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## Cultural Atmosphere as a Component of the Quality of Life in Cities

### Abstract

*Objectives:* The aim of this paper is to draw attention to the fact that cultural atmosphere or ambience – although underestimated – is one of the key aspects of the quality of life in cities.

*Research Design & Methods:* The article is theoretical, as it reviews the literature on the quality of life and the characteristics of cities, trying to identify their main determinants as well as, against this background, to show the importance of cities' cultural atmosphere.

*Findings:* The author attempts to prove that the cultural atmosphere is difficult to define, yet it is important feature regarding, for example, motives for attachment to the city or to local patriotism. The paper also explores how the cultural ambience is considered as a significant factor when taking into consideration location-related decisions.

*Implications / Recommendations:* The subject of the article belongs to the sphere equally important to that of economic features. The culture and its character, elusive yet spectacular, manifests as a vibrant presence of people leading their existence and living side by side in the common environment. Immigrants, clerks, artists, street vendors, and police officers – alongside thousands of homeless people – create spectacular *mélange* and the character of the city. These features have to be considered.

*Contribution / Value Added:* This paper tries to ease the relative shortage of scientific analysis on the said topic.

*Keywords:* quality of life, city, cultural atmosphere

*Article classification:* conceptual paper

*JEL classification:* A12

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This article had been edited by an external entity outside of the Publisher and the Publishing Partner (Scholar WN).

## Introduction

“Let others rise Ganges, Sorrento, Crimea to the skies, but I prefer Łódź! Its dirt and smoke are my happiness and delight!” This fragment of Julian Tuwim poem titled “Łódź”, quoted many times on various occasions, poetically introduces the problematic of this article. The prospect of living in an environment polluted with dirt and smoke seems unappealing, but Tuwim’s verse expresses that the predilection for a particular place (city) is bivalent: someone from the outside could see only the deficiencies of the old, factory-like city of Łódź, while the author of “Polish Flowers” and “The Ball at the Opera” was sentimental about the city where he was born and brought up of his first steps in life.

The motives of this article are double folding: the quality of life in cities is the framework upon which the author think that cultural atmosphere is one of the important aspects assessed, although not fully appreciated ones. Both ideas are multi-facets, vague in scope and content. Cultural atmosphere is difficult to describe, although it comes to mind as the aspect substantially determining decisions on settle for life. This feature resembles ancient *genius loci*, which includes the character of the city’s structure, a variety of buildings, and the diverse lifestyles of people. It allows to realise that every city, though having features shared with others, is unique. Its cultural atmosphere is something spiritually tangible, felt, perceived, and sensed, something that emanates from the urban composition, general structure, and buildings, yet also from the vivid existence of dwellers. Thomas Hansen and Oskar Verkaaik define these features as the charisma of the city – an impression that is close to the atmosphere and consists of the same components: moods, ambiance, behaviours, gestures, and the appearance of the distinctive personalities among the crowd (Hansen & Verkaaik 2009, p. 12). The cultural atmosphere – like the culture itself in a broader sense – is always “somebody’s” in terms of affiliation to a specific nation, social entities, collectives, or communities.

Without need to reach to the theoretical knowledge, it is sure that both features – atmosphere or charisma play a crucial role when concerning, for example, human’s attachment in the form of local patriotism, and something that counts as important factors of the setting decisions.

Quality of life is one of the themes which used to be relatively popular in social sciences and fields such as medicine, philosophy, economics, sociology, pedagogy, politics, etc. However, it opens the wide field of interpretations. Thanks to ambiguity, theoretical and definitional conventions and unlimited freedom of explanation, the concept of quality of life is sometimes emotionally charged or has the character of an ideological-evaluative tool, impossible to be explicitly grasped and entangled in specific political and cultural contexts. Depending on the point of view, it is understood informally or scientifically. Several scientists consider “quality” to be an undefinable concept, treated as assumed, yet not to describe within a stringent theory. Nevertheless, many theoretical and empirical efforts have been undertaken to seize this notion for either utilitarian or cognitive reasons. Correlates and indicators of urban life quality belong to the wider context of studying the general satisfaction of life. This can be (simplifying in purpose) divided in two groups: 1) “hard” – as actual, objectified and measurable, quantitative, graspable, and empirically verifiable, typical of sciences that use mainly determinate criteria, such as geography or regional economics; and 2) “soft” – subjective and imaginative, mainly qualitative thus unquantifiable, individual, difficult to grasp, having a value-based character (e.g. within cultural anthropology or sociology), for which the category of quality of life, besides logical and epistemological reasons, has mainly conventional nature.

## Specified determinants of the quality of life

Within the limited scope of this article, it is not possible to describe the abundant body of scientific opinion and research on the quality

of life. Its understanding must be diverse for societies and cities in wealthy regions of the world, often strikingly different from the many poorer ones, which are compelled to deal with permanent deficiencies. Excluded as well from further considerations are qualities of large cities and towns, in which downtown fill in extravagant buildings, differs sharply with shantytowns and poverty-stricken slums in the others. The lifestyle in a large agglomeration also contrasts from pursuing in a small town. Finally, essentials of culture also participate in that variance: the urban centers of Europe are unlike from those of Africa or Asia, as Max Weber pointed out in his characterisation of the “occidental city” – that is the European style urban settlement of ancient or medieval origin which contrast with evident superiority (worth emphasising) to the “oriental city,” which belonged to the less advanced Asian formation in terms of democracy. What nevertheless these two have in common is that studying of urban reality and the quality of life is everywhere of great cognitive and practical importance (Weber, 1958, pp. 15–19).

The urbanisation that has created cities was, and still is, a continuous process of subsequent phases and unequal outcomes. Already 50% of the world’s population and almost 80% of Europe’s inhabitants are concentrated in agglomerations which play a decisive role in economic growth and regional development, offering employment, higher education, and professional services, being also centers of technology and innovations. Cities in richer and poorer parts of the world today are profoundly interested in implementation of critical goals: social cohesion, environmental protection, and sustainable or possibly resilient development. They also try to reduce or at least mitigate the acute problems of social inequality, environmental and air pollution, and crime, all of which are traditionally considered to be inevitable belongings of the urban realm. The quality of life has become one of the important subjects of urban policy in most countries of the European Union, as evidenced by numerous European and

governmental policy suggestions (Banai & Rapino, 2009, pp. 259–276). Cities and their governments must participate in the world-wide or local urban competition for a limited sample of goods. Current economic scenarios consider a high quality of life as a vital mechanism of development and well-being. Satisfactory life seems the main attraction for the businesses, production, and workforce, also as instrument increasing the ability to compete with other cities; this was analysed by researchers more than half a century ago (Hall, 1995, pp. 175–214). Ensuring that citizens are adequately satisfied with life in a city has become an important field of urban policy.

The quality of life is mainly analysed according to two conventional approaches:

- (a) objective – usually based on the analysis and reporting of secondary data, aggregated for different geographic regions or spatial scales, and contained mainly in official data from censuses or systematic sociological surveys. This is an approach often associated with research into social indicators research;
- (b) subjective – designed to collect primary data at a disaggregated or individual level and using qualitative research methods focused on the behaviours and judgments of either individuals or larger social units.

Faced with contemporary challenges, most urban development strategies involve ensuring and enhancing the quality of life, measured all over the developed world alike. Cities compete to attract the highest number of resources at the local, regional, national, and global levels. Although the outcome of this contest depends on many factors, including global trends, national policies, decisions regarding the location of businesses, development strategies and the efficiency of local politicians, undoubtedly the highest chances in this rivalry have “cities with character” – which might be the cultural ambiance. In comparative studies and analyses, cities quite often are placed in different places, based on various economic, social, and geographical characteristics to reveal their best and worst faces. Policymakers and business representatives, but also

common citizens, use these results of city evaluation as a basis for considering advantages and setting targets for future developments, likewise making individual decisions to migrate for economic and non-economic reasons, i.e. changing the place of residence because of the desire to alter the social environment or to improve living conditions. Recently, the resiliency has become extremely topical because of natural disasters.

Positive scores in legitimate cities' rankings might serve as the crucial element of a city's marketing strategy. The Mercer, an influential consultancy portal suggesting the most favourable locations for business, recommends the following cities as the best ones in this respect: Vienna in Austria, Zurich in Switzerland, Vancouver in Canada, Munich in Germany, and Auckland in New Zealand. It takes into consideration factors such as climate, prevalence of mass diseases and sanitary standards, ease of communication and physical distance, as well as the quality of the local political and social environment, concerning the law and preventing the crime. In this ranking, Poland's capital Warszawa takes the 82nd place, next to Bratislava, Vilnius, and Port Louis in Mauritius (*Quality of living city ranking*, 2020).

Saskia Sassen (2009) examines rankings of various city's attractiveness, states that in recent years European cities have begun to dominate in that issue, while American cities have lost a lot. In the top twenty of the places, the agglomerations previously regarded as modern, such as Los Angeles or Boston, was taken by the "old-fashioned" Amsterdam or Madrid, mainly due to the high rating of non-economic (cultural) factors in them. The position of a city in such ranks may be important in specific areas or sections of the global market. However, this does not mean that it is about the best cities in general. As Sassen points out: "If we are not in the top ten and we think positively about our region, then we need to open our eyes to the significant differences when a company sits in Copenhagen wanting to avoid the much more expensive Frankfurt or London. The main issue here, then, is for cities to open up wisely in individual

aspects – that determines where investors will go" (Sassen, 2009).

Often the positions of cities in reliable arrangement emphasize most of the strengths, ignoring the disadvantages. Little attention is paid to the methodological limitations of arrangements in rankings, especially when they generalise and compare cities with different histories and present. In 2018, the weekly journal *Polityka* – together with researchers from the AGH, University of Science and Technology in Kraków – compiled a list of Polish cities where people can live the best life. Many factors were considered and divided into the following categories: education, leisure, housing, local government, work, environment, community, safety, health care, and communication. The higher the weighted average from all the categories, the higher was the position of a given city. As the authors explained, the methodology used to build the index complies with the current recommendations of the OECD and the European Union Commission in this area. Only objective and generally available statistical data, collected scientifically, were used for the analyses. Subjective data, such as the results of surveys or even representative opinion polls, were not noted. The primary objective was to identify the best or most attractive city in a general sense, which, in practice, amounted to a simplified approach, although different areas of reality require different conditions. The first three places were taken by, respectively: (1) Sopot – owing to winning in four categories, namely: environment, education, leisure, and community, as well as due to and high positions in the areas of availability of work, transport, and connectivity. Then it was followed by (2) Warsaw, whereas in most of the country's capitals it is easiest to get a job and earn the best money. Besides, it boasts good education, communication, and access to health care. There was 3) Kraków, which won its place on the podium by offering good access to health care, having the efficient local government, and the active local community (*Jakość życia w miastach*, 2018).

Surveys on the quality of life in eighty-three European cities showed an already well-known

outcomes: aggregated ratings of satisfaction with life in each city revealed high levels of fulfillment declared by at least 80% of the respondents. In sixteen cities, this level of satisfaction reached 95%, and in forty-six of them it was higher than 90%. Among the cities included, Denmark's Aalborg ranked first in satisfaction with a (99%) satisfaction level, while the lowest levels were reported in Athens (52%), Naples (34%), Palermo (28%), Miskolc (26%), and Marseille (25%). The levels of resident's satisfaction in cities under 100,000 population were found to be uniformly high. In the six smaller cities included in that survey, at least 95% of the respondents they were generally fulfilled; besides the above-mentioned Aalborg, these were Oulu (96%), Burgas (95%), Luxembourg (95%), Braga (95%), and Piatra Neamt (95%). The twenty-eight cities with satisfaction levels below 90% included fourteen capitals of the countries from within the European Union, with nine of them having populations between 1 and 5 million. In the ranking of satisfaction with living in capital cities with the percentage of satisfaction reaching 90%, Warsaw ranked equal to the Czech Prague, Irish Dublin, or Slovenian Ljubljana, with the percentage of satisfaction reaching 90% (*Quality of life in cities*, 2013, pp. 7–21). The high level of satisfaction with the quality of life was confirmed in subsequent surveys carried out under the same assumptions and methodology. It should also be added, that in the light of evaluations of twenty-two more detailed aspects that make up the perception of satisfaction (for example, the quality of the environment or the spotlessness of streets and squares), evaluations were no longer so positive.

A more recent compilation of assessments of the 2015 quality of life in 64 cities across Europe takes into consideration the index of purchasing power, levels of air pollution, house prices in relation to average family incomes, the index of the general cost of living, public safety, the health care satisfaction, usual commuting time, and climate quality (*Quality of Life in European Cities*, 2015). Correspondingly to the cited above, this survey

showed a clear prevalence of positives, but at the level of specific areas (for example, satisfaction with public transportation), differences between the results became more apparent. In about half of the cities, at least three-quarters of the respondents were satisfied with the public transport in their city (the highest levels of satisfaction were in Zurich at 97%, Vienna at 95%, and Helsinki at 93%). On the other hand, in 9 cities, less than half of the respondents declared approval with public transport in their city: in Bucharest (48%), Valletta (46%), Reykjavik (45%), Kosice (45%), Oulu (all 45%), while Naples (33%) and Rome (30%). The lowest levels in this regard were recorded in Palermo (14%). In general, satisfaction with public transport as one of the vital components of the quality of life was found as high in German and Swiss cities, but much low in Italian cities (*Quality of Life in European Cities*, 2015, pp. 8–9).

The well-known Polish nationwide inquiry *Social Diagnosis* distinguishes between two groups of indicators: “civilisational living conditions” and “lifestyle.” It takes into consideration the multidimensionality of the quality of life and include both living settings and assessments of one's own well-being. This approach combines subjective and objective indicators, on the one hand asking for a general evaluation of life (the level of satisfaction with “life in general”), and on the other hand – eliciting – partial assessments, covering nine distinguished aspects: general housing conditions, factual well-being, social capital, physical well-being, mental well-being, life stress, and the perception of social pathologies (Czapiński, 2013, p. 388). The holistic perception of the city as a place of living, which is a component of quality-of-life assessments, is an extrapolation of the valuations of individual areas, which are then transferred onto the whole city – notes Magdalena Szmytkowska in her geographical-humanistic analysis of the determinants of the urban space based on the example of attitudes towards the city of Gdynia (Szmytkowska, 2018, 81–93).

Neither the aggregation nor simplification of indicators in the city rankings do not reflect the

true attitudes and preferences of residents, although some of them merely attempt to ponder “soft” factors alongside with “hard” ones. Sometimes this reinforces stereotypes and clichés effective in social awareness, having also equivalents in the popular slogans. Thus, for example, in Britain the small county Northamptonshire announces the motto “Let yourself grow,” while the county Kent is “The Garden of England,” then County Durham is “The Land of the Prince Bishops,” and Warwickshire is the “Shakespeare Country.” The different variations of these labels are intended to serve the directed promotion of the so-called destination branding. Management of this already progressive business includes the following elements: brand creation, operational activities related to product positioning, promotion, protection, tactical activities (market building, creation of communication channels, and brand virtualisation) and, finally, strategic activities.

Within the same framework publicised are – though sometimes not clearly understood or suitably translated – narratives like “Glasgow’s Miles Better,” or “It’s Happening in Liverpool.” According to Sharon Zukin (2014), the beginning of city branding dates to the urban crisis of the 1970, when graphic designer Milton Glaser developed the world-famous slogan “I ♥ New York” for a campaign promoting the values of family life. Later, in the 1990, almost every city wanted to be as loved as New York and perceive as clean, safe, and open for business. City branding in recent years has evolved into an industry associated with tourism and the media, sports, and entertainment complex. Originally promotional in its design to attract new residents and business, now it is often associated with carefully designed advertisement campaigns intended to persuade people from so called “creative class” to settle down. From Las Vegas to Seoul, city governments have created bureaus or special organisations of tourism, mass convention and entertainment and spend a lot of funds to hire brand consultants up to create the showcase of the cities’ opportunities.

Within social-sciences literature, there are descriptions of cities drawn from an arbitrary set

of metaphors and a literary setting of characteristics. John Rennie Short (2006) has collected them into a compilation corresponding to the way of feeling their atmosphere: “city of networks”, “city of polarisation”, “city – niche of migrants”, “city of competition”, “city of gender”, “erotic city”, “political city”, “designed city”, “city of disorder” (Short, 2006). Other authors propose visions of perfect or ideal cities. For example, Tomasz Martyniuk’s (2011) tourist guide does not deny that Kraków is a truly “magic city”.

From the point of view of the assumptions of quality-of-life surveys and their evaluative character, it might be questionable to reduce the number of factors influencing the way individuals evaluate their life and satisfaction with it. Statistical-quantitative studies aimed at ordering the cities in terms of measurable aspects of the quality of life and stop at just them can sometimes head to misleading conclusions. As Agnieszka Jeran writes: “No one who knows Bydgoszcz, Toruń, and Włocławek will confuse these cities” [...] yet their statistical characteristics in many areas overlaps, and the results of studies on the quality of life in these cities can be considered surprisingly similar.” The three cities are located close to each other within one voivodeship. Although they occupy different positions in the ranking, in the light of representative quantitative research (using questionnaires) on quality-of-life measurements of most features, they turn out to be almost identical. The differences in the results of the findings probably reflect not so much the specificity of cities and their characteristics, but the side effects of the statistical quantitative surveys (Jeran, 2015, pp. 222–235).

Studies on the attractiveness of cities in Europe and the United States revealing that many attractive factors replicate on both continents. Positive opinions about cities as places to live are common due to the high level of public services and amenities boosting the comfort of everyday life, combined with certain characteristics of the social structure. Economic considerations are the first to be thought when making migration-related decisions: availability of work, satisfactory wages,

social security, and the adequateness of public services. These factors are decisive when it comes to the local population, but play a lesser role for the external visitors, who are more attracted by cultural and entertainment-related incentives. Analyses of the determinants of labour migration show that migration decisions are generally dependent on the employment opportunities. However, the second place is taken by the variously conceived quality of life, including such ecological aspects as climate conditions, easy contact with nature, and the availability of recreational areas. The third important factor is the housing situation. The fourth one – which does not mean it is less significant – is low crime and pathology rates. These findings show that among the factors influencing the attractiveness of cities and apart from purely economic factors, there are also considerations which can be described as qualitative. Also, in the case of the investigated attempts to encourage human capital to settle down, the economy is not the one resolving argument. In other words, an attractive region does not necessarily have to be tantamount equate to wealth in the economic sense (*Attractiveness of Regions to Migrants and Visitors*, 2020).

Other studies also come to analogous conclusions about the role of non-economic aspects: the beauty of the landscape, the existence of widespread recreational areas, the availability of public infrastructure facilities, as well as well-functioning health services, reputable schools, prestigious universities, and tourist attractions. Thus, of interest are not only cities with low unemployment rate and satisfactory wages. Nevertheless, as Thiess Büettner and Alexander Ebertz explain, even if wages in the region or city are satisfactory, high crime rates discourage migration-related decisions (Büttner & Ebertz 2009, pp. 89–112).

Most of the studies confirm the ambivalence and relativity. For many years, researchers have claimed that the quality of any subject has an objective dimension, but it is based primarily on the subjective component of a perceptual nature.

As Robert W. Marans asked (2011): “What do we mean by the quality of life? It is certainly a multifaceted concept, often used in the media and by politicians, although it is impossible to define it precisely. It is difficult to distinguish between the concepts of quality of life, well-being, satisfaction, and happiness” (pp. 11–12). Both “hard” and “soft” groups of criterias are linked by referring to the system of values and hierarchy of needs, shaping people’s economic and social behaviour as well as determining preferred lifestyles, models of consumption, and the attitude to wealth or socially acceptable and desired quality of life.

The sociological point of view is presented extensively by Ewa Rokicka (2013), who distinguishes five main currents of interest in the reflection on the quality of life: 1) the attention focusing on the protection of the natural environment, which shows that the attitudes towards critical aspects, like air pollution, water contamination, excess noise, etc., for the natural environment and for the people’s health is growing in importance for the common awareness; 2) the quality of life is considered through the prism of the state of health in the patient’s self-assessment, and it takes into account the impact of diseases and applied treatment on the individual’s functioning in the physical, mental, and social spheres; 3) the concerns related to the problems of urbanisation – focuses attention on particularly unfavourable effects of spatial development in residential areas, such as defective planning of cities, housing, excessive motor transport, or high density of agglomerations; 4) the stream based on sociopsychological motives concentrates on the negative consequences of the development of civilisation for individuals and for social life (such as social alienation, loneliness, and emptiness in human life); and 5) the answers focusing on the economic aspect of the quality of life, where quality is understood as the material level of life of an individual, local community, region, country, or even nation, and as such, it can be treated both as an explanatory variable, or as a determinant of economic development along with its effect.

The level of wealth and poverty and in particular their uneven distribution is critical for assessments of the individual and societal quality of life. To illustrate poverty well, signs such as unemployment rate, access to fresh drinking water, the availability of sewage and gas networks, life expectancy, the weight of infants and the proper child nutrition are used, in addition to financial ones. There are both comparative and valuing as descriptive (non-valuing) orientations in the explanation of the quality of life. Within the descriptive orientation, a distinction is formulated between the objective and the subjective qualities, argued by almost all researchers investigating the discussed issues. The objective dimension of the quality of life consists of such overarching factors as the standard of living, material conditions, and health (Rokicka, 2013, pp. 161–162).

What city life mean in the general perception? For Alexander Wallis (1967) the modern metropolises were a separate world, thus particularly interesting field of sociological research. They are vivid environments, fascinating in their diversity, exciting, colourful as a social environment, making it impossible to get bored with, and vibrant with energy. Living in a large city can provide constant, appealing experiences and stimuli. They are the centers of modern civilisation; each of them has unique and interesting features (Wallis, 1967).

One of the main advantages of living in a city is close access to culture, and for the followers of trendy activities cities always have a lot to offer: theaters, cinemas, museums, art galleries, dance halls, subject-based meeting places, and festivals. The comfort of living in the city is another point in its taste. Almost everything in the field of services is within easy reach thanks to the transportation system and even with walking distance. The public transportation reduces the need to own a car. Living in a city means access to jobs and the chances of finding suitable employment or boosting specialised qualifications. It offers career opportunities, which for many professions is a prerequisite. Getting suitable accommodation or achieve a proper education is easy. They are full

of attractions stores, offering fashion novelties. Every city is a unique blend of architecture and culture. On a social level, everyone can meet many interesting people with little or no effort. Cities attract interesting and dynamic individuals which creates flavour and makes them vibrant centres of events.

Sociological and anthropological perspectives on describing the quality of urban life take into attention mainly, though not exclusively, “soft” criteria. As Claude Lévi-Strauss (1964) stated in his “Sadness of the tropics: “One has the right to compare cities to symphonies or poems, they are objects of the same nature” (p. 127). This quote appeared in the foreword of Waław Piotrowski’s (1976, p. 7) empirically based study of the socio-spatial structure of Łódź.

The comparison of the structure and composition of cities to the work of art points in the direction of feeling, that means articulating judgements and opinions under the influence of receiving stimuli – basic material for the further narration of perception or valorisation. This concept was used in the studies on the cities and relates to the designate “communication.” Social sciences, especially cultural anthropology, have taken this anthropomorphic comparison seriously. A humanised city can “speak” to its audience-dwellers, just like poetry or painting to the reader and viewer, hence it can be interpreted in a variety of ways like a piece of art. This manifests itself in people’s attitudes and statements, from the common opinions of residents to scientifically based analyses, both of which can be the substance or data for further scholarly interpretation. In speaking by some ways and means to its audience, the city uncovers character, identity, and quality. Each of the cities should be treated in terms of unique and several characteristics typical for urbanity as a form of life. Within the Polish sociology, the general direction of the study of culture – and in this context the conditions and the quality of life – was outlined by Florian Znaniecki, who defined the city as a non-spatial, humanistic entire, displaying itself in human experience and activity. For this



reason, people living in the urban realm consider themselves “inhabitants” of the city; the material conditions of this residence exert an influence on their lives. “This does not mean, however, that they allow themselves to be entirely situated in this territory, like houses or streetcars. After all, they are not only bodies, but experiencing and active subjects, and in this capacity, they are not in the city, but – if I may express it this way – the city is in the sphere of their common experience and action, they create it as an overly complex social structure” (Znanięcki & Ziółkowski, 1984, pp. 34–35).

### **The quality of life and the city’s cultural atmosphere**

As mentioned before, notions of the cultural atmosphere are difficult to define and parametrise, although it can undoubtedly be felt and remarked. Firstly, it is a symbolic representation of many objects or phenomena, based on typical images existing in individual or collective consciousness. Secondly, it consists in an awareness, feelings and sharing of beliefs about the ambiance of a given city and its landscape. Finally, it is something that corresponds to the spirit of the city (understood like the ancient *genius loci*). Such atmosphere can be understood and assigned to a whole range of terms with various meanings: aura, character, physiognomy, colour, character, specificity, style, properties. Though difficult to determine, it may function as a regarded and decisive criterion in any kind of appraisal. People born and brought up in the realm of a given city get used to and typically pay no attention to its nature and spirit, contenting themselves within the domestication, part of natural attachment to the place (city, housing estate, street). Yet an outsider, a sentimentally unmotivated observer, a passing short-time visitor, or a sporadic tourist, might have an enthusiastic or unpleasant opinion about it. Peter Critchley’s view on Liverpool might be an example: “It is a city to do something, to change, to try, a city with human dimensions, embodying and expressing

lightness of heart, passion, spirit, imagination, energy, diversity. It welcomes everyone. In terms of material resources, Liverpool has much to offer. It is a beautiful city, with more significant buildings than any other city in the UK, outside London. However, the city’s greatest asset is its people. They are the heart and soul of the city. The physical content, the structure of the buildings and the social forms of the city are in creative relation to the content – the individuals whose actions and interactions make up the social life of the city.” Critchley quotes a clipping from the *Illustrated London News* of May 15, 1886: “Liverpool ... has become a wonder of the world. It is the New York of Europe, a world city, not just of the British countryside” (Critchley, 2015). In contrast, prominent author John Steinbeck noted about the Big Apple that: “New York is a foul, dirty city. Its climate is a scandalous, its politics can frighten children, its traffic is madness and its competition murderous” (Steinbeck, 2003). According to numerous everyday opinions, Łódź is still mainly a working-class city, not deserving attention, even though the economic transformation thirty years ago exterminated Łódź textile industry and, on the other side, the richness of its 19th-century heritage is now fully appreciated. Gdańsk is still considered to be a city of shipbuilders (despite the museum-like present nature of its shipyards), and Scotland’s Glasgow is continuously referred to as a rude industrial city, even though it now leads Europe in terms of modern transformation.

Quotations above selected from many statements on cities refer to the impressions which can be summed up as “atmosphere.” This sort of ambiance seems to be indispensable, even though characterised mainly by metaphors and parallels expressing its general features, alongside with peculiarities. Some authors have proposed other terms and concepts semantically close to cultural ambiance. Richard Florida (2010) writes about “street culture,” thus defining its various components and stimuli as “... a rich mix of cafés, street musicians, small galleries, and restaurants, all cultural elements within which it is difficult to separate participation

from observation, creativity from the creator himself' (Florida 2010, pp. 172–173). Sharon Zukin, describing the downtown of New York, illustrate how the city's cultural environment, conceived as a mosaic of the ethnic groups, styles, and aesthetics that make up population, is constantly noticeable within the central and public spaces of this city, its streets, parks, stores, museums, and restaurants. Culture and its character, sometimes vague yet spectacular, manifests as the living presence of different people. Immigrants, civil servants, artists, street vendors, and police officers alongside thousands of beggars and homeless people embody this unique, eclectic *mélange* and character of the city (Zukin, 1995). Daniel A. Bell and Avner de-Shalit (2011) explain why philosophy and the social sciences should discover not something else, but largely all the "spirit of cities," that can be assumed as equivalent with cultural atmosphere. It is not easy, they argue, to theorise about what makes certain cities unique, and why their identities matter from a standardising point of view. In the "ideal" or "model" city, the maximisation of the various possibilities and advantages is undertaken according to current patterns. Modern middle-class dwellers take pride in living in an environment that makes their way of life more comfortable and inspiring compared to rural life, but they can also take satisfaction in living in an urban environment that is exceptional compared to other cities. As Bell and de-Shalit further explain (2011): "We call this pride an urbanity (civicism). It is rooted in the sense that the city is special [...]. A sense of community – something that seems to be as deeply embedded in human nature as, for example, the pursuit of personal freedom – must be linked to a communal feeling of particularity, which we also call ethos or spirit. [...]. In modern cities, another form of community has developed. While more and more people are experiencing a growing sense of cosmopolitanism, they also want to feel special. Cities allow for a combination of both cosmopolitanism and a sense of community rooted in that particularity. Residents take pride in their

cities and the values they represent and try to nurture their specific civic cultures and ways of life. Jerusalemites struggle to promote their segregated religious identity, Montrealers try to preserve their linguistic identity, etc." (Bell & de-Shalit, 2011).

Nine of the cities analysed by these authors can be employ in view of the leading features that give them distinct character and atmosphere: in Jerusalem it will be three great religions; in Montreal – two languages and cultures; in Singapore – one nation in two versions, i.e. traditional and super-modern; in Hong Kong – extreme commercialism and the utilitarianism of development caused by the scarcity of space; in Beijing – the demonstration of traditionally oppressive political power; in Oxford – a prestigious and intimate space of learning; in Berlin – tolerance for some behaviours and intolerance for others. Paris, in this convention, is a city of adventure and romances, while New York is a city of business, haste, and unrestrained ambition. Phenomenology describes the experience of cities through notions such as "character" or "spirit of place," "mood" or "magic." Yi-Fu Tuan proposed the term "topophilia," literally meaning love of place and affective connections between people and their physical environment, creating positive feelings. The opposite of topophilia is "topophobia" – an aversive attitude towards the environment, causing anxiety or depression (Tuan, 1987, pp. 92–113).

Similarly, the specific charisma of a city, especially a large one, can be considered as triggering fascination and encouraging positive evaluations. Like the impact of charismatic persons and their ability to influence followers or enemies, charisma can be something characteristic that cities possess. It can then include a uniqueness shaped by history or staged through modernisation; one can feel their symbolic meaning. People can declare complex feelings, as they do under the influence of tempting attention charismatics personalities, when they excite for history of the municipalities, and when they perceive a unique charm and

impression caused by the richness of their architecture or beauty of specific places.

In this specific environment charisma evokes many more meanings. On the one hand, it will be the metaphorical soul of a city, emanating from its history, urban composition, infrastructure, or certain buildings and public spaces. On the other hand, it will be the appeal of the crowd or some dwellers, their style and presentation, special appearance, or unusual behaviour. Artists, cab drivers, policemen, or just ordinary street passers-by; the amazing presence of all of them as well as the manner they speak, gesture, move, or dress can all contribute to a charisma that is indefinable, although noticeable almost to the naked eye. They all make up the cultural characteristics of cities (Majer, 2015, pp. 113–116). As Thomas Hansen and Oskar Verkaaik (2009) write on this subject: “Urban spaces have spirit and cities have souls. Some are dangerous and threatening but attract attention; others are marked by beauty and excess; still others frighten with monotony and commonness. These qualities are contagious and can permeate the character of people living in such cities” (Hansen & Verkaaik 2009, p. 5).

Social sciences have often drawn their rationales for interpreting the atmosphere of cities from fiction, literatures and poetry, and great writers have repeatedly expressed their feelings on that subject, usually stipulating that they cannot even come close to capturing its essence. An example of the split between the apotheosis and anathema of the big city can be seen in Italo Calvino’s (2013) following reflections: “It is New York, a city that is neither exactly America nor Europe, that gives off a surge of extraordinary energy that you can immediately feel as if you had always lived here, and at certain times, especially in the Upper City, where you can sense the bustle of big offices and ready-to-wear factories, this city lands on your head as if it wanted to crush you” (Calvino, 2013, p. 194).

The atmosphere of a city always grows out of basics of the nations or region’s culture; in other words, is an emanation of cultural diversity.

Thus, can be understood as a kind of compilation of symbols and messages, within the boundaries set by the physical geography and human imagination or emotions. It does not necessarily have to coincide with the current reality. The media of a cultural atmosphere can be tangible objects with distinct identification features, present in social consciousness as distinguishing signs and markers. Usually significant artifacts play the role of messages. As Anna Karwińska (2008) writes, “...such features as antiquity, aesthetic value, uniqueness, originality, authenticity, which evoke historical and emotional associations, make a given area unique and shape the identity of a place. It is worth noticing, however, that not only historical or monumental objects that refer to aged traditions, but also centuries – also old traditions form the basis for shaping the collective identity [and thus the cultural atmosphere – note by A. M.]. For building the identity of local communities, and sometimes only of certain groups, seemingly average places may be important, which nevertheless create history and symbolic space for a selected group of people. Sometimes humble and ordinary elements of space become significant and important, complementing the dominant values of another culture in the space; they also play an important role in shaping urban cultural landscape and the local identity” (Karwińska, 2008, pp. 90–96)

The characterisation of cities in contemporary scientific literature exemplify the growing number of entries dealing with the exemplary or desirable cities, i.e., cities as they ought to be from the perspective of ideas, assumptions, theories, or concepts. Many of these visions can inspire and draw attention to important, if not crucial, aspects of urban reality. Yet many of them are hypostases or images belonging to so-called wishful thinking. In recent decades, sample concepts of cities and their functions have appeared one after another: the sustainable city, the smart city, the green city, the competitive city, the creative and attractive city, and lastly the slow city. The newest adjective having some inspirational power is the postulate

that cities must be resilient and having the ability to respond quickly and effectively to various natural catastrophes, such as the devastating hurricane Katrina in New Orleans or unexpected terrorist attacks like the one in New York City. A handbook explanation of a resilient city is that it should be dominated by forms of development and physical infrastructure strong enough to resist the physical, social, and economic challenges such as fossil fuel depletion and negative climate change, natural disasters, or extremist attacks (*Resilient Cities*, 2020). There are a growing number of scientific works devoted to the factors determining the resilience and vulnerability of cities and referring to the assessment of this resilience in terms of a strategic diagnosis (Majer, 2020, p. 188).

Cultural atmosphere can be likewise described in the context of the so-called cultural tourism. Paulina Kosowska (2013) quotes one of its definitions "...group or individual expeditions of a tourist nature, in which the encounter of the participants of the trip with objects, events and other qualities of high or popular culture, or the increase of their knowledge of the surrounding world organised by man, is an essential part of the programme of the trip or constitutes a decisive argument for the individual decision to undertake or participate in it" (Kosowska, 2013, p. 19).

What ultimately causes that a city, especially a large one, may be considered as good environment for living in a qualitative sense, and having a proper cultural atmosphere? Among many factors, one can probably mention the countless opportunities to meet new people all the time, the unrestrained possibilities to consume, liberty to dress naturally and spend free time any way, the exceptional architecture and art, and finally, the ease of moving easy around the territory. Trying to reach deeper into the reasons for approval or dissatisfaction might reveal other aspects. In the overall sense of good quality of life in each city, the state of the economy plays a significant role. Today, the level of economic development is largely the result of the successive phases of urbanisation and the creation of new jobs,

both in traditional sectors and in the field defined as cognitive-cultural. However, it turns out that culture is as much important as economy. Thus from this perspective, the perception the quality of life is determined not only by official "temples of art" (museums and galleries with world-famous works, or renowned theaters and concert halls), but also by smaller showcases run by local artists, halls of chamber performances, boutiques with unusual clothing, and often connected catering establishments, known jointly as places of culture. An example in this respect is the Off-Piotrkowska development in Łódź, which is a set of boutiques and eating places or the now defunct Fabryka Trzciny (Reed Factory) in Warsaw.

Assessments of a city's cultural climate is a very sensitive and might vary depending on a person's situation, emotional state, weather of the season and even part of a day. In every physical urban space, there are points communicating certain contents to which some people can have a personal, emotional, or sentimental references. These can be areas whose charm is recognised by the locals, but also by tourists and seldom visitors, and which become hallmarks or evoking symbols of a given locality, able to arouse concordant or contradictory emotions. The feeling towards such places and the communities or the whole city influences one's mood and are capable to generate the desire to join and build one's own future with them. It also reflects historical and currently verified knowledge of a place and helps predict its future. Psychologist Edward Relph (1976) wrote that one can imagine a city as a mosaic of buildings or other physical objects, but the person perceiving these objects sees far more; they are beautiful or ugly, useful, or unnecessary, they can be a citadel or factory, an eye-pleasing specimen, an object of property rights; in short, they are meaningful and evocative. Relationships with such places and objects are as indispensable and varied, or as satisfying or disagreeable, as relationships with other people are (Relph, 1976, pp. 45–47, 141).

By some scholar's modernity is understood as an period that differentiate people and disperse

nations or communities. For Zygmunt Bauman (2006) most people are contemporary nomads without belonging or at least they have a nomadic personality. According to him, this is especially apparent when it comes to the young generation, for whom it is normal to be in many places at once, here today and there tomorrow (Bauman, 2006, p. 92). It is a fact that substantial parts of the societies, including those of Europe and Poland, are increasingly on the move or more precisely: under the continuous process of changes. According to the new ontology, the world around is a sort of experience which should be treated as a narration generated from a certain perspective, never as an accomplished unit. For many people, this is neither a comfortable perspective nor a sure leaning point. Thus, such a vague position may frequently turn into an attachment to certain places because of its cultural atmosphere. Most people feel an emotional connection – positive or negative, pleasant, or awful – with the places related to the present day and a memory of the past, and sometimes even with some prediction of the future. Feelings felt towards such places and the individuals or communities that fill them conjointly socio-spatial ecumene – micro polis, that is fragments of the city considered to be “one’s own,” belonging to its inhabitants – individuals, family, friends, colleagues, neighbours, acquaintances. It is, in other words, sort of personal city within a city, a kind of *pars pro toto* (a part for the place of the whole), but also a metaphor corresponding with the desire to give a real structure to the way people interact with their urban environment (Majer, 2015, p. 7).

Likewise, as the way the identity of people and objects cannot be adequately explained within the framework of science, so the urban atmosphere can be simply a prefiguration with greater or lesser explanatory capacity. Difficult to the full comprehension, though may evoke sentimental associations, and awaken the memory of experiences that co-create the foundations of personality and the fundamentals of individual biographies. According to Fritz Steele (1989), “Sensation of place is the feelings of an individual

in a particular environment (such as experiencing stimulation, joy, effulgence, or the like). [...] A spirit of place is a set of qualities that give some part of a space a specific atmosphere or personality (like a feeling of mystery or identity with someone else or a group) [...]. The environment (setting) is the individual’s immediate surroundings, including physical and social elements” (Steele, 1989, p. 48).

In well-developed countries, urban areas play the role of drivers of economic growth, social change, and political integration. Dynamic and prosperous cities can attract, establish, and maintain both the human talents and investment capital necessary to create economic opportunities and sustain high levels of living. Globalisation, developments in technology and the growing importance of knowledge in the economy have forced modern cities to seek new sources of revenue and job creation in sectors other than industry, primarily in specialised services and culture. This has raised the threshold of expectations from the current principles of urbanism: it is to consist of a high quality of life and the most favourable conditions for living, working, studying, resting, and entertain. For politicians and city managers, this is a challenge that can no longer be ignored or avoided.

## Conclusion

Cities are vibrant, dynamic spaces, focusing human efforts in every field. They also have the greatest potential for continuous improvement of the quality of human life. For millennia, people have come to cities with hopes and dreams for a better life. Today, many cities managed to raise the material standard of living higher than any time in history, although not equally for everyone. In many cities of the developed and less developed world, circumstances of urban life are appallingly poor. Even so cities continue to attract people because of the quality of life.

I shall end these considerations with a quote from Lewis Mumford (1961) who predicted the importance of the city’s atmosphere by making

the following, persuasive comment: “The mission of the city is to continue the conscious participation of people in the historical process. Through its own complex and enduring structure, the city greatly enhances the ability to interpret these processes and to take an active, formative part in them, so that each phase of the spectacle that is its stage bears to the highest possible degree the stamp of consciousness, the seal of purpose, and the colour of involvement. Improving all dimensions of life through conscious community, rational communication, technological mastery, and above all, changing reality has been the highest task of cities throughout history. And this remains the primary reason for their continued existence” (Mumford, 1961, p. 576).

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