’Brien, M. Yar, op. cit., p. 72.

inanimate, works of nature and of human hand, remain dependant on each other as well as in specific relation to each other. Consequently, this term can be found in the study of medicine, biology, geography and social sciences. It therefore has an important role in the description of various phenomena. The term can be widely seen throughout the social sciences where the emphasis is on its determination of behaviour,¹⁰ while also underlining its “human” dimension.¹¹ As a result, it is the human subject that is placed in the spotlight within all these definitions, collecting his own personal baggage of experiences through contact with his surroundings.

In the subject literature, the term is used with a number of qualifications. Where the emphasis is on the typology of the human population, and especially the specifics of social relations connecting those living in specified territory, we use the term “local environment”. Sometimes it is interchangeably used with the term “local community”, which seems to be an excessive simplification, as the role and importance of non-living elements (what determines the specific “material” space of a location) in shaping the identity of the man is thereby diminished.¹² It is therefore not only the effect of the interactions within the family environment, but also those in the local peer group, school and other institutions in the social sphere. In this context, Tadeusz Pilch notes that “the local environment is a cluster of people living in isolated and relatively limited territory who possess and appreciate common traditions, values, symbols, institutions and cultural services, and who feel a sense of unity, of distinctiveness and readiness for Community action, and of belonging and of cloistered security.”¹³ With reference to the classic typology of Toennies’ *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft*, its definition speaks of human collectivity not just in terms of it occurring spontaneously and naturally but also in terms of the individual members operating in social systems that are there to help achieve specific goals and objectives.¹⁴ The territory is difficult to define by means of such indicators as population density, total number of residents or specific location/area of land. It is certainly an area in which the people living there enter into a generally lasting, and not incidental, interaction. To sum up: individuals making up the local society are therefore characterized by two constitutive elements that form social bonds: spatial contact and mental connectivity.¹⁵

In this context, another related term, should be noted, namely the “educational environment”. According to Irena Lepalczyk, this is the distinct social environment which

¹⁰ Cf. F. Znaniecki, *Socjologia wychowania*, Warsaw 2001.

¹¹ Cf. R. Wroczyński, *Pedagogika społeczna*, Warsaw 1985, p. 78; A. Kamiński, *Funkcje pedagogiki społecznej*, Warsaw 1974.

¹² T. Pilch, *Środowisko lokalne. Struktura, funkcje, przemiany*, [in:] *Pedagogika społeczna. Człowiek w zmieniającym się społeczeństwie*, T. Pilch, I. Lepalczyk, Warsaw 1995, p.155; idem, *Refleksja nad istotą i przemianami wspólnoty*, „Pedagogika Społeczna” 2012, No. 3–4.

¹³ Idem, *Środowisko lokalne...*, p. 157.

¹⁴ Cf. F. Toennies, *Wspólnota i stowarzyszenie*, Warsaw 2008.

¹⁵ T. Pilch, *Środowisko lokalne...*, p. 160.

is created by a group for an individual who, after appropriate preparation, will become its member.¹⁶ The author stresses, therefore, that it is a specific environment, one whose driving force is, more or less, the need for effective influence, the result of which is – an individual ready to occupy common social roles: a child of parents, a student at school, a friend in a formal or informal group, or, eventually, a partner in a relationship, a parent or a material provider for themselves and family through gainful employment. According to Peter Sztompka, it is the area in which an individual's interpersonal relations are based on solidarity and on tribal mentality, loyalty, trust and endogamy at the local level, as well as on homophilia, the attraction to similarity.¹⁷

Human groups that operate in the aforementioned “relatively isolated territory” are in a place where everyone roughly knows everyone else and what is going on, like a big city housing estate. In their extreme form, resulting from social stratification, these isolated territories may take on a character of radical demarcation that Zygmunt Bauman described as no go areas (out / in), the types of ghettos that represent a sort of safe haven for their residents and a threat to outsiders.¹⁸ This is a norm that is particularly visible in multicultural urban societies. Observations of areas with such living conditions for over half a century have shown that these ghettos are as much a caricature of historic cities as of typical suburban neighborhoods.

“Uniformity, uniform buildings of a generally nondescript style, rows and rows of uniform streets, devoid of greenery and with ever present communal rubbish and waste – all this inhabited by people of the same class, with the same level of income [...] creates a uniform environment from which there is no escape.”¹⁹

Jane Jacobs' work fits into this stream of reflection, in which the author draws attention to the relationship between the soulless, metropolitan architecture of skyscrapers and high rates of crime, community fragmentation, erosion of neighbourly relationships, limited possibilities for recreation and ghettoization.²⁰ Oscar Newman said that urban residential areas are created in such a way that their residents can easily become victims of crime because they inhabit spaces that facilitate such behaviour.²¹ Data on the number of offenses indicate that such events are most commonly recorded in dilapidated urban areas, the so-called worse areas, inhabited by those experiencing exclusion from the community and characterized by poverty or disintegration of ties. This also applies to victimological indicators, because victims of such acts also derive from these areas.²²

¹⁶ E. Marynowicz-Hetka, *Pedagogika społeczna*, Warsaw 1996, p. 58.

¹⁷ P. Sztompka, *Socjologia. Analiza społeczeństwa*, Cracow 2003, p.184.

¹⁸ Z. Bauman, *Wśród nas nieznajomych – czyli o obcych w (po)nowoczesnym mieście*, [in:] *Pisanie miasta – czytanie miasta*, A. Zeidler-Janiszewska (ed.), Poznan 1997.

¹⁹ L. Mumford, *The City in History*, Harmondsworth 1966, p. 286.

²⁰ Cf. J. Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, New York 1961.

²¹ Cf. O. Newman, *Defensible Space*, London 1972.

²² Cf. L. Hannon, *Extremely Poor Neighborhoods and Homicide*, „Social Science Quarterly” 2005, No. 86.

This means that local communities, living in a given area, create specific patterns of identification, models of behavior and/or constellations of axiological choices. They highlight to their members those things that are worthwhile and how these might be obtained. In view of the diversity of society it should be remembered that such a microcosm with its axionormative universe, this homeland that integrates its inhabitants, is not always totally acceptable from an outsider's perspective or by society overall. Moreover, it can (in radical cases) be seen as a marginalized or disadvantaged area and its inhabitants referred to as marginalised. The above-mentioned sense of security that members of such a community have is limited to the area of a street or estate. This is a feature of classically defined subcultures which in extreme cases can become areas conducive to deviant behavior, even spawning pathological phenomena.²³

In this context, one can point to a number of research examples or media stories whose heroes are the people of so-called bad neighborhoods. Oscar Lewis, describing life in such areas half a century ago, used the term "culture of poverty".²⁴ This is the fruit of his anthropological studies into the lives of Mexican immigrants. They are characterized by cynicism, apathy, helplessness, and a lack of trust in institutions and in social services. The relatively modest opportunities available to shine in the labour market and at school result in its citizens having a broad distrust of these institutions. High unemployment, an unstable family environment create surroundings in which it is difficult to develop the skills, habits and, finally, lifestyle that go to ensure educational success, and in the long term, effective entrance into the labour market.²⁵ Bonds, key factors of communities, are also weakened which effects the integration of the members of such communities, and as a result – the regulatory abilities of people living in the area.²⁶

Theoretical premises

In the search for theoretical grounds describing the indicated prevalence it is necessary to go back a long way to its source. Prominent place in the study of environmental phenomenon of deviant behavior is taken by representatives of the Chicago School from the first half of the last century. The achievements of Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay can serve as an example of this.²⁷ These authors, analyzing the criminal behavior patterns of young people in the context of their place of residence and their specific activities,

²³ K. Gelder, *Subcultures*, London–New York 2007, p. 29.

²⁴ Cf. O. Lewis, *The Culture of Poverty*, „Scientific American” 1966, No. 215.

²⁵ Cf. J. Ainsworth-Darnell, D. Downey, *Assessing the Oppositional Culture Explanation for Racial/Ethnic Differences in School Performances*, „American Sociological Review” 1998, No. 63.

²⁶ Por. B. Warner, *The Role of Attenuated Culture in Social Disorganization Theory*, „Criminology” 2003, No. 4.

²⁷ M. O'Brien, M. Yar, op. cit., p. 72.

have developed a concentric model of city zones. They underline that the sources of the crimes lie not so much in personal factors, like the origin of a particular ethnic group, but in the conditions of the living environment. They proved that deviant youth behavior and crime have their source not in immoral nature but in the specifics of the structure and the culture of the community the youth inhabit. This applies especially to complex communities where it is possible to talk of almost inherent conflict genesis.

In adolescence, the roles played by young people out on such territories through peer groups (especially boys) in their places of residence are not only the result of peer group pressure. This territory is (as stated by Frederick Thrasher – a classic of Chicago school) an arena for more complex processes.

But it is not only the local gang (clique) that changes a person's internal image of reality. A young boy lives in an illusory world of soldiers and knights, pirates and bandits. To his enemies he ascribes extraordinary, almost mythical, roles. The grumpy old lady across the street is a dangerous witch; the neighbourhood policeman becomes a human giant fighting with other giants, an exploiter; while a peer-group gang from a neighboring block represents the enemy troops.”²⁸

A relatively radical movement, a manifestation of social Darwinism, has attracted a number of critical voices. An interesting example of this is the work of John Irwin,²⁹ a sociologist at the University of Berkeley, who stressed that deviant behavior is not just a manifestation of conflict but more a matter of choice and, even, of preferred style of life in a given area. The author concludes that the so-called Chicago School and its concept of gangs, subcultures and ways of behavior do not explain the randomness of the worlds involved. All gangs or subcultures are associated with excessive commitment, determined by the stability of membership. On the other hand, concepts such as the environment, the atmosphere, and fashion do not sufficiently explain the durability, consistency and sub-cultural complexity of the forms of expression in the area.³⁰

In other works undermining the achievements of Shaw and McKay it is claimed that their assumptions over simplify the problem being analysed (e.g. the model: the worse the area, the higher the crime rate). Keep in mind that serious crime is also found in areas with relatively low crime, so only to a certain extent can it be said that such phenomena are limited territorially. They are often recorded near the residences of their perpetrators, therefore, *per analogiam*, such areas may also be more likely to be characterized by their occurrence.³¹

This is due to the fact that the perpetrators usually reside in disorganized environments, conflicting with their system of axio-normative requirements, culturally unstable, less

²⁸ F.M. Thrasher, *The Gang: A Study of 1,313 Gangs in Chicago*, Chicago 1927, pp. 117–118.

²⁹ Cf. J. Irwin, *Scenes*, London–Beverly Hills 1977.

³⁰ Ibidem, p. 18.

³¹ Cf. L.W. Sherman, *The Hotspots of Crime and the Criminal Careers of Places*, [in:] *Crime and Place*, J. Eck, D. Weisburd (eds.), New York 1995.

affluent communities, though not necessarily characterized by poverty. The assumption of social disorganization as a criminogenic factor has become crucial for further studies into the influence of place of residence on crime. In this case, the concept of bad neighbourhood is appropriate, as the analysis of the mentioned authors' work shows that lawbreakers are people living in areas where real estate values are below average.³²

It is not considered therefore without reason that manifestations of social maladjustment may be encountered more frequently on municipal housing estates. This is partly due to practical reasons; primarily from attempts to solve the living problems of the excluded as well as from wider social control exercised with respect to marginalized groups by "managing" them in their social housing enclaves.³³ In the first case, it is because of the fact that communities are trying at all costs to remove such people from their areas. To take care of their needs, sub-standard housing complexes are created in the city where it is (in reference to Bauman also referenced or Mumford) relatively easy to end up but extremely difficult to leave. It may be noted that the anti-social behavior is in part due to a planned housing policy through which the focus is on one enclave of socially excluded families and young couples with children,³⁴ because the "troublesome tenants have to live somewhere."³⁵

In this context, an important factor shaped by a place of residence is the sense of security one has when living in a given environment. It should be remembered that feeling of safety is greater in residents of manicured neighborhoods,³⁶ whilst, neglected areas are neighborhoods full of gray, dirty facades dotted with the most varied graffiti, derelict buildings, scattered trash, neglected and damaged residential shops, filled with noisy and aggressive behavior and profanity. Such confusion and disorganization raises residents' fears and anxieties.³⁷ Fear is also born of experience. Residents of poorer neighbourhoods who have been victims of criminal activities are more concerned about the future than those who have managed to avoid it.³⁸ The sense of anxiety among residents increases when their environment has to be shared with drug dealers, grouping openly in public spaces, and where the growing importance of local juvenile gangs is directly felt and the neighborhood

³² Cf. T.P. Morris, *The criminal area: a study in social ecology*, London 1957.

³³ A. Brown, *Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime Control and Social control*, „Howard Journal of Criminal Justice” 2004, No. 43(2), p. 204.

³⁴ L. Hancock, *Community, Crime and Disorder: Safety and Regeneration in Urban Neighbourhoods*, Basingstoke 2001.

³⁵ E. Burney, *Ruling out Trouble: Anti-Social Behaviour and Housing Management*, „The Journal of Forensic Psychology” 2000, No. 11(2), p. 271.

³⁶ J. Schafer, B. Huebner, T. Bynum, *Fear of Crime and Criminal Victimization: Gender-Based Contrasts*, „Journal of Criminal Justice” 2006, No. 34, p. 296.

³⁷ Cf. X. Yili, M. Fiedler, K. Flaming, *Discovering the Impact of Community Policing: The Broken Windows Thesis, Collective Efficacy, and Citizens' Judgment*, „Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency” 2005, No. 42.

³⁸ Por. S. Greenberg, *Fear and Its Relationship to Crime, Neighborhood Deterioration, and Informal SocialControl*, [in:] *The social ecology of crime*, J. Byrne, R. Sampson (eds.), New York 1985.

is defined by suspicious dens; the result is that adults become really concerned not only about their own fate, but also that of their children, who could be drawn into the world of drugs.³⁹

Anxiety is a contagious feeling. News that someone has become a victim of crime spreads very quickly in the environment. This in turn produces the feeling of living in a troubled neighborhood or housing estate where you can easily become a victim of crime.⁴⁰ Living in fear may encourage residents to abandon long term plans and to live in the moment. Adopting this approach leads to increased risk behavior while at the same time disregarding its later effects.⁴¹ Those who are wealthier flock at all costs to better neighborhoods or to other cities.

Residents of the so-called inferior districts often have the feeling of experiencing the syndrome of being besieged. Neglected infrastructure, combined with high crime rates, raises the residents' feeling of living in a dangerous area, and as a result becoming a victim of crime is seen as something inevitable, or creates indifference to behavior that is contrary to social norms.⁴²

Sometimes one of the side effects of such situations is that residents of such areas come to distrust representatives of the social services. They perceive them (paradoxically) as people who are working against their environment; According to them, representatives of the social services are incompetent, arrogant and haughty, and therefore keep them at arm's length. As a result of this point of view, these people exhibit a general resistance to representatives of social institutions: to school education, to the parole officer (a potential threat – on the basis of their reports family members can be separated), to the neighbourhood policeman (representing the apparatus of oppression, cooperation with him is collaborating against their own), to the social worker (treated instrumentally as a potential source of obtaining benefit). This distrust means that the police will be criticized in every situation: both when officers avoid taking action in problem districts as when they use concerted and ruthless intervention. Both forms create a sense of dissatisfaction in the community.⁴³

It should be emphasized that although socially maladjusted young people, especially young offenders, do not always become criminals in adulthood, living in such an area in conjunction with coming from needy families increases the risk. Also be aware of a kind

³⁹ P. Wilcox, N. Quisenberry, S. Jones, *The Built Environment and Community Crime Risk Interpretation*, „Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency” 2003, No. 40; C.L. Storr, C.-Y. Chen, J.C. Anthony, „*Unequal Opportunity*”: *Neighborhood Disadvantage and the Chance to Buy Illegal Drugs*, „Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health” 2004, No. 58.

⁴⁰ W. Skogan, *Fear of Crime and neighborhood change*, [in:] *Communities and Crime*, A. Reiss, M. Tonry (eds.), Chicago 1986.

⁴¹ M. Wilson, M. Daly, *Life Expectancy, Economic Inequality, Homicide, and Reproductive Timing in Chicago Neighborhoods*, „British Journal of Medicine” 1997, No. 314.

⁴² Por. P. Wilcox, N. Quisenberry, S. Jones, op. cit.

⁴³ Por. W. Terrill, M. Reisig, *Neighborhood Context and Police Use of Force*, „Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency” 2003, No. 40.

of side effect of the described situation. As the crime rates for these areas are higher, representatives of social services involved are largely involved in prevention or intervention in order to increase control.⁴⁴ As a result, identification of the symptoms of maladjustment is much easier, all the more as it goes hand in hand with really high crime rate.

Directives for practice

The specificity of a local environment means that the activities of educational institutions operating in their area must be preventative in character by a specialized action in the field of prevention and rehabilitation in the open environment. The theory of rational declares that modification of the social and material environment can reduce the occurrence of negative social phenomena. This is due to the fact that people (including young people) are responsible for their behavior. They will engage in criminal behavior when there is low level of social control acting as a deterrent against “wrong” choices.⁴⁵

There are several models that permit us to mitigate the scale of the problem being analyzed. The main issue is the creation of multidisciplinary teams consisting of architects or urban planners and social scientists. Such a model for solving problems and social issues is pointed to by Ronald Clark and Patricia Mayhew.⁴⁶ They argue that it helps minimise the scale of social maladjustment and preserve infrastructure in so-called worst neighborhoods. According to Jose Otero-Lopez: “Institutional forms of action targeting criminal behavior and drug abuse cannot be implemented solely on the basis of individual factors and must take into account factors that supersede the individual – environmental ones.”⁴⁷

Another challenge is the issue of compulsory education. Many minors who attract the attention of social services are unprepared to fulfill this obligation in a typical educational setting. Efforts should be made to develop alternative educational routes, including vocational schools whose curriculum is addressed to socially maladjusted youth in particular, and enables them to achieve further levels of education or to enter the labour market.

Living space as a factor affecting the functioning of individuals, in the context of maladjustment, is a subject that has undergone significant changes in recent years. Civilizational development means that one gets a sense of mismatch between space and the commission of acts contrary to social norms. With the development of cybertechnology – particularly mobile telephony and the Internet – a negligible, decreasing relationship

⁴⁴ C. Tittle, R. Meier, *Specifying the SES/Delinquency Relationship*, „Criminology” 1990, No. 28, p. 293.

⁴⁵ J. Wyn, R. White, op. cit., p. 68.

⁴⁶ Cf. R.V.G. Clarke, P. Mayhew (eds), *Designing Out Crime*, Home Office Research and Planning Unit, London 1980.

⁴⁷ J. Otero-Lopez and others, *An Empirical Study of the Relations Between Drug Abuse and Delinquency Among Adolescents*, „British Journal of Criminology” 1997, No. 34, p. 474.

between criminal and delinquent behavior and urban environment can be noted.⁴⁸ Such behaviors, like their perpetrators, go across national borders and time zones. The earlier mentioned design and construction of safe housing estates physically protects people from being a victim of crime, but does not protect against virtual activities. Moreover, they do not take a “typical” form such as burglary or vandalism.⁴⁹ Either way, we can talk about the symptoms, namely the new quality of deviant behavior using cybertechnology. However, these behaviours do not significantly reduce the role of the milieu in shaping individuals. Despite these changes in the study into the essence of social maladjustment, it is still worth referencing the extent to which young people build their identities in different environments and communities, not only in the individual sphere, but as part of a wider perceived reality, including their relationship with the natural physical environment.

Abstract

The text examines the theoretical assumptions of the analysis and research of American sociologists and criminologists which describe the environmental determinants of juvenile delinquency. The interpretation of the term “environment” is focused on its spatial character. The various ways in which the term environment, and related terms (“local environment” and “educational environment”), can be defined are analyzed. In describing the criminal influences of an environment, references are made ranging from the Chicago School to the present day. Besides theoretical concepts other possible modes of action for prevention and rehabilitation that are to be carried out in the open environment are also presented.

Keywords: environment, juvenile delinquency, minors, urban space, Chicago school.

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⁴⁸ M. O'Brien, M. Yar, op. cit., p. 75.

⁴⁹ Ibidem.

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