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## IMAGES OF THE URBAN SPACES OF CIESZYN

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**ABSTRACT.** A number of specific characteristics of the town of Cieszyn are inherently related to its history. Since 1920, Cieszyn has been divided by a state border along the Olza river (except for the war time of 1938–1945). Before that, since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the town was part of the Austrian Habsburg empire and was under imperial Vienna's cultural influence. The contemporary structure of the Polish part of Cieszyn includes numerous elements reflecting the town's specificity. Therefore, the social cognitive image of Cieszyn comprises those components of its spatial structure too.

**KEY WORDS:** Poland, Cieszyn, perception, cognitive image, urban space.

### INTRODUCTION: THE TOWN'S SPECIFIC FEATURES

In the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Duchy of Teschen became the fief of the Czech king and remained part of the Czech landholding until 1620 when the country collapsed and became dependent on the Habsburgs. The Duchy of Teschen was ruled by the Polish Piast dynasty until 1653. After the death of the last duchess in the line, Elisabeth Lucrezia, the land was incorporated as a fief into St. Wenceslaus' Crown (Czech kings) and the Austrian Habsburg empire until the dissolution of Austria-Hungary in 1918. As a result of an interim division of Cieszyn Silesia between the emerging new states of Czechoslovakia and Poland, the town of Cieszyn was under Polish control until July 1920 (after Czechoslovak troops had occupied it for a short time early in 1919). On 28<sup>th</sup> July 1920, a Conference of Ambassadors delineated the border between Poland and Czechoslovakia along the Olza river. The town of Cieszyn was then divided into two national parts. Taking advantage of Czechoslovakia's difficult political situation, on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1938 Poland entered the Czech part of Cieszyn and the region of Zaolzie. History took another turn when after Nazi Germany's occupation of Poland, the poviats

(administrative region of the 2<sup>nd</sup> order) of Bielsko and Cieszyn as well as the Silesian Zaolzie region were incorporated into the Third Reich. Following the end of WWII in Europe in 1945, the initial border between Poland and Czechoslovakia was re-established and the town was again divided between Cieszyn (Poland) and Český Těšín. Therefore Cieszyn and Tešín formed a single town only in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (since 1920 and in 1938–1945). The majority of that century witnessed two different towns separated by a sealed-off state border along the Olza river. Following the town's division, in the late 1920s the authorities of Český Těšín decided to build a new town hall, while the Polish authorities expanded the railway station from a small stop at Bobrówka.

The contemporary specificity of Cieszyn and its spatial structure have been largely affected by the town's border location (since 1920), as well as its former attachment to the Austrian Habsburg empire (since the 17<sup>th</sup> century). This was reflected in the town's architecture: e.g., Habsburgs' hunting lodge on the Castle Hill, the construction of a ducal brewery in 1846 or a tram line leading from the railway station to the town centre in 1911, an innovation modelled on Vienna. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many social and cultural organizations emerged in the town for the benefit of maintaining the Polish character of the former Duchy of Teschen (e.g., the Polish Educational Society, construction of a theatre in 1910). The Castle Hill bears traces of a town from around the 10<sup>th</sup> century, while an important historic Romanesque church – St. Nicholas' Rotunda (11<sup>th</sup> century) – has survived until today.

It should also be noted that following an agreement about good neighbourliness and friendly cooperation between Poland and Czecho-Slovakia in October 1991, many barriers to cross-border traffic were lifted, resulting in an explosive growth in cross-border movement followed in turn by the establishment of numerous contacts between the local governments on both sides of the border. Later on, when Czecho-Slovakia was dissolved, Poland and the Czech Republic entered into another cross-border cooperation agreement in September 1994. The border between Poland and the Czech Republic changed its permeability and transformed from a filtering border into an open one as a result of both countries' accession to the European Union in May 2004, and the introduction of the Schengen Agreement in December 2007.

## A CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF THE TOWN'S COGNITIVE IMAGE

The town's unique position in the settlement system is reflected in its spatial representations and significant events which should be interpreted as symbolic of the entire town as well as magical from the point of view of its dwellers (see Libura,

1990; Bierwiazzonek, 2008). A behavioural attitude is one of research movements focusing on places and facilities meaningful to municipal space, pursued also in geography. As part of this movement, a research has been launched to examine the decision-making process among individuals and groups. The same holds true for factors affecting human cognitive and behavioural processes in the spatial context, in the midst of their own universes of perception. However, it should be noticed that some geographers resort to the term ‘perception’ in such an imprecise way because they refer to complex facilities too large to be perceived by means of stimuli directly affecting senses (see Walmsley, Lewis, 1984). In geographic research, perception is understood as a broad process of collecting, ordering and organizing information. It is sometimes identified with the processes of cognition and evaluation of town space (see Lisowski, 2007). Fig. 1 presents a conceptual model of learning urban space in relation to other elements of this space that rests on the works by Downs (1970), Pocock (1974) and Lloyd (1976).

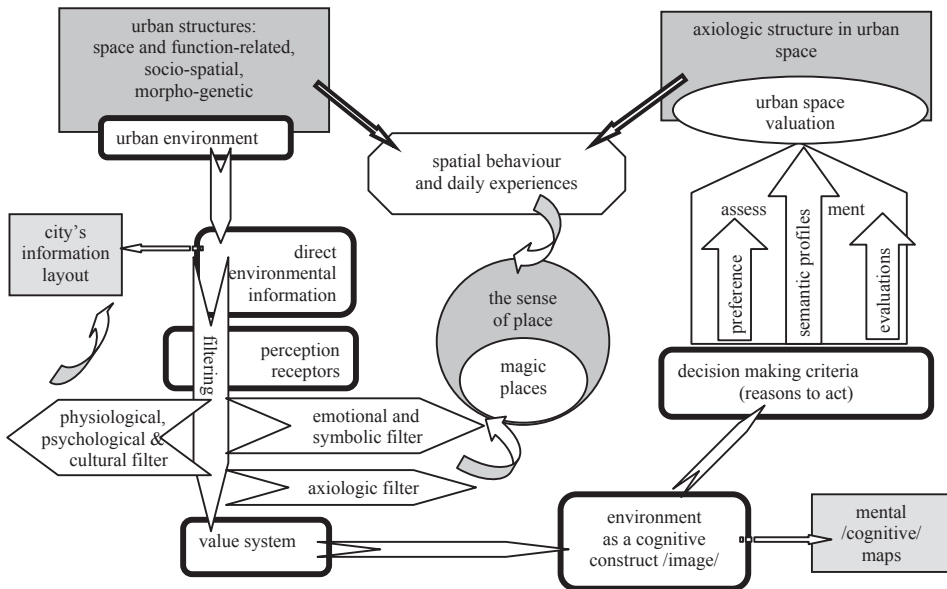


Fig. 1. Conceptual model of learning urban space

Source: Compiled on the basis of Downs (1970), Lloyd (1976) and Pocock (1974)

The city environment is a source of abundant direct information received and processed by two human filters: receptors and senses as well as every human being’s value system. It is worth noting that a user moving along streets and across squares perceives the town as an inexhaustible multitude of visual landscapes as

well as many information layers fashioning the dweller's aesthetic and semantic values. In order to describe the information layers of the town environment perceived in its many aspects, notions like urban information layout, urban semiotic structure or semiotic landscape are used (see Wallis, 1979; Castells, 1982; Jałowiecki, Łukowski, 2008). The very process of filtering information depends on individual personal traits (a physiological and psychological filter) as well as on the attitude towards specific facilities (an emotional filter) or the value system employed (an axiological filter). The products of perception are often referred to by geographers as presentations; psychologists call them cognitive constructs. The effects of this cognitive and behavioural process are presented as the so-called mental maps and evaluation of town space (see Słodczyk, 1984).

### **CIESZYN AS IMAGINED BY SOCIAL RESPONDENTS**

In empirical terms, the goal of this study is to analyze the presentations of Cieszyn based on completed questionnaires. Surveys of the perception and presentation of the town and its dwellers were conducted in June and July 2009, using two similar, though not identical, questionnaire forms. The June survey was conducted on a sample of 274 insiders, including 139 females and 135 males, while the July one involved 53 insiders and 57 outsiders. In the latter research, the insider type of respondents – Cieszyn residents – were treated as control. In selecting respondents use was made of the number-at-random method, which is typical of this kind of survey (cf. Downs, 1970; Libura, 1988; Bartnicka, 1989). The research was conducted in several designated places in the centre (downtown) and the intermediate zone of Cieszyn (e.g., near the bazaar in Katowicka Street and on the Liburnia housing estate). The analysis focused exclusively on survey issues related to the town's characteristics under study. Among Cieszyn's most characteristic places and buildings, the respondents indicated its oldest part as well as the Wolności and Przyjaźni bridges connecting Cieszyn and Český Těšín for pedestrians and cars (cf. Table 1a). One should note the fact that some respondents indicated the Castle Hill as a whole while others indicated specific buildings which are integral parts of the hill: St. Nicholas' Rotunda and the Silesian Castle of Art and Entrepreneurship. The same holds true for referring to the town hall, a significant element in the composition of the Cieszyn market square.

The results of the research conducted in July 2009 were slightly different owing to the questionnaire being extended to include important events taking place in Cieszyn (cf. Table 1b). Five places and only three events were indicated by the biggest number of respondents. Nonetheless, the Three Brothers Celebration organized on an annual basis in June to commemorate the founding of the town

Table 1. Cieszyn: significant places and events

a) June 2009		b) July 2009		
Characteristic places and buildings	in % (N=880)	Characteristic places, buildings and events	in % (N=481)	in % (N=347)
The market square	15.5	The Three Brothers Celebration	14.3	The market square
The Castle Hill	10.9	St. Nicholas' Rotunda	9.1	The Castle Hill
St. Nicholas' Rotunda	8.9	The market square	7.7	The Peace Park
The Well of Three Brothers	7.7	The Well of Three Brothers	7.1	The Municipal Woods
Głęboka Street	5.5	The Piast Tower	6.7	Cieszyn Venice
The town hall	4.3	The Silesian Castle of Art and Entrepreneurship	5.8	Głęboka Street
Wolności and Przyjaźni bridges	4.0	Film festival 'On the border'	5.4	The Olza River Boulevard
The Silesian Castle of Art and Entrepreneurship	3.1	Film festival 'Holiday Film Frames'	4.2	Reger's Park
Other	40.1	Other	39.7	Other
				27.1

Source: Authors' own development on the basis of questionnaires completed in June and July 2009

was indicated most frequently (14.3%). An analysis of the responses with respect to buildings and places indicates that Cieszyn's historic centre was the most popular, just like in the survey conducted a month before (June 2009). However, the difference was that specific components of the Castle Hill were indicated rather than the Hill as a whole. The respondents listed the rotunda and the castle as well as the 14<sup>th</sup> century Piast Tower with a new vantage terrace.

On top of that, the research revealed that the buildings and places indicated as the most characteristic of Cieszyn (mostly historic buildings) are not always magic

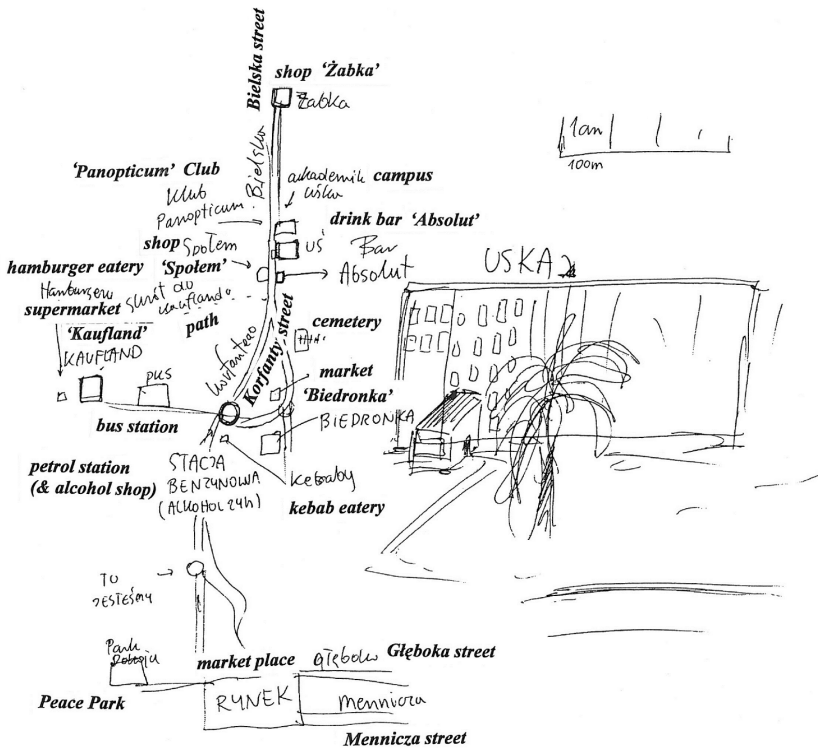


Fig. 2. Mental map produced by a respondent: an individual look at the town's structure  
 Explanation: 'Kaufland' – supermarket; 'Spotem' – shop; 'Zabka' – shop; 'Biedronka' – market; klub 'Panopticum' – 'Panopticum' Club; bar 'Absolut' – drink bar 'Absolut'; hamburgery – hamburger eatery; kebabery – kebab eatery; PKS – bus station; stacja benzynowa (alkohol 24) – petrol station (& alcohol shop); miasteczko studenckie – campus; cmentarz – cemetery; Rynek – Market Place (old market); Park Pokoju – Peace Park; Bielska – Bielska street; Korfantego – Korfanty street; skrót do 'Kauflandu' – path to 'Kaufland'; Głęboka – Głęboka street; Mennicza – Mennicza street; tu jesteśmy – there we are here

Source: Questionnaires completed in June 2009

places (cf. Table 1b). It was proved that the most frequently indicated facilities included those with a high proportion of greenery tailored to the land use pattern, namely the Castle Hill, the Peace Park, the Municipal Woods, Cieszyn Venice, the boulevard along the Olza river, and Reger's Park. Therefore, characteristic facilities and places are not the same as spaces perceived as magical, although it would seem that in medium-sized towns they are identical. Information about the perceived facilities in Cieszyn's space was obtained verbally (answers to questions) and graphically (icons). Fig. 2 presents this graphic image of Cieszyn sketched as a 'mental map'. It is a diagram produced by a respondent living on the campus of the local branch of the University of Silesia. On this mental map, facilities important to its special structure include shops, restaurants, cafes, and the like.

Next to Cieszyn's spatial presentation, the research dealt with the town's functional properties as viewed by the public. The research results suggest that the single most important property is its role of a border town (91.8% indications), the role of the capital of Cieszyn Silesia (79.1%), and the position of a town with a multitude of historic buildings (66.4%) (see Fig. 3). It is interesting to

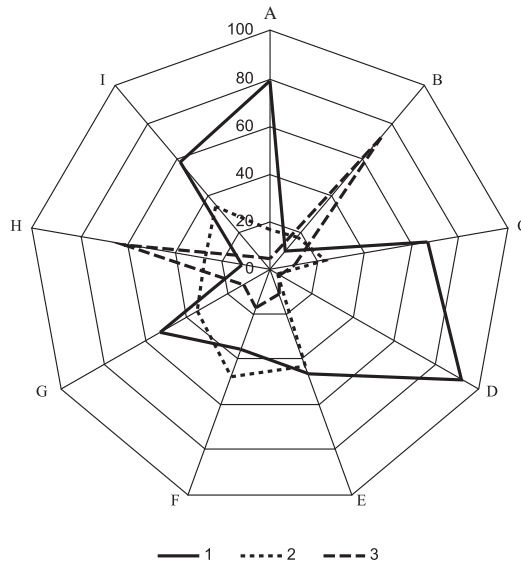


Fig. 3. Social appraisal of Cieszyn's characteristics (N=110)

Explanation: A – capital of Cieszyn Silesia; B – suburban town; C – historic town; D – border town; E – tourist town; F – education centre; G – trade town; H – industrial town; I – capital of county; 1 – most important; 2 – moderately important; 3 – least important

Source: Authors' own presentation on the basis of questionnaires completed in July 2009



note that the respondents were most sensitive about their town's historical and administrative functions. The trade function, so characteristic of border cities, barely ranked as the fifth (out of nine) most important descriptors of the town (52.7% of indications).

According to respondents, the least important function of Cieszyn is that of a suburban town (71.8%) which would otherwise degrade it as a cultural and leisure centre. The fact that the town's industrial nature was regarded unimportant (60.9% of indications) is strictly related to the bankruptcies, limited business activity and significant staff reductions in the town's numerous production works. Perceiving the town as a centre of education proved moderately significant (47.3%).

The town's borderland location is indirectly related to Cieszyn's territorial continuity perceived in the context of the increasingly blurred state border. Therefore respondents were asked if Cieszyn dwellers treated Český Těšín as an extension or a fragment of their town. Opinions varied, but 58.0% of respondents still perceived the town as a whole. The research conducted by Bierwiazonek (2008) also reflected the diversified perceptions of Cieszyn. Some respondents treated the borderland urban complex as two separate systems separated by a state border since 1920. This perception has already been deeply rooted in social awareness. Others treated the two separate parts of the town (Polish and Czech) as a single urban system. One respondent said: 'When speaking about Cieszyn one needs to bear in mind the other side (of the border). To me it is a single city. Also, people from Český Těšín perceive the town as a whole. Czechs recognize that the historical centre is located on the Polish side, while the Czech part of the town hosts more cultural events. Český Těšín is perceived as a place for shopping and travelling (the trip to Prague is less expensive on the Czech side)' (Bierwiazonek, 2008: 110). On the other hand, the differences in opinions on the durability of the division along the Olza river are certainly largely affected by the town's historic past in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the records of the Zaolzie region conflict as well as contemporary disputes (e.g., after restoring a monument to the Silesian Legionaries there was a conflict around the so-called 'Silesian woman' with a sabre or about celebrating the town's foundation anniversaries).

The image of Cieszyn's social inequality and the sense of safety in its various parts are important elements typical of the town's spatial diversification. Respondents decided that Cieszyn's most dangerous parts included tower-block housing estates (Piastowskie, Liburnia) and the old district (centre). This leads to a simple conclusion that the districts perceived as the poorest are frequently regarded dangerous (see Table 2). What is surprising, however, is the inclusion of Cieszyn Venice in the list of the poorest and most dangerous places, also perceived by the respondents as a magic place.

A town consists of space as well as inhabitants. This is why respondents were requested to identify the inhabitants' characteristics within five semantic profiles on a scale of 1–5 (Fig. 4). The research relied on the semantic differential, a special method of quantitative evaluation of the impression made by buildings

Table 2. The town's dangerous and poorest districts (in %)

The town's poorest districts (N=363)		The town's dangerous districts (N=332)	
Sikorskiego Street	10.5	Piastowskie estate	13.9
City centre	9.6	Liburnia estate	8.4
New Town	9.1	City centre	7.2
Piastowskie estate	8.3	New Town	5.4
Błogocka Street	6.6	Sikorskiego Street	4.5
Cieszyn Venice	6.1	Vicinity of open markets	4.2
ZOR Estate	5.0	Błogocka Street	3.3
Przykopa Street	4.1	Cieszyn Venice	2.5
No such districts	5.2	No such districts	15.7
Other	35.5	Other	34.9

Source: Authors' own development on the basis of questionnaires completed in June 2009

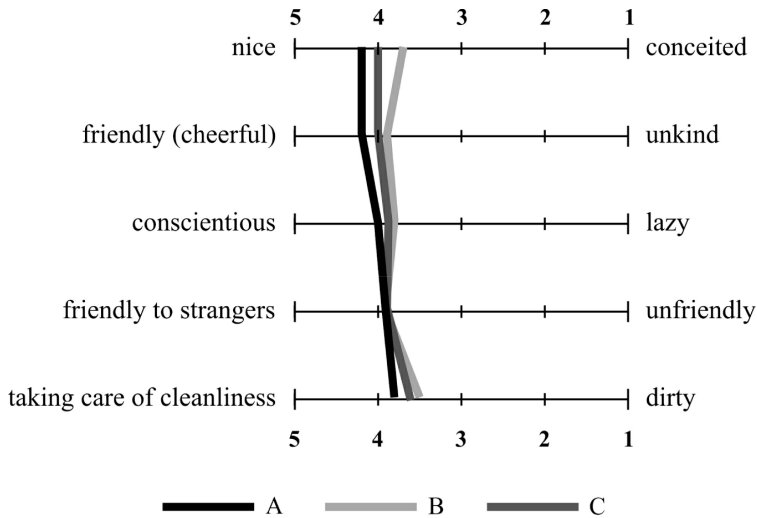


Fig. 4. Profile of a Cieszyn resident

Explanation: A – opinions of respondents – Cieszyn inhabitants (N=53); B – opinions of respondents – residents of other locations (N=57); C – total opinions of respondents (N=110)

Source: Authors' own presentation on the basis of questionnaires completed in July 2009

or properties on the individual surveyed (see Burgess, 1978; Mayntz et al., 1985). The analysis included five pairs of opposing properties referring to the features of Cieszyn residents. When the results were processed, each pair of opposing features was treated as a continuum consisting of five elements (from 5 – strong positive indication, to 1 – strong negative indication). Later on graphic profiles there were determined with respect to average evaluations; the profiles represent the differences in the respondents' perception of Cieszyn inhabitants. The analysis was conducted in three 'layers': (a) opinions of respondents living in Cieszyn; (b) opinions of respondents living elsewhere; and (c) total opinions of respondents.

It was proved that the respondents evaluated themselves better (average evaluation of 4.0). Respondents living outside of Cieszyn had a less favourable opinion of the town dwellers (average evaluation of 3.8). The properties of 'being nice' and 'friendly' were rated highest with an average evaluation of 4.0 each, while 'taking care of cleanliness' was rated lowest (an average of 3.6). These interdependencies are presented by means of graphic profiles; they clearly indicate that the biggest differences in evaluating Cieszyn residents relate to the 'friendly – unkind' opposition. The respondents who were at the same time Cieszyn dwellers rated this quality at 4.2, while those from other locations were moderately positive about this feature (3.7 on average). It is also worth noting that Cieszyn residents were positive about as many as three properties, while respondents from other locations were only moderately positive about all five features. There was no single case of respondents having no opinion at all or having a downright negative opinion. This stems from the fact that the analysis relied on averaged opinions. Therefore the survey of properties of Cieszyn residents resulted in a profile of an inhabitant who is predominantly nice (39.1% indications) and friendly (38.2%).

## CONCLUSION

According to public opinion Cieszyn is primarily a border town and a centre uniting the sub-region of Cieszyn Silesia. Despite its location, the town is losing some of its characteristic borderland traits as a result of integration processes (as part of the European Union and the Schengen Agreement). Hence the growing popularity of the opinion that Cieszyn and Český Těšín are spatially and functionally continuous. It is also worth noting that in the light of responses of Cieszyn residents (insiders), the frontier Olza river is not treated as its margin, while the bridges joining the two towns and the linear systems (streets) leading to them (Głęboka Street or the Olza boulevard, i.e., Łysek Avenue), are significant elements of the mental spatial structure of the town.

On the other hand, the spatial representations of Cieszyn are largely affected by certain characteristic (symbolic) buildings and magic places which may come in handy especially in promoting the town among tourists, e.g., the Castle Hill with its St. Nicholas' Rotunda and the Piast Tower, or Cieszyn Venice, and the Market Square with a growing network of eating facilities.

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