

# Urban and Rural Public Spaces: Development Issues and Qualitative Assessment

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**Abstract.** This paper presents selected issues related to the observation, assessment and development of urban and rural public spaces. Therefore, its initial part focuses on the specific nature of these spaces, and in particular on their functions and on problems in their development. It also describes features of urban and rural public spaces, which will be a prelude to the issue of qualitative assessment of the subject at hand. The method applied here can be used for the analysis of each urban space selected, thus strengthening the practical nature of this study. While over 80 public spaces have been analysed, the paper itself focuses only on the case studies that demonstrate the specific nature of the analysis that was carried out. The analysis process as a whole is only referred to in the summary.

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## 1. Introduction

Public spaces are of great importance both in people's lives and in the development of society. In order to better understand their functions, it is necessary to focus on how people build their social relationships. There are three types of bonds that each human being establishes in the course of their life. The first is the family bond, which accompanies human beings from the beginning and helps them to develop properly and become autonomous members of society. Secondly, there are bonds that human beings form when staying in places where they meet other people with whom they spend free time. And lastly, there are bonds which are the highest in the hierarchy and which are created through participation in various social groups. For all those bonds to exist, a place for their development must be created. Public spaces are just those areas in which such relationships can be formed and developed.

Nowadays, the needs of urban residents differ from those of rural residents. Therefore, it is necessary to create public spaces that will play different roles in urban and rural areas. The sheer number of functions performed by urban and rural public spaces also varies, depending on their sizes and nature as expressed through the lifestyles of their users.

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate the issues concerning the development of public spaces in urban and rural areas. Readers will find here a method for assessing these areas in terms of their quality, which enables their functionality, practicality, reliability, durability, safety, legibility, aesthetics and sensitivity to be determined. These determinants of qualitative assessment can be used to analyse any social space, which reinforces the practical nature of this paper. The qualitative assessment is presented through the case studies that show differences in the development of urban and rural public spaces. The case studies analysed come from the Wielkopolskie Province and represent the results of implementation studies carried out in the framework of social and economic cooperation between the Adam Mickiewicz University and both the City Office in Poznań and the Commune District in Krobia.

## 2. Public space: definition and development issues

A public space is: any area that is available to anyone and free; any physical area in which any human being may find themselves; any area of particular significance for the fulfilment of the needs of its residents and for the improvement of their quality of life; and any area favourable to establishing social contacts due to its location and both functional and spatial characteristics (*Ustawa o planowaniu i zagospodarowaniu przestrzennym*). Types of public spaces are as follows: representative spaces (most often a square built as a symbol of the prevailing social relations, in a developed monumental and geometrical form, usually associated with objects of particular significance), traffic spaces (streets, separate vehicle and pedestrian traffic areas), commercial spaces (used for commercial purposes, bazaars), ordinary spaces (intended for use, and with various functions, including mostly a residential one), church spaces (stemming from medieval traditions of cathedral squares, related to religious ceremonies), green spaces (recreational function, combined with parkland), recreational spaces – squares (leisure-related purposes, often within a residential zone) and town marketplaces (important urban areas created when a town was built or even earlier; in widely differing forms) (Gorlach, 2004).

Public spaces have been undergoing changes. While they still form the most durable elements of urban/rural infrastructure, their evolution has become more and more noticeable. As a result, the following transformations have occurred: blurring of boundaries, fragmentation of infrastructure, and proliferation or replacement of development elements or land consolidation (Jastrząb, 2002). In many cases, traditional local values clash with values brought from the outside by technological progress, fashion or similar factors. Instead of being a space for meetings, conversations and interactions between various age groups, public spaces sometimes become centres of services, commerce or continuous traffic, or areas that have an adverse impact on local society. Obviously, although the infrastructure and the use of the areas concerned vary, the spaces analysed perform defined social and technical functions.

The design (development) of public spaces should be tailored to their users. A public space should stimulate the strengthening of human interactions and the creation of social relations, and also provide people with a reason or incentive to frequent it, and it should ensure the undisturbed movement of people. Public spaces should also be the jewel of a city/village and should highlight its values (both historical and cultural). A well-designed public space should attract people, stimulate initiatives and trade, foster a sense of responsibility for the area concerned and increase the safety of its users. The elements of which a public space consists and their distribution, as well as their number, scale and location are of great importance. Public spaces are functional when they can meet the needs for relaxation, shelter, movement and on-site activity, as well as any necessary or optional action.

According to many authors, in 21st-century Central Europe public spaces have been experiencing a crisis (Madanipour, 2004; Sennett, 2003; Buivydas, Samalavičius, 2011; Kratochvíl, 2013; Kristiánová, 2016; Bitusikova, Luther, 2018), and the development of cities has been made difficult by motorways that break up the urbanised structure, by the apparent democratisation of areas, which results in their division but without boundaries, and by an economic system where market conditions fragment business activities. In addition, a public space is also not developed in relation to the environment, but instead separately, in the form of a closed urban interior. Rural areas experience similar phenomena, but on a slightly smaller scale.

The changes referred to by researchers started happening no earlier than in the 1970s, when improvements in the conditions of life and an increase in contamination and noise levels triggered changes in the internal structure of cities and villages. It became necessary to create places of activity and social contact, which brought about favourable conditions for trade, relaxation and business. Cycling and pedestrian safety was taken into account. Public spaces of European cities and villages became points of information exchange, venues for important events (processions, celebrations and festivals) and markets on which goods and services were exchanged. They have been continuously developing and have become places for socialising, spaces for art, culture and history, as well as places for real en-

counters outside the virtual world (Grunskis, Mankus, 2013).

The aforementioned characteristics of urban and rural public spaces invite a reflection on issues related to their development. The trends in development of the spaces analysed are as follows:

- Owing to expansion and renovations, development of public spaces is not continuous or fully compact, and is subject to internal fragmentation (Sagan, 2002; Zathey, 2002);
- New service-focused functions and new architectural and urban forms appear; wealthier groups of people coexist with poorer ones (Lisowski & Grochowski, 2007; Hamilton, 1999; Stanilov, 2007);
- Urbanisation intensifies construction projects (Rydz, 2010);
- A public space is now an area characterised by various levels of evolution and by density of architectural forms, shapes and functions (Czarnecki, 2009);
- Public spaces are not directed towards the cultural landscape, but remain disorderly in their development and have no landscape identity (Grunskis & Mankus 2013; Kosiński, 2002);
- Zoning plans are often developed under pressure from land owners or investors, one result of which is the dispersed and multifunctional development of land;
- New developments are not integrated with existing infrastructure (Ioan, 2007; Zimnicka & Czernik, 2007);
- Spontaneous development causes threats and losses in zoning activities, and in particular amplifies the functional and spatial chaos and compositional disorder, as well as the irrationality of the development of land, also impeding the capacity to modernise the development of public space in the future, and obstructing the effective protection of natural and landscape resources, in particular, in the immediate vicinity of areas protected by law (Kłodziński, 2007; Kamiński, 2008; Kowicki, 2010);
- The shape and development of public spaces currently fails to take account of the natural environment and to be in line with the existing forms of investment projects. Furthermore, there is no logic behind their creation and the

principles of urban composition and architectural unity are violated (Staszewska et al., 2004);

- Residential and service buildings in public spaces are modernised by enlarging windows and converting attics. The most popular renovations include vertical and horizontal extensions and changes to facades, entrances and windows, as a result of which the whole structure of a building, its architectural details, decorative woodwork and ornaments are changed (Staszewska, 2005);
- The absence of green areas makes public spaces less attractive (Kristiánová, 2016; Staszewska, 2012);
- It is primarily traffic routes and the specific location of plots that crystallise and shape development. The location of properties depends on road capacity, road surfaces and the location of public transport stops (Staszewska & Kacprzak, 2009), but not on the shape and role of public spaces;
- Solutions for the location of buildings, architectural form, aesthetic and organic quality vary inconsistently, former zoning plans become more and more blurred, along with the traditional features of regional architecture (Madanipour, 2004; Melges, 2007).

Therefore, the intensity and use of urban and rural public spaces is affected by the number and distribution of development elements and the organisation and functionality of the location, as well as the characteristic features of the area concerned and the preferences of its users. The capacity of individual parts of urban/rural public spaces to adjust to various forms of social activities is important. It is common knowledge that the quantity and type of relationships, links or contacts, both internal (within an urban/rural public space) and external (with other spatially related communities), affects the attractiveness of these areas. Public spaces should function as areas that are hierarchically important and maintain their local identity. They should also be included in the projects of local authorities that support the development process in organisational and financial terms. It is necessary to preserve the aesthetics and the natural and cultural values of the public space's landscape, as well as the functionality of development elements and the capacity to satisfy the needs of users of individual public spaces.

### 3. Urban public spaces: meaning and development

Urban public spaces are characterised by features that differ slightly from those typical of rural public spaces. These features depend on the meaning that such spaces have to their users. For residents it is essential that urban public spaces are usable, interactive, civic, political, axiological, symbolic and identifiable.

The first of the aforementioned features refers to the required and optional activities of both individual and social nature (Gehl, 2010, 2011). Expectations in this respect are related, to the largest extent, to the use of the time that human beings have for themselves, i.e. those "moments" that "human beings consider excluded from an impact of the majority of life pressures and which are at their disposal" (Fatyga, 2014: 24). The time one has to oneself can be spent in a public space, and on satisfying needs that can be met by a given place. According to Stephen Carr, there are five such needs, i.e. the need of comfort, the need of relaxation, the need of passive engagement, the need of active engagement and the need of discovery (Carr et al., 2009). Research reveals that urban public spaces enable people to satisfy, to a large extent, their needs of relaxation, comfort and passive engagement, and to a lesser degree, those related to active engagement and discovery (Bierwiazzonek, 2016). The most important role in meeting those needs is played by two types of urban public spaces, namely parks and main squares – in particular, marketplaces.

In a city, usability is also related to direct and unlimited access to various functions. A public space is attractive only when it is largely surrounded by or filled with objects and entities of a commercial nature such as cafeterias, restaurants, shops, entertainment venues and cultural institutions. Their presence on city squares and streets is obvious and undoubtedly expands the usable meaning of public spaces. However, it is necessary to strike a balance between commercial establishments and areas that are accessible for free. The easiest way to achieve this is to place a sufficient amount of urban furniture in a space, along with some small architectural elements that provide shelter from the sun, wind and rain, ensure safety and provide scope for con-

versation, observation and visual contact with other users.

The second key characteristic of urban public spaces for an urban community is their interactivity. The development of public spaces does not often encourage relations between people, as it does not allow for events to be experienced together. In addition, urban users of shared areas often use virtual space through their social profiles on telecommunication devices (Bierwiazzonek, 2012).

Urban public spaces also have civic and political meanings. The fate of urban communities is determined by their ability to enhance civic roles, conduct dialogue and have public discussions. City squares often become an arena for political games or demonstrations of one's views (Harvey, 2012; Merrifield, 2014; Miciukiewicz, 2011).

The next of the aforementioned meanings, i.e. the axiological one, refers directly to classical concepts of Florian Znaniecki and Aleksander Wallis. Znaniecki formulates the concept of spatial value to be understood as part of a physical or symbolic space to which an individual refers as a member of a given community (Znaniecki, 1999). Public spaces also become such reference areas. On the other hand, Wallis points out the value of favourite places. He refers to personal relations with space, thus to the sphere of identification and identity. The fact remains that they also constitute functional values and may also constitute situational values (Wallis, 1990).

The symbolic meaning, which is also important and closely related to the two meanings already mentioned, is given by people and is based on the experiences of users of given spaces and on their history. It also results from the awareness of inhabitants, the level of cultural capital and their ability to "read" the city. Symbolic references often transform themselves into identity values (Lenartowicz, 2010). Symbolism and identity have an impact on the value of space and give it a configuration of features that distinguish the way people experience and transform it. When a space is valued highly, people identify themselves with it, and they become more socially and spatially active and start shaping, organising and using it. When the space is poorly valued, it loses its sociable, definable and developmental potential. It may therefore be of significant

importance in spatial, social and economic terms to give a space a symbolic meaning and identity.

In a city, social participation is based on seeing, perceiving and understanding public spaces. This participation is obviously correlated with spatial organisation and development of urban areas. It is worth bearing in mind that urban public spaces are filled with people who are culturally diverse and have different and particular needs, and therefore public spaces are often shaped (developed) without a specific idea or functionally comprehensive project (idea).

#### **4. Rural public spaces: issues and good practices in spatial planning**

Public spaces are a common good and are of particular importance for local communities, including rural ones. Owing to their location, development and other functional characteristics they are designed to satisfy various material and non-material needs of their users and also to facilitate interactions between individuals and groups. They are supposed to improve the quality of life and to be a place fostering the identification of a human being with their place of residence. Traditional rural public spaces differ significantly from urban spaces. They are characterised, in particular, by the openness of landscape and the absence of clear boundaries between public and private zones (resulting primarily from the nature of their development and from the lifestyle and leisure activities of residents).

Rural areas often lack social facilities designed for leisure, recreational and sporting purposes. They are also deprived of representative areas with which local people could identify and where they could meet, organise events, etc. A significant issue, apart from the shortage of places that integrate local communities, is their unfavourable location, e.g. the peripheral location of recreational and sporting facilities or the dispersion of daily activity places. Many public spaces are also located in isolation from the condition of the surrounding area, which creates sheer enclaves in rural areas. Some of them are located, e.g. at the rear of buildings, out of sight of people. Furthermore, spaces such as playgrounds

and care centres tend to be exceedingly isolated, and, as a result, instead of attracting and integrating, they divide and deter (their physical and psychological accessibility is severely restricted). Their hosts assume that high and solid fences, and dense plantings, will increase safety and public order. However, better effects can be achieved by creating a space that gives all its users a sense of responsibility for it, and in return results undoubtedly in the feeling of safety being increased. It is also worth making sure that each area has a sufficient number of attractive and inviting entrances, which will contribute to increasing the space's openness and accessibility (Bietkowski, 1999; Czarnecki, 2006; Kowicki, 2010; Szuba, 2005).

The issue that is inseparably related to the location and neighbourhood of public spaces is their transport connections. In many villages, the system of local roads and paths for pedestrians and cyclists is underdeveloped. As a consequence, there are no convenient connections between areas that are of importance for local communities. Furthermore, rural streets, which used to play an important social role as meeting points for neighbours and as an opportunity to stop and have a chat, are increasingly losing their significance. Nowadays, roads in rural areas, in particular in suburban areas, are dominated by vehicle transport, which, as in large cities, begins to determine spatial development.

The usually more-or-less clearly outlined architectural and landscape areas – whose composition and aesthetic values have an impact on the perception of individual parts of landscape – include rural roads, playgrounds, recreational rooms at care centres, clearings in historic parks, etc. It is important to note that harmonious development of rural landscape areas is largely based on the creation of local cultural identity reflected in the emotional relationship (attachment) of residents to the surrounding area and the tendency of the entire community to cooperate in matters related to this area. Unfortunately, nowadays rural areas are becoming more and more affected by adverse phenomena which cause the degradation in composition and aesthetics of local landscape and the disappearance of rural cultural identity (Antrop, 2005; Arriaza et al., 2004; Bogdanowski, 1994; Böhm, 2004; Claval, 2005). This pertains mostly to spatial chaos, which is caused, in particular, by introducing elements of

equipment (e.g. large-scale advertisements, concrete fences, buildings with aggressive colour schemes, temporary objects, etc.) that are unattractive and unsuited (in terms of colours, dimensions, building materials and location) for the environment and local tradition. There are instances where old and valuable trees in public spaces are cut down and replaced by row plantings of alien species. Such ignorant actions cause the rural landscape to become incoherent and lose its value.

Therefore, with a view to finding the best solution for rural public spaces, efforts should be made to increase awareness of the role of the aforementioned issues among decision-makers responsible for spatial development in communes (residents, local authorities, officials, etc.). Once this goal is achieved, it will certainly be easier to implement measures aimed at improving the quality of the landscape of rural public areas, which may include, in particular, the following: elimination or masking of elements that distort the environment, proper location and display of features that identify the space, consistent adoption of rules for using advertisements, small architecture and fences in keeping with the specific nature of rural areas, and also boosting the visibility of attractive and extensive views. The list of desirable measures also includes the following (Chilik, 2008; Górka, 2012; Soszyński et al., 2012):

- The use of local traditions and values in spatial planning (using materials, forms and proportions that are in line with the local landscape);
- The proper use and display of monuments in rural areas (through revalorisation, adaptation to social purposes, etc.);
- The avoidance of imitation (thoughtless imitation) of historical forms in favour of creative continuation of rural traditions and customs.

All these measures intended to increase and maintain the values of rural landscape may contribute to improving the quality of spatial development of rural areas and to strengthening the sense of local identity and responsibility among residents. This, in turn, may stimulate the rural community to act for the benefit of their environment, and thus lead to the development of functional, familiar, active and aesthetic spaces (Chmielewski, 2013; Niedźwiedzka-Filipiak & Kuriata, 2010).

## 5. Qualitative assessment of public spaces with respect to their social and spatial nature

According to the definition provided in the encyclopaedia issued by PWN, assessment is an evaluative judgement, i.e. a statement that expresses the positive or negative attitude of an assessor towards the assessed object. In relation to the perception of space, assessment is understood as a subjective relation between an observer or user of a space and their environment. It consists in the assignment of a certain value to the assessed object, based on the individual perceptions of the assessor. According to Bajerowski et al. (2007), the following assessment alternatives can be identified: 1) absolute – quantitative (e.g. much–little); 2) absolute – qualitative (e.g. good–bad); 3) comparative – quantitative (e.g. less–more); 4) comparative – qualitative (e.g. better–worse). All the alternatives are based on relative scales that are typical of qualitative assessment, which is the opposite of quantitative assessment and consists in the estimation of properties of objects, events or areas against relative scales (Staszewska, 2013).

It may be assumed that the process of professional qualitative assessment of a specific area (e.g. for revitalisation purposes) consists of three main stages. The first is the selection of assessment criteria for the analysed area (e.g. from among functional, social, cultural and aesthetic values). The next step is the operationalisation of key criteria, i.e. the identification of their individual properties or, in other words, the development of key indicators. For the criterion of aesthetic values, indicators would include, for example, such features as sublimity, beauty, harmony, diversity, etc. The details and number of assessment criteria and indicators depend on the objective of the assessment to be carried out. The third and last stage is the formulation of the final assessment based on the adopted criteria. An obvious action that precedes the whole process is the familiarisation with the infrastructure of the assessed space, which can be achieved through its psychological (resulting from perception) and physical (resulting from use) recognition (Kupidura et al., 2011; Myga-Piątek, 2007).

There is no doubt that the results of qualitative assessment of a selected area largely depend on the assessment criteria selected. For the main functions and characteristics of public spaces, a set of eight assessment criteria can be adopted, the scope of which corresponds to the complexity of issues that make up the concept of urban and rural public spaces. They are the following: 1) *Functionality* (the degree and scope of performance of the functions expected in the space); 2) *Practicality* (comfort of use, ease of operation and maintenance, ergonomic objects and equipment in the space); 3) *Reliability* (usability); 4) *Durability* (the period for which usability is maintained); 5) *Safety of use* (in particular, a sense of safety and belonging to the space); 6) *Legibility* (understanding, ease of orientation and organisation of the space); 7) *Aesthetics* (coherence, form, layout and spatial order); 8) *Sensitivity* (the effect exerted on the senses by the space).

It is assumed that the quality of public spaces is a result of the aforementioned criteria, which may be widely used in spatial research (Micek, 2017). Each of the aforementioned criteria has its own determinants of qualitative assessment (Staszewska, 2013), which are presented in Table 1. The key criteria appear not to require any particular comment, as the determinants assigned to them are specific enough to determine their meaning. It is important to note that they are so diverse and universal that they can be applied to the assessment of any public space, either urban or rural.

One of the methods that can be used for the qualitative assessment of public spaces on the basis of the criteria and determinants provided (Table 1) is the *semantic differential* method. This combines the advantages of both qualitative and quantitative methods. It is a specific technique of the quantitative assessment of an image (images) of an object as perceived by the person surveyed (Osgood et al., 1957). In other words, the semantic differential method is a quantitative method for assessing a surveyed person's impressions of a phenomenon or object, or for assessing the attitude towards the assessed object (Mayntz et al., 1985).

In practice, the semantic differential method takes the form of a question within which assessment is carried out on a so-called “semantic scale” that ends with two opposite adjectives. For spatial development, the scale may end, for example,

**Table 1.** Public space qualitative assessment determinants

Assessment criteria	Qualitative assessment determinants
Functionality	Relaxation Shelter Movement and communication On-site activities Fulfilment of conditions for required and optional activities Fulfilment of conditions for social activities
Practicality	Good living conditions Good technical infrastructure network Easy vertical and horizontal communication Quick access to greeneries and to recreation and leisure areas Quick access to services Proper distribution of roads and paths Good access to small architecture elements Physical spatial arrangement of elements facilitating social contact Ergonomics of development elements Adequate properties of the residential environment Existence of places to walk, stand and sit Unhindered movement of older people, handicapped people and children
Reliability	Technical condition of equipment, facilities, elements of development
Durability	Period for which spatial development elements maintain their properties
Safety	Sense of belonging to society and space Sense of public safety Existence of places that gather, integrate and invite – or dissipate, segregate and deter – people
Legibility	Easy orientation Unity of spatial composition and its internal conformity Systems of symbols and legible information signs
Aesthetics	Appropriate architectural scale (human) Moderate and mild colours Cleanliness Adequate proportions Rhythm
Sensitivity	Positive feelings and emotions related to the space concerned Positive impressions evoked by the use of goods located in the space concerned

Source: Staszewska (2013)

with such adjectives as “beautiful” and “ugly”. Its intermediate degrees cover the range between the two opposite terms and reflect the degree of intensity of a given feature of the assessed object. The adoption of the semantic differential method to assess selected spaces against the criteria and determinants provided (Table 1) requires their operationalisation. For determinants to be assessed, they need to be translated into bipolar characteristics (pairs of features). The analyses carried out, the results of which are presented below, were based on 40 pairs of opposite characteristics, as listed in Table 2, which constitute a questionnaire for assessment of spaces. Each of the 40 pairs is a continuum that consists of five values (from

“-2” to “+2”). The values “-2” and “-1” indicate weaknesses and the values “+1” and “+2” indicate strengths. The value of “0” is neutral and can be described as “difficult to say” (Babbie, 2016; Błuszkowski, 2003; Mayntz et al., 1985; Micek, 2017; Osgood et al., 1957; Staszewska, 2013).

The simplest way to analyse the results of the assessment of a public space under the semantic differential method is to draw a graphic profile of the assessed space. This is created by linking together all the numerical values that have been assigned to the considered aspects of the examined area. The profile is a graphical illustration of the assessment results and it allows for the nature of the analysed area to be easily determined (as negative or posi-



tive). Such charts are easy to interpret and analyse and they can be compared and presented in various forms. They provide information on how individual characteristics of the analysed space are assessed. In addition, the semantic differential method allows for statistical calculations to be performed, which are particularly useful in surveys and which help to indicate which of the characteristics assessed are important in the opinion of respondents. The analyses in the case studies presented below were conducted by experts (authors and researchers). Thus, statistical calculations were not performed. However, for each space the quality indicator was calculated, which is a result of the assessment of a given space against the adopted criteria and determines the share of characteristics evaluated negatively or indifferently, which under the semantic differential method are assigned values equal to or lower than “0” (on a scale from “-2” to “+2”). The higher the indicator, the poorer the quality of the analysed space.

## 6. Analysis and assessment of urban and rural public spaces: examples

The case studies presented below demonstrate the results of the qualitative assessments of urban and rural public spaces in accordance with the methodological assumptions adopted (against the criteria, determinants and qualitative characteristics specified in the assessment questionnaire presented in Table 2). The first case concerns urban areas (located in Poznań) and the second case concerns rural areas (located in the Krobia Commune). The juxtaposition of the two types of areas is intended to demonstrate differences in the public spaces concerned. They were not selected randomly. The location of the analysed areas, their functions and their potential to meet various needs show the specific nature of public spaces and their perception by users.

The urban areas assessed are located in Poznań (1). In the framework of the research project entitled “Conditions and Directions of Revitalisation in Poznań” carried out by IGSEiGP UAM on behalf of the City Office in Poznań in the years 2016–

2017, public spaces located within the boundaries of the revitalisation area in Poznań were assessed. This area is characterised by a specific concentration of negative phenomena, but due to its important significance for local development, the city decided to revitalise it. It constitutes 9.4% of the city’s area and includes mainly city-centre areas. Within its boundaries, of the 63 public spaces identified (Fig. 2.) that are relevant for particular districts or for the whole city and that are characterised by conditions favourable to social contacts or with potential in that respect, the largest part is occupied by generally accessible green areas (parks, squares, riverside areas, etc.). The areas assessed also include central marketplaces (e.g. the Old Square), other squares (e.g. Wolności Square), bazaars (e.g. Bernardyński Square) and some major streets along cultural and commercial routes (e.g. Półwiejska Street). The largest concentration of socially active public spaces is the area of the Old Town (the historical centre) and along the Warta River.

Each of the spaces analysed in Poznań was also assessed during a field inspection. In keeping with the assumptions under the semantic differential method, the values assigned to the areas analysed were plotted on the graphical profiles created on the basis of the values assigned to individual properties of the assessed areas. Due to the limited framework of this publication, only an exemplary graph has been provided below, which refers to the area concerned (Fig. 1). The analysis of the profiles has revealed which of the adopted criteria characterise the analysed area. It also made it possible to calculate the value of the quality indicator for each space (Fig. 2).

The best rated public spaces in the area analysed (with a share of negative and neutral characteristics lower than 20%) are green areas located mainly in the Old Town area (e.g. Mickiewicz Park – Fig. 1). At the same time, this area has spaces that are assessed as most negative (over 80% negative and neutral characteristics). Therefore, it can be concluded that the quality of public spaces in the centre of Poznań varies greatly. Some spaces located in the districts of Wilda (e.g. Wildecki Market), Łazarz (e.g. Łazarski Market) and Jeżyce (e.g. near Kościelna Street) were also assessed to be negative (over 60% negative or neutral characteristics). It is important to note that the average values of the qual-

**Table 2.** Public space qualitative assessment questionnaire

Item	WEAKNESSES	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	STRENGTHS	
1	Not relaxing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Relaxing	Functionality
2	Providing no shelter	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Providing shelter	
3	Failing to encourage on-site activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Enabling on-site activities	
4	Failing to meet conditions for required activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Meeting conditions for required activities	
5	Failing to meet conditions for optional activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Meeting conditions for optional activities	
6	Discouraging	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Engaging, encouraging and stimulating	
7	Uncomfortable (absence of places to stand, sit or walk)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Comfortable (many places to stand, sit or walk)	Practicality
8	Not available to anybody	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Available to everybody	
9	Obstructive	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Supportive	
10	Impeding social contacts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Facilitating social contacts	
11	Useless (unnecessary)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Useful (necessary)	
12	Inconvenient	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Convenient	
13	Dark, dirty and noisy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sunny, clean and quiet	Reliability
14	Antisocial	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Social	
15	Unusable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Usable	
16	In poor technical condition	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	In good technical condition	Durability
17	Damaged, broken	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Undamaged, renovated, repainted	
18	Requiring renovation, modernisation, maintenance or replacement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not requiring any renovation, modernisation, maintenance or replacement	Safety
19	Insecure, dangerous	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Secure, without danger	
20	Turbulent	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Quiet	
21	Unfriendly, sinister	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Friendly	
22	Distracting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Accommodating, eye-catching	
23	Isolating	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Integrating	
24	Deterrent	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Inviting	Legibility
25	Inconsistently composed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Consistently composed	
26	Obstructing orientation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Facilitating orientation	
27	Illegible	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Legible	Aesthetics
28	Simple	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sophisticated	
29	Ugly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Beautiful, pretty	
30	Austere	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Idyllic	
31	Dirty	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Clean	Sensitivity
32	Unpleasant	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Pleasant	
33	Depressing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Uplifting, elevating	
34	Annoying, irritating, disturbing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Calming, relaxing	
35	Negative	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Positive	
36	Odorous	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fragrant	
37	Noisy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Quiet	
38	Anxious, moving, stressful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Calm, soothing	
39	Conservative	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Liberal	
40	Boring, dull	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Interesting, fascinating	

Source: Staszewska (2013)

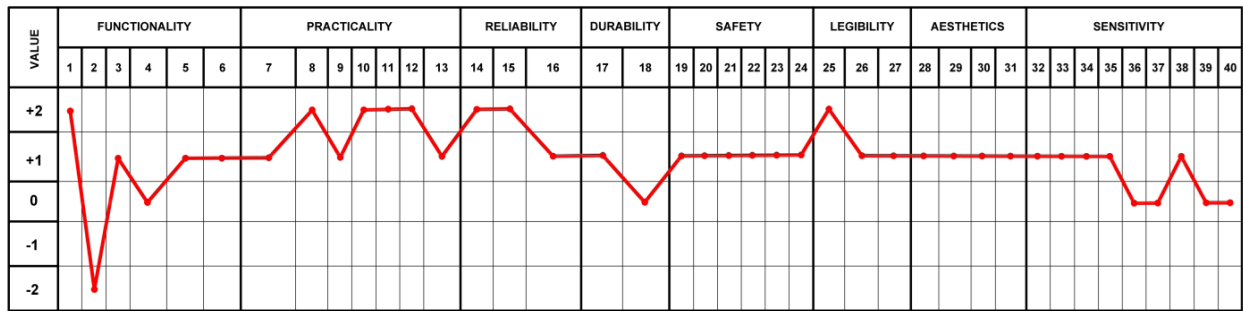


Fig. 1. Semantic differential – the Mickiewicz Park. Source: Own study

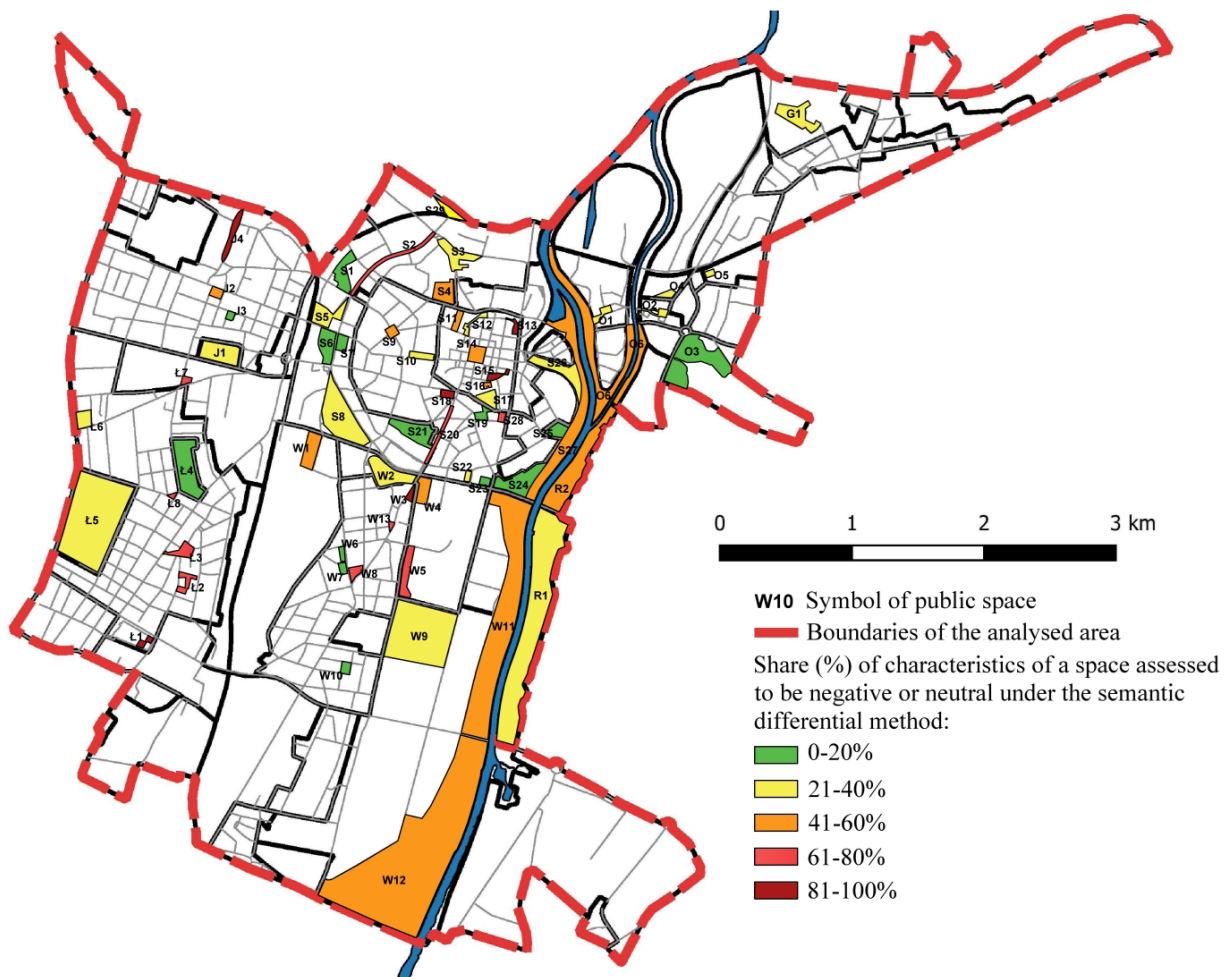


Fig. 2. Quality of public spaces in the analysed area of the city of Poznań expressed by the qualitative assessment indicator, which is the share (%) of characteristics of a given space assessed to be negative or neutral and assigned values lower than or equal to “0” under the semantic differential method. Source: Own study

ity indicator (between 20% and 60% negative and neutral characteristics) are typical of the majority of the public spaces analysed. These mainly include city-centre marketplaces (including, in particular, the Old Square), some parks (e.g. Maciejewski Park) and squares (e.g. Kazimierz Nowakowski Square or Wolności Square). Spaces with average scores are

distributed across various parts of the analysed area. They include, in particular, the green areas along the Warta River. Despite serious problems such as the absence of equipment and disorder, the riverside public areas were not rated the worst. Their numerous issues are compensated for by a huge recreational and social potential and by their natural and

landscape values. It is advisable to create pedestrian and cycle paths in these areas and to implement some recreational, waterside and accompanying infrastructure, and also to organise and develop the neglected areas and furthermore to adopt all types of measures aimed at developing their recreational function and strengthening the potential of these areas as public spaces.

The qualitative assessment of rural public spaces has been presented using the example of the Krobia Commune (2). The analysis was carried out under the revitalisation project entitled “Diagnosis of State and Directions of Development of the Krobia Commune”, on which the Local Revitalisation Programme for the Krobia Commune in the years 2015–2022 was based. The analysis covered 22 rural public spaces (3) characterised by social, recreational and cultural potential. They were assessed by experts during field inspections. As in the case of Poznań, the assessments were plotted on graphical profiles, an example of which is presented below (Fig. 3). Quality indicators were calculated for all the rural public spaces analysed. The multi-functional recreational areas that received the highest scores were in Domachowo, Włostowo and Pudliszki, which include playgrounds, sport fields or stadiums, and in Włostowo – including a rural care centre. For the aforementioned areas, the share of negative and neutral characteristics was less than 20% of all the analysed characteristics. In turn, the spaces that received the lowest scores were those that were not intentionally developed, but which were located next to facilities that generate high activity among inhabitants (the space around the bus stop in Bukownica and the square in front of the shop in Karc). Over 81% of their characteristics were assessed to be negative or neutral (i.e.

they were assigned negative or zero values). The two simple recreational and sporting spaces, including the playground and the football pitch in Żychlewo were also poorly rated (a share of 61–80%). For the remaining 16 areas, which form the largest group, the quality indicator was average (between 21% and 60% negative and neutral characteristics). These areas vary in terms of their location and function, but it can be noted that they are dominated by recreational and leisure areas located next to care centres: in Potarzyca (Fig. 3), Pijanowice, Stara Krobia, Domachowo, Sułkowice, Posadowo and Gogolewo. These include, in particular, paved squares, clearings, outdoor spaces, playgrounds, etc. In addition, places that scored average include: the village square in Pijanowice, the greeneries in Stara Krobia and Domachowo, the avenue in Posadowo, the church parking lot in Domachowo and several independent playgrounds in other villages.

The relatively low assessment of rural public spaces in relation to the social and cultural potential of the Krobia Commune is triggered by numerous issues that affect the spaces concerned. These issues are confirmed by general observations outlined in the theoretical part of this paper concerning rural areas in Poland. The areas assessed are generally underdeveloped and inadequately equipped with infrastructure. As a rule, they are not adapted to the diverse needs of their inhabitants and they allow only for occasional activities. They are often in poor technical and visual condition. They also lack social places. Access to some of them is restricted (e.g. fenced playgrounds). It seems, however, that the most serious problem is a clearly noticeable shortage of public spaces in rural areas of the commune. It should be pointed out that the few public spaces that are generally accessible are assessed to



Fig. 3. Semantic differential: the square and care centre in Potarzyca. Source: Own study

be positive mainly in terms of such features as attractive location, activity of residents and large social potential.

The qualitative assessment of urban and rural public spaces, including the examples provided, is undoubtedly affected by their sports facilities, small architecture objects, pavements and other elements of spatial development that satisfy the needs of residents with regard to their daily activity. The condition of the aforementioned elements is unsatisfactory both in urban and rural areas. Many places lack benches, paths, rubbish bins, properly equipped playgrounds, etc., which results in the absence of places to walk, sit or stand. This forces inhabitants to spend their free time in places that are unsuitable for this purpose, or at home. Another issue is the mismatch between the development elements of common spaces and the needs of their users. Large paved areas, excessive formalisation and geometrisation of the area, the insistent introduction of a modern form of development, the construction of facilities just because “we have money and lots of space” – these are just some of the bad practices in this respect. The poor condition of urban and rural spaces is often caused by the absence of consistency between individual elements of spatial development, their poor aesthetics, unsatisfactory technical condition, and careless and hectic location. Spaces that are affected by similar problems usually become illegible and uncomfortable, and therefore amorphous and antisocial. To avoid this, it is recommendable, among other things, to equip the shared areas with the necessary infrastructure (lamp posts, rubbish bins, benches, etc.) and to maintain them and their equipment in good technical and visual conditions, as well as placing elements emphasising the areas and making them easier to orientate in (e.g. sculptures), and to introduce elements enriching the offer of the areas and responding to the needs of local communities. At the same time, the scale and nature of the solutions implemented should be adjusted to the specific nature of a given place in such a way as to make the space intimate and to encourage people to stay in it. In addition, care should be taken to ensure that social spaces are properly arranged, in particular, with a view to harmonious and coherent spatial planning, including the proper layout of their elements, thus facilitating social contacts.

## **7. Evaluation of the applied method and the specific nature of urban and rural public spaces: conclusions**

The aim of this paper is not only to assess the quality of the selected public spaces, but also to determine whether the semantic differential method is useful for such assessment. It can be stated that the method applied has been verified positively. Its suitability to the defined purpose is considered high. The semantic differential method is a method that is relatively simple and easy to use and can be easily modified and adapted to research needs. Importantly, it allows for graphic profiles to be determined, and these provide an easily comprehensible illustration of the results of assessment of the space concerned against the adopted criteria. Such charts are easy to interpret and analyse and can be compared and presented in various forms. They provide information on how the individual characteristics of the examined space are assessed. Furthermore, the semantic differential method can be used to make statistical calculations that are useful for surveys. One of the most important advantages of the semantic differential method in the context of the assessment of public spaces is undoubtedly an easy-to-use and intuitive semantic scale whose scope enables positive (“+”), negative (“-”) and neutral (“0”) scores to be assigned. Another important advantage is the use of a large number of criteria that are easy to organise and analyse. Unfortunately, the semantic differential method, like other methods of qualitative assessment, is burdened with subjectivism, which is practically impossible to eliminate from research on the quality of spaces. In addition, it requires a number of actions to be taken: the selection of appropriate criteria, the preparation of a questionnaire, the carrying out of field inspections, the drawing of charts and the analysis of the results. All these actions can be time consuming.

The qualitative assessment of public spaces, examples of which have been presented herein, should be an integral stage in the development process of any urban or rural area. It is an important tool in the process of reasonable spatial development, as it provides bases for defining the issues and potentials of the examined area. It is worth pointing to the

key correlation that forms the basis for the practical application of the qualitative assessment results in the semantic differential method. If a given public space ranks highly and therefore has great potential, it can be considered worthy of intensified development in the future. Otherwise, if a public space ranks low and has many issues, it should be analysed in detail so that the reasons for its poor state can be determined and solutions found for the problems identified.

In keeping with the assumptions made, the quality of a given public space is a combination of the criteria presented (i.e. functionality, practicality, reliability, durability, safety, legibility, aesthetics and sensitivity). The suitability of the qualitative assessment in the form presented manifests itself not only in complex research (intended to compare the summarised assessments and indicate those of the public spaces analysed that require intervention), but also in individual research (based on analyses of assessments of individual criteria and on the scope for potential intervention in the public space concerned, which is determined in detail on the basis thereof). This paper, due to its limited framework, presents only the results of the comparative research and general conclusions in the empirical part thereof, which relate primarily to the key issues identified in the public spaces in Poznań and Krobia. On the basis of those issues, it can be assumed that the key corrective actions recommended both for Poznań (a large city of over 500,000 inhabitants) and Krobia (a rural municipality with approximately 13,000 residents) should focus on improving the quality of development and on strengthening the social function of public spaces (e.g. by equipping them with recreational infrastructure or pro-social areas).

The semantic differential method made it possible to subjectively analyse the main public spaces in the city of Poznań and in the villages located in the Krobia Commune. Although the paper contains only individual examples of the analysis carried out with regard to the areas researched, this section further includes the averaged nature of all the assessed areas, drawing a distinction between urban (Poznań) and rural (Krobia) public spaces. The analysis included 63 urban public spaces and 22 rural public spaces. The charts presented in Fig. 4 clearly demonstrate the differences in the functionality of these spaces and in the reliability of

their development elements, and also in their aesthetics. Urban public spaces fail to meet many conditions (they do not encourage activity, they are polluted, often dirty and noisy, and require renovation, modernisation, maintenance or replacement of equipment). Although the way in which public spaces are arranged allows their users to relax and their equipment is generally available, urban users do not identify with urban public spaces. They do not pay attention to whether a given space distracts, deters, irritates or maybe calms and relaxes them. Urban inhabitants have no time to make observations on the surroundings, they are busy with their own issues and they treat squares, streets and parks as transitive areas where they do not need to stop. Obviously, these are averaged findings and one knows that an individual approach to respondents could reveal their attitude towards the environment. However, this does not alter the general conclusion that while city dwellers treat public spaces as a whole and without a context (which results from the energetic way they live and work), rural residents are more likely to pay attention to the details of the spatial development of the area in which they live and to the atmosphere of places and their familiarity. Rural residents become more frequently involved in social activities aimed at improving the quality of life.

Therefore, development of urban and rural public areas requires an individual approach and the engagement of communities in the planning processes. It also requires discussions, consultations, interviews and meetings. It is worth noting that rural residents are potentially more likely to express a positive opinion on the area in which they live, and urban residents are more sceptical about the surrounding area, express more negative opinions and have higher demands.

## Notes

1. Poznań is a county city in the Wielkopolska Lake District, on the Warta River, at the mouth of the Cybina River; the seat of the authorities of the Wielkopolskie Province. Poznań is the fifth largest city in Poland in terms of population (over 537,000 people) and eighth in terms

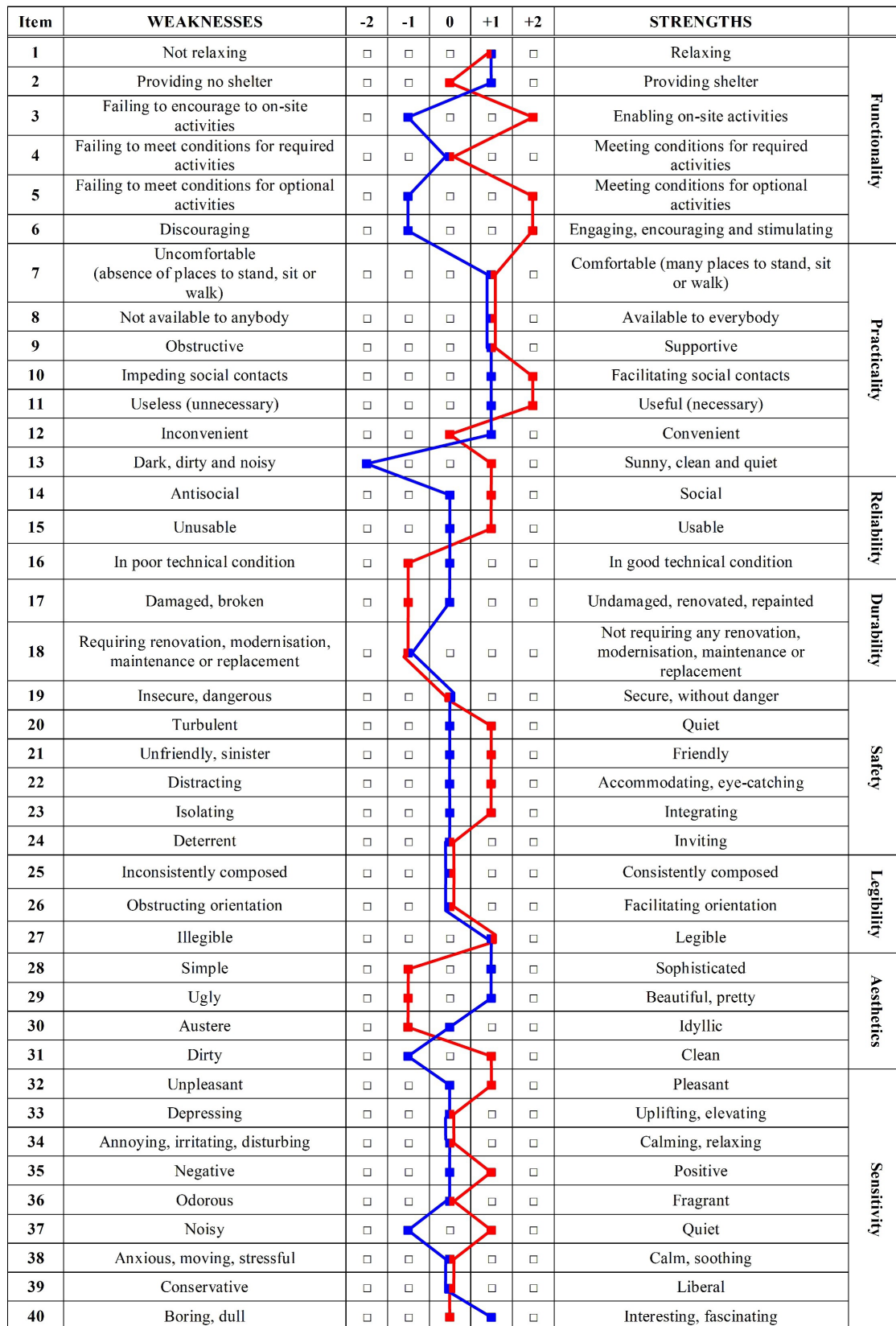


Fig. 4. The averaged quality assessment of urban (blue line) and rural (red line) public spaces Source: Own study based on the analysis of 63 urban spaces and 22 rural ones. All spaces were assessed using the space qualitative analysis questionnaire (for details see above).

of area (approx. 262 square kilometres) (BDL, 2019). It is a key transport hub, as well as an important industrial, commercial, tourist, academic and cultural centre.

2. Krobia is a rural-urban commune in the Wielkopolskie Province in Gostyń County. It has approx. 13,000 inhabitants and its area is approx. 130 square kilometres. Its seat is located in the town of Krobia (BDL, 2019).
3. These spaces are located in the following villages: Karzec, Pudliszki, Żychlewo, Bukownica, Pijanowice, Stara Krobia, Domachowo, Sułkowice, Posadowo, Potarzyca, Włostowo and Gogolewo.

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