

# The modern agoras: the relationship between urban open public space and political expression. A case study of the city of Poznań, Poland

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**Abstract.** Contemporary urban public open spaces are stages of political expression, reminiscent of the historical Greek agoras that performed similar functions thousands of years ago. What has clearly changed, however, is the form of political expression. Rather than individual speeches by ancient thinkers and politicians, we are increasingly dealing with collective protests and assemblies presenting the views of the communities involved. Nowadays, public assemblies also take place in a much larger number of public spaces, depending on needs. They are chosen on the basis of three main categories of factors: spatial, semiotic and reception-related, which may overlap. The main objective of this paper is to determine the role of urban public open spaces as places of expression of political views during public assemblies. The study was based on the analysis of data from the Municipality of Poznań, as well as individual in-depth interviews with people involved in the organization of public assemblies in Poznań in 2019 and representatives of local associations.

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## 1. Introduction

Cities as areas of human clusters were established several thousand years ago (Claval & Claval, 1981; Słodczyk, 2003). Over the years, they developed in more or less planned ways, creating an increasingly complex system of many spaces and buildings that constituted the stage for the everyday life of their inhabitants (Madanipour, 1999; Goffman, 2000; Słodczyk, 2003; Carmona et al., 2008). There is agreement in the literature that the first examples of organized forms of cities and the public spaces present in them were the Greek polis, and with them the agoras, which are considered the first form of what is now referred to as “urban open public space” (Dyer & Ngui, 2010; Jalaladdini & Oktay 2012; Pluta, 2014; Wantuch-Matla, 2016; Dickenson, 2017; Bierwiazzonek, 2018). They were important in the structure of the then city-states due to their social, cultural, administrative, sacred and political functions (Kitto, 2000; Dickenson, 2017). Undoubtedly, due to the above functions, as well as their specificity, form, surrounding institutions, location in the city structure, or history and symbolism, urban open public spaces play an integrating and verbalizing socio-political role (McCarthy & McPhail, 2006; Arora, 2015; Abrahão, 2016). They also play the role of channels for expressing views, postulates or pressure (Wierzychowska, 2015). The possibility of unrestricted expression in line with the principles of the functioning of communities using these spaces seems to be a combination of the functions of Greek agoras and contemporary urban open public spaces. As Bierwiazzonek (2016) notes, “the ancient agora does not exist anymore, but its archetype has remained, on the one hand, associated with spatial references associated with the city center, and on the other - with civic discourse in urban space”. Public appearances by philosophers, scientists and politicians, despite the passage of hundreds of years, still take place in this type of space (Avritzer, 2009; Gehl, 2011). They are also often scenes of protests, gatherings and marches by larger groups of people associated around a common goal or problem, very often resulting from the current political situation – on both a national and local scale. We use the term “political expression” because it most accurately reflects the nature of the gatherings that took place both in the agoras and nowadays take place in urban open public spaces. In the context of this work, the wording itself should be understood as a scope limited to the analyzed spaces, not exceeding other tools of political expression, such as social media, or

party or non-party activity (Svahn, 2006; Ganowicz, 2013).

This article analyses precisely this type of event, i.e., official public assemblies that were registered at the Municipality of Poznań in 2019. The authors focused on achieving the aim of the study, which is to determine the role of urban public open spaces as places of expression of political views during public assemblies. The achievement of the above aim of the study is based on the following research questions:

- Q1: Which urban public open spaces in Poznań hosted public assemblies in 2019?
- Q2: How often were the identified urban public open spaces in Poznań used for public assemblies?
- Q3: What aspects determine the choice of specific public open spaces as venues for political expression?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. The Greek Agora: the beginning of public spaces: historical, spatial and political outline

In every Greek polis there was an agora (Greek: *ἄγορά*). It was an area in the central part of the city surrounded by major buildings and institutions (Camp, 1986; Gottesman, 2014). All free polis citizens had access to the agora. This allowed them to communicate freely, most often through a series of debates, votes or formal and informal meetings (Mumford, 1961; Carr et al., 1992; Carmona et al., 2008; Dyer & Ngui, 2010). The character of this place was expressed by its very name. The ancient Greek word *ἀγορά* (agora) literally translates to “place of assembly” (Mazzara et al., 2013). Initially, this term was used to describe only the meeting of Greek citizens of polis, who were to make decisions for their community, but with time it also began to characterize the place as a point on the city map (Mazzara et al., 2013).

The most famous Greek agoras undoubtedly include the square located in Athens (Pluta, 2014; Rogowska, 2016; Dickenson, 2017). In its heyday, it served as a market square during days not intended for political and administrative meetings, but ultimately it hosted numerous gatherings of Athens’ citizens who jointly made decisions, made judgments, or elected their officials and war leaders (Kitto, 2000; Dickenson, 2017, 2019). As Andrzej Bryk points out: “Such a central, social place was

partially common, public, egalitarian, symmetrical in character. It was created for peaceful confrontation and debate; hence its distinctiveness from Akropolis – the center of religious life. It is no coincidence that the first urban planners, such as Hippodamus of Miletus, were also systemic theorists” (Bryk, 2013: 105).

Due to the great importance of the agora, over time, the square was surrounded by a number of prestigious buildings that were important to the functioning of the polis: a library, rostrums, religious and political buildings, arcades and column porticoes (with an ergonomic and decorative function) (Carmona et al., 2008; Dyer & Ngui, 2010). Thus, there was a kind of delineation of the boundaries of the agora with the help of the appropriate rank of infrastructure and architecture, which gave and emphasized the essence, character and importance of the events that took place in the square. Thus, in addition to the popular, mass factor legitimizing the decision-making activities taking place in the agora, there was another, prestigious and administrative one, also of a nature that today could be called “marketing”. All these features determined the democratic nature of the agora and its important role in the structure of the Greek polis (Mumford, 1961; Carmona et al., 2008; Dyer & Ngui, 2010). This way of understanding the main city square therefore seems to be crucial for interpreting the connections between the place and the assembly.

## 2.2. Contemporary public spaces: contemporary agoras?

Contemporary public spaces are undoubtedly a continuation of the ideas that came into being with the first public squares – the agoras. This applies to all dimensions, but due to the subject of interest of this article, two of them should be distinguished – the spatial and the social (Carr et al., 1992; Mitchell, 1996; Carmona et al., 2008; Carmona et al., 2010; Gehl, 2011). During the hundreds of years of the development process, however, there have been many changes – inextricably linked with the progress of civilization or socio-spatial – the result of which is today’s urban public spaces. From the social aspect, in the context of this work, political behavior should be emphasized particularly strongly (see Aristotle’s *Homo politicus*). Spaces, in turn, may differ depending on geographic, historical, economic or cultural factors (Wróbel, 2018; Kowalewski, 2013). Lorens and Martyniuk-Pęczek (2010) indicate that the urban open public space is

intended for the needs of direct social contacts and other needs of the communities using it. In addition to the social layer, the authors of the definition also point to the spatial aspect – the spatial organization and location of urban open public spaces in the city structure. Dymnicka (2009) also draws attention to the need for unrestricted, equal access to this type of space. The researcher states that the essence of the functioning of urban open public spaces is the freedom to express views within it, as well as the expression of various behaviors and direct contacts. In the light of the definition presented in this way, the analogy between ancient agoras and modern urban open public spaces seems to be strong. The “modern agoras” mentioned in the title of the publication should therefore be seen as places where the voice of part or all of society is articulated and expressed, often through protest or assembly made possible by universal access and freedom of expression. Bierwiazonek (2016) emphasizes in one of his works that civic or public activity is one of the specific types of activity in urban open public spaces. At the same time, he emphasizes that this type of activity has its source precisely in the context related to the civic sphere of the activities of the Greek polis and the functioning of the agora. There is also a discussion in the literature on the function of political expression in urban open public spaces. On the one hand, the decline of public spaces is indicated, including the broadly understood political activity also carried out by users of these spaces (Mitchell, 1995; Nawratek, 2008; Mitchell, 2017; Pettas & Daskalaki, 2021). On the other hand, many researchers indicate that public spaces can still successfully play the role of places of political expression, despite the changing lifestyle of their users (Kochanowska, 2010; Bierwiazonek, 2016; Merrifield, 2016;).

In the Polish lands, in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, many social and political events took place in public places and took the form of public gatherings. For example, it is necessary to indicate at least a few of them, bearing in mind that their specificity differed significantly from the meetings held on the Greek agoras.

The iconic event of the 1950s was June in Poznań. Sirens in Józef Stalin Factories in Poznań sounded on June 28, 1956, not as a signal of alarm, but as the beginning of a protest against the authorities and in defense of the workers’ living conditions. The plant employees went through the streets of Poznań to the city center, in the vicinity of today’s Adam Mickiewicz Square, where what was then Red Army Street was home to the Provincial Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party and the Municipal

National Council (in the building of the Imperial Castle). It was the first uprising in Poland against the communist government after World War II (Grzelczak, 2020; Łuczak, 2011).

The initial protests of 1980 were again economically motivated and responded to rising meat and sausage prices. In mid-July, strikes broke out in Lublin, where political demands appeared for the first time – new elections to trade unions were expected (Sierpień ..., 2010; Kamiński, 2021). A month later, the protests spilled over to the coast, where the protesters appeared under the pretext of defending Anna Walentynowicz, but later presented political demands that laid the foundations for the later, so-called “August agreements” between the striking party and the authorities of the People’s Republic of Poland (Kozłowski, 2018).

It seems important to emphasize that workers’ protests usually took place in workplaces (June ’56, August ’80) or in the vicinity of power centers (June ’56). In their case, the space that was used as an agora had two types of influence: economic by stopping production processes; political by demonstrating (or even engaging in armed struggle) near decision-making centers.

Also, events that take place somewhat closer to today may be an interesting field for studying the relationship between public space and political and social behavior. A characteristic, cyclical event is the Independence March organized in Warsaw every year since November 11, 2010. The circles that initiated this event identify themselves with the national-conservative part of the Polish political scene (Skrzypek, 2020). As indicated in the literature: “This march for members of national organizations is used to demonstrate its anti-globalization and anti-EU vision of the world, in which Poland should be a nationally and culturally uniform state” (ibid.). Importantly, the route of each march runs through symbolic places in Warsaw and usually begins at Rondo Dmowskiego, whose patron is considered the spiritual father of the national movement in Poland. This is an example of another legitimate use of space for the implementation of political activities. However, it should be borne in mind that the said legitimation mechanism is characteristic of many types of gatherings and independent of their location (both geographically and culturally).

An interesting phenomenon was the protests that took place in 2019, at Adam Mickiewicz Square or at Plac Wolności. The *leitmotif* was “Chain of Light” and the object of opposition was changes in the law, which, in the opinion of the protesters, limited the independence of the judiciary. The event organizers emphasized the civic nature of the assemblies

and encouraged people to leave markers of party affiliation at home in favor of taking the symbols of the theme of the assembly with them – the flags of Poland and the European Union (Przybylska, 2019; Kompowski, 2019; Jankowska & Woźniak, 2019). Interestingly, the “Chain of Light” initiative was willingly joined by other interest groups, such as teachers associated with the “Protest with an Exclamation Mark” campaign (Wojtaszczyk, 2019).

### 3. Materials and methods

Several social science methods were used to achieve the objective of the study. The research process began with collecting and analyzing data obtained through a request for public information submitted to the Municipality of Poznań, inquiring about the locations and number of public assemblies in Poznań in 2019 (Jakubowski, 2012; Kulisiewicz, 2016). Hence, the analysis of data for 2020 was omitted due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on public life and the low reliability of data for that year. Therefore, the most recent data available was for 2019. It should be emphasized that protests in Poznań took place also after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic (including protests related to changes in women’s rights, education, access to free media and the war in Ukraine). Next, an analysis of the secondary data was performed. The information obtained from the Municipality of Poznań was systematized, merging data for regular and simplified public assemblies into one set.

Public assemblies were analyzed as a form of political expression in public spaces in the physical sense, rather than in the public sphere understood as “the domain of discursive actions, anchored in language as a tool for communicative coordination” (Nowak & Pluciński, 2011). Thus, all demonstrations of political expression, e.g., on the Internet, were excluded because the focus was on physical public spaces in Poznań. It was also necessary to organize and unify the data in the set.

In the next step, gathering places were grouped into nine categories: (1) street, (2) plaza, (3) monument, (4) square, (5) park, (6) sports facility, (7) bridge, (8) building and (9) others. This helped to exclude events that took place outside the city’s public open spaces (“buildings” category) and places that, due to their nature, were difficult to assign to a specific set (“others” category). The obtained dataset allowed the analysis of public assemblies according to their number and location in the city’ structure within the categories and individual public spaces. This allowed us to create a map of

**Table 1.** Number of outdoor venues for expression in Poznań in 2019, and number of assemblies in each category

Category of public space	(A) Number of spaces per category	(B) Number of assemblies per category	A/B
Street	79	197	2.49
Plaza	10	142	14.20
Monument	8	37	4.63
Square	6	15	2.50
Park	7	17	2.43
Sports facility	2	2	1.00
Bridge	2	6	3.00
SUM	114	416	

Source: own work

public assemblies registered by the Municipality of Poznań in 2019. In the case of spaces where it was not possible to indicate the exact location of the gathering (e.g., most streets), they were marked in their entire administrative boundaries. Therefore, e.g., the streets Głogowska, Grunwaldzka and Aleje Niepodległości were identified in their entirety on the maps. Then, out of all the spaces in the previous stage, those where events took place more than once were selected. A detailed spatial analysis and data interpretation was carried out on this set of spaces. Subsequently, non-standardized and semi-structured individual in-depth interviews (IDI) were conducted, based on the data gathered in the previous stages of the study (Gudkova, 2012). Two persons involved in the organization of public assemblies in Poznań in 2019 and two representatives of local associations whose activities involve the spatial and social development of the city of Poznań were selected for interviews. During the interviews, the respondents answered questions about the determinants of the choice of the space of political expression. Due to the Covid-19 restrictions, interviews with the selected respondents were conducted online.

#### 4. Results

In 2019, as many as 416 public assemblies were held in Poznań. The analysis of the data obtained from the Municipality of Poznań for 2019 showed that the public space where the most public assemblies were registered was Stary Rynek (Old Market Square; 49 events). This number was significantly higher than the second public space on the list, Plac Wielkopolski (33 events), followed by Plac Adama Mickiewicza (31), Półwiejska St. (21), Jackowskiego St. (16), Plac Kolegiacki (12), and Aleje Marcinkowskiego (10). The ten public spaces that were most frequently chosen as venues for public assemblies included, moreover, Zgoda (9 events), the area surrounding

the Hipolit Cegielski Monument and Cześćnikowska (7 events each). Thus, the ten public spaces most popular with organizers of assemblies included five streets, four squares and one monument. Streets also figure prominently throughout the list as venues where city residents' express their views. In 2019, public assemblies took place on 79 different streets across the city, significantly outranking squares (10 such registered spaces) and other types of identified public spaces. In terms of the number of organized public assemblies, the "streets" category ranks first, too. In 2019, a total of 197 public assemblies were held in the streets, while 142 events were held in squares. Spaces around monuments (37), parks (17), squares (15), bridges (6), and sports facilities (2) came next. The situation is slightly different when we consider the number of public assemblies per selected public spaces in Poznań. It turns out that each square attracted on average almost 13 events of this type, compared to an average of 4.63 assemblies organized around monuments or 2.49 in streets. Thus, it can be concluded that streets attracted the highest number of public assemblies held in 2019, but at the same time their fragmentation was significant. Squares, on the other hand, were venues of almost six times more events of this type on average (Table 1).

Regarding the location of public open spaces within Poznań city limits that hosted public assemblies in 2019, a high density can be observed within the Old Town district. Numerous squares, parks, streets and monuments there were mostly used more than once. The squares include Stary Rynek (49 public assemblies held in 2019), Plac Wolności (33), Plac Adama Mickiewicza (31), Plac Kolegiacki (12), Plac Cyryl Ratajskiego (5), and Plac Bernardyński (5). The most popular parks in the Old Town area include Park Dąbrowskiego and Park Stare Koryto Warty (6 public assemblies each in 2019), Park Marcinkowskiego and Park Wieniawskiego (1 event each). In the "streets"

category we should mention Półwiejska (21 assemblies in 2019), Aleje Marcinkowskiego (10), Święty Marcin (6) and Aleje Niepodległości (5). Six out of eight monuments in the city are located in the Old Town area (Fig.1, Fig. 2).

## 5. Discussion

There are three main categories of factors determining the organization of public assemblies: spatial, semiotic and reception-related. The above three categories explain the high incidence of public assemblies in urban public open venues in the city center. They can also be understood as aspects that more generally determine the choice of specific spaces as venues for political expression.

First, the venues in the city center are well-prepared in terms of infrastructure and space. They are large enough to accommodate everyone who wants to participate in an organized gathering. They are also properly equipped, sometimes with power connections for larger stages and sound

and lighting equipment. Their location within the city's spatial structure makes them relatively easy to access. Furthermore, they are located in the vicinity of many governmental and local self-government units, parliamentarians' offices and similar facilities. This allows for the expression of views against selected persons/groups of people or their actions or against events initiated by, for example, political parties or other entities directly in the places of their everyday operation. For this reason, such parts of the city center (as our research has shown, in the case of Poznań these are the Old Town and Jeżyce) are well-suited to events of a political and ideological nature. Cultural and entertainment assemblies are organized in other areas of the city that require not the availability of important institutions, but, rather, more space for their proper and safe conduct. Examples of such spaces mentioned by the interviewees include Cytadela Park or Morasko district.

Another aspect that contributes to the organization of most public assemblies in the city center is the latter's historical value and symbolism.

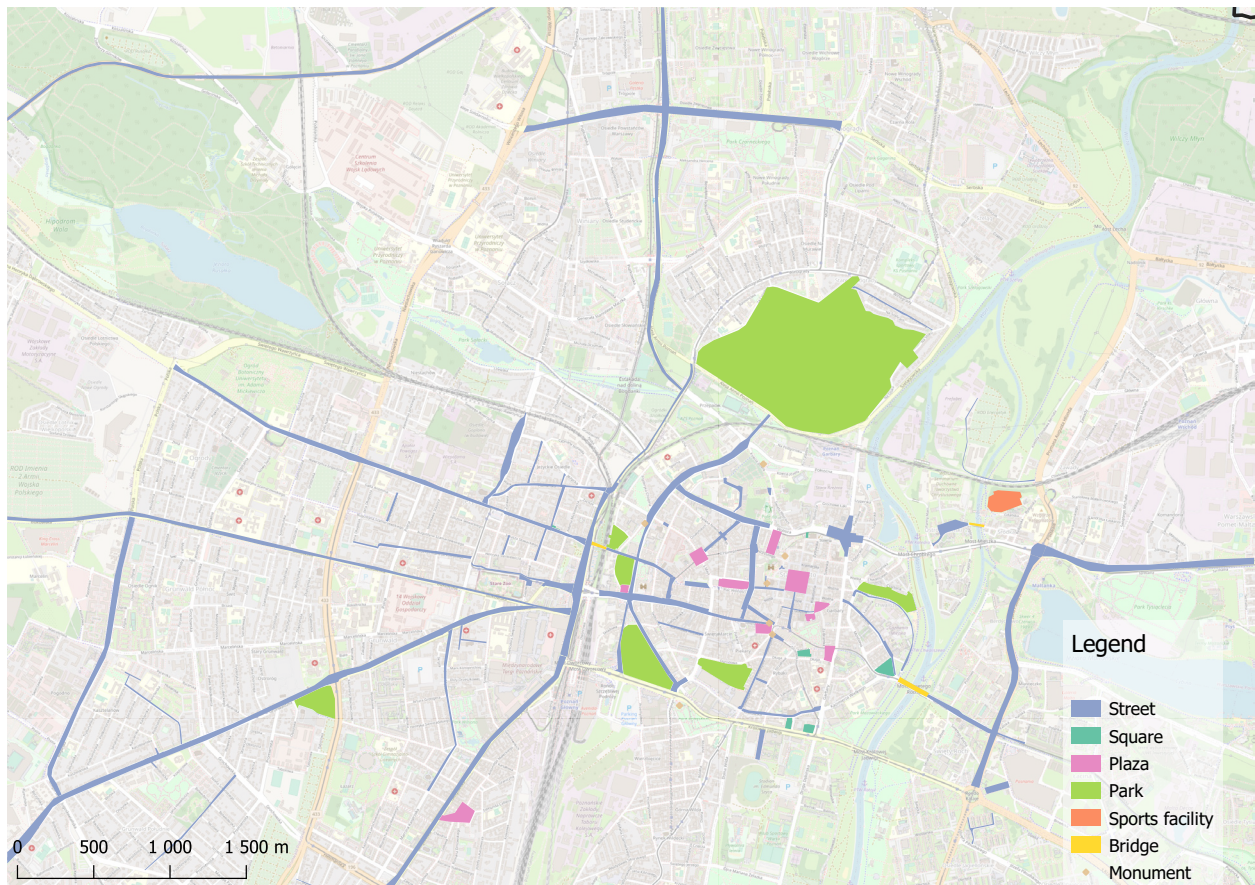


Fig. 1. Venues for political expression in Poznań in 2019 by category

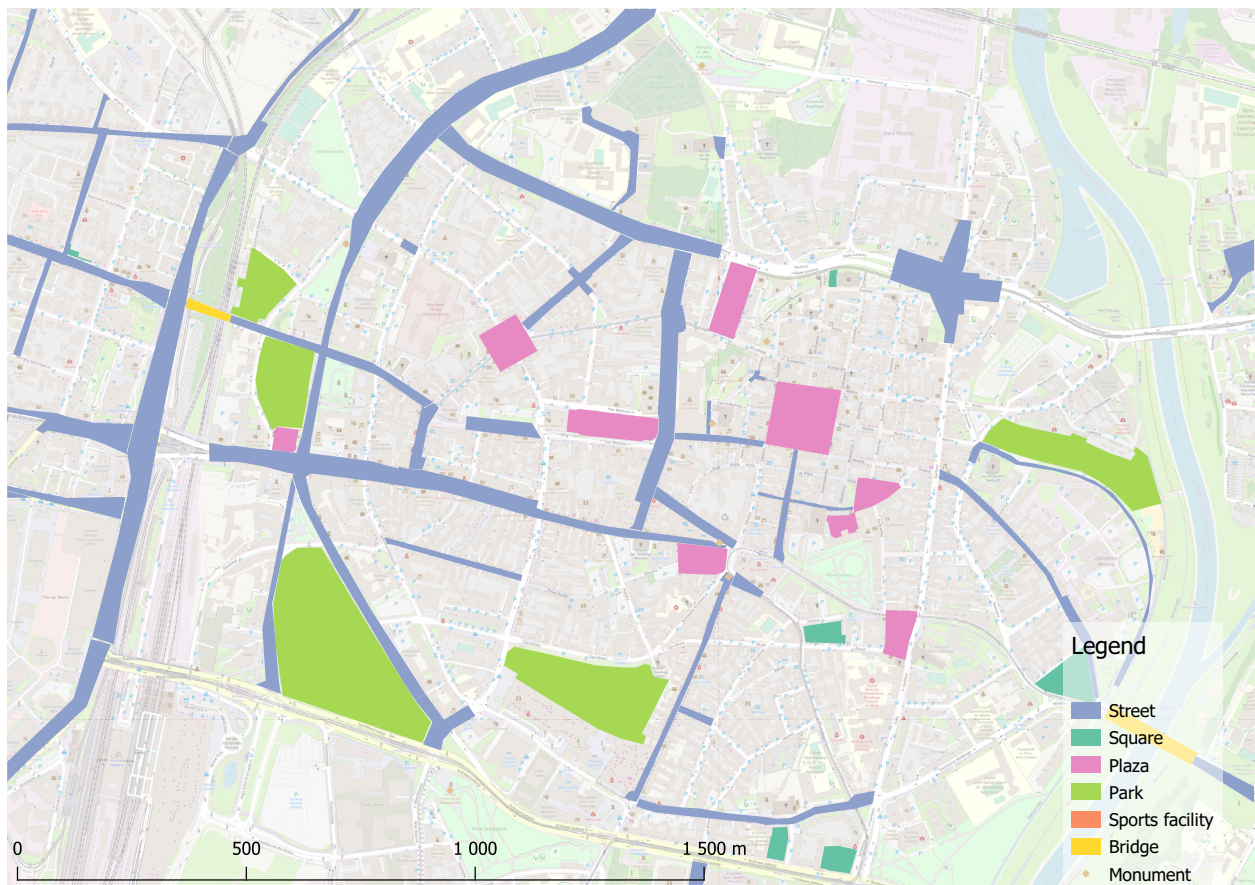


Fig. 2. Venues for political expression in Poznań in 2019 by category and number of events – center of Poznań

Very often, such events are organized in spaces that have already witnessed similar assemblies and that are often very strongly rooted in the local culture and history. They symbolize values that are vital from a historical point of view and that can also be important during contemporary assemblies. The semiotic value of these spaces relates to their names (e.g., Pol. *Plac Wolności*, Eng. Freedom Square) and the significance of the existing landscape elements (e.g., fountains, monuments, sculptures). Numerous references to the place and its symbolism are often made during public assemblies. For instance, during protests against judicial reforms in Poland, reference was made to the historical significance of Plac Wolności as the venue where the victorious Wielkopolska Uprising began. Contemporary events brought about the creation of the “Wolność” (Freedom) neon sign on the Arkadia building. The author of the concept of the neon sign, Kamil Kłopotcki, pointed out:

*The symbolism of the neon is crucial to the whole concept. For almost 4 years, Poznań residents have been protesting at Plac*

*Wolności. The neon sign is a reference to those demonstrations and symbolizes our commitment to the broad notion of freedom. It is also an expression of Poznań residents' resistance to the assault on democratic values in general. (Neon..., 2019).*

Thus, not only can the influence of the place on the character of the assemblies be observed, but, also, the events themselves influence the appearance and character of the space in which they take place. From a political point of view, we can deduce a living space that develops with the course of events and acquires new significance and symbolism. Along with it, local (often also supra-local) communities thrive and create history.

Another important aspect of choosing the venue of a public assembly is its potential social and media impact and the resulting reception. Events that take place in spaces that are important for its residents in the city center have a chance to be noticed by a larger number of citizens. This, in turn, generates greater media interest, allowing local events to reach a larger audience across the country and possibly

abroad. Information about the public assembly, its course and effects help to involve a larger number of people. The greater the public perception, the more exposure the issue receives during the public assembly and the more it affects its participants and observers. A rather obvious, but in this context significant correlation can be observed, i.e., the significance of events in public spaces that bear signs of political expression increases the closer one gets to the city center. This results from the high concentration of venues for political expression in the city center, linked to the strong symbolism of city centers, e.g., due to the historical background.

Organized public assemblies usually take place on streets and squares. Streets are chosen when the character of the event and its framework plan includes a march to different places in the city. Squares, on the other hand, are places of stationary assemblies, without the need to move. However, these two forms often merge, and public assemblies take the form of marches combined with longer stopovers in city squares or near prominent buildings. Each of these types of venues offers slightly different features that affect the form of the event. The desired qualities for public assemblies singled out by interviewees are as follows: size, connectivity via transportation, placement within city limits, good visibility from multiple locations, and adequate paved surfaces.

Going beyond the analytical material concerning the conditions in Poland, it is worth paying attention to two clear examples from other countries: protests at Taksim Square in Istanbul (Turkey, 2013) and at Puerta del Sol Square in Madrid (Spain, 2011). The protests in the former Turkish capital were initially peaceful and served to defend one of the last green spaces in the city. However, the harsh actions of the security services led to an escalation of events. As journalists behind Turkish political scientists (including Koray Çaliskan) point out, the reasons for such a rapid development of events may be at least twofold. First, Turkey lacks a solid, sophisticated opposition party. This remains a fundamental disadvantage, as people have no alternative political venues through which to channel their views and frustrations. Second, a lack of meritocracy and transparency reduces people's trust in the political regime (Shafak, 2013).

Another example of the occupation of public space by opposition movements is the Puerta del Sol square in Madrid in 2011. The purpose of the occupation of Puerta de Sol was to demand profound changes in the current political and economic system. The list of protests was so long that it caused an exponential growth in the

number of protesters. The occupation of Puerta del Sol, denounced by some as illegal appropriation of urban space and suppressed in national media that only mentioned it under pressure from social networks or foreign press, disappeared weeks after its spontaneous appearance. “

*This central square, perhaps the most popular in the capital, brings together such symbolic elements as Kilómetro Cero (Kilometre Zero), which is the point of convergence of the State system of radial roads, the clock tower that rings in the New Year; the emblematic statue of a bear and a strawberry tree, heraldic icons of the city. Constructed in the nineteenth century, it is semicircular in shape and occupies a surface area of approximately one hectare. (Bravo, 2018)*

Analysis of the collected empirical material helped to identify a number of factors among the listed determinants. Spatial factors included those related to the connectivity of a given space with other parts of the city, the presence of infrastructure enabling individual or group access to the space of political expression, as well as accessibility understood in the context of universal design and convenient use of the space by large groups of people. The presence of public institutions in the immediate vicinity is another spatial factor that determines the choice of a particular space as a public assembly venue. Semiotic factors are related with the value system represented both by the space and the people participating in the assembly. In this context, one can distinguish historical values of the events that took place in the more or less distant past as well as related architectural and spatial values, which can be significant both for the choice of a space as a place of political expression and for the course of the event itself (references to particular buildings, spaces or objects during speeches). They also include social values relevant to the attitudes and views of the participants in the event. The perception-related factors include the potential reactions of the local and supra-local community (and in the case of some events, the entire nation or international community), media exposure and the reception and reactions of local, supra-local, or national authorities, to whom demands are most often addressed during such events. The use of symbolism of places by participants of assemblies as a way to gain allies by building a system of shared signs, values and contexts may be important in the case of perception-related factors. Again, two key locations in Poznań can be referenced: Freedom



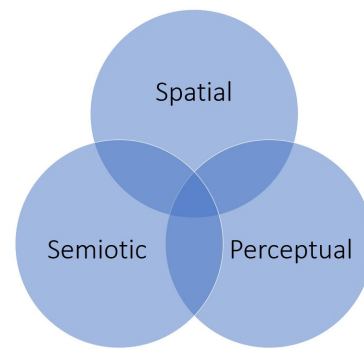
Square as a vehicle of heritage of the Wielkopolska Uprising and Adam Mickiewicz Square as a scene commemorating the events of the June 1956 Riots in Poznań. These examples demonstrate the community of historical experiences, which are in a way associated with certain places and are the basis for building a community of action to achieve specific political goals (anti-government protests) (Table 2).

Considering the above factors, it is appropriate to note that many of them overlap indications of another category in their framework. For example, the factor of location in the city layout is strongly connected with all semiotic conditions and thus also with the perception-related factors. The above categorization should therefore be considered transitive, as we are dealing with an overlap of and interrelationships between factors. It should be noted that, in many cases, only some of the proposed factors may influence the occurrence of public assemblies in particular spaces. The identified factors are presented more clearly in the Figure 3.

## 6. Conclusion

The content of contemporary assemblies in open public spaces largely corresponds to the events of the Greek agoras. They are still mostly about airing political views on current regional, national or international issues. What has undoubtedly changed, however, is the form, which has shifted from individual speeches of ancient thinkers and politicians to collective protests and assemblies representing the opinions of the communities involved. Traditional events in the Greek agoras were orderly, procedural and formalized. Nowadays, political expression in public venues is often spontaneous and little organized. However, it still remains a tool for influencing public authorities.

The main objective of this paper was to determine the role of urban public open spaces as the venues of political expression during public assemblies.



**Fig. 3.** Factors determining the organization of public assemblies in urban public open spaces as sets with fluid boundaries

This objective consists of providing answers to the three research questions posed by the authors.

### Q1: Which urban public open spaces in Poznań hosted public assemblies in 2019?

Due to the diverse nature of public assemblies, they take place in various types of urban public open spaces. Noteworthy among them are streets and squares, whose form make them suitable for holding such events. They have divergent characteristics; while squares are spaces suited to holding assemblies in one place over a longer time, streets are most often used for marches and parades. Nevertheless, the two leading types of urban open public spaces can supplement each other. Importantly, the distribution of venues for political expression is concentrated mainly in the central part of the city or among downtown developments. It is much less common for public assemblies to be organized in the districts surrounding the center, and they very rarely occur on the city's outskirts. Among the open urban public spaces, there are Freedom Square, the Old Market Square and Adam Mickiewicz Square

**Table 2.** Factors and conditions for organizing public assemblies in urban public open spaces

	Conditions		
	Spatial	Semiotic	Perceptual
<b>Factors</b>	Communication and accessibility	Historical values	Social reception
	Location within city structure	Social values	Media reception
	Proximity of public institutions	Architectural values	Authority reception
	Capacity	Spatial values	Alliance reception



Fig. 4. Freedom Square (Pol. Plac Wolności) as the heart of the expression of political emotions. Protest against tightening of the abortion law, 25/10/2021

(Fig. 4). According to the scale of the protests, Freedom Square should definitely be distinguished as the “heart of the expression of political emotions”. It was the place where the most events of this type took place in 2019. It is important for the citizens of Poznań for historical reasons, as well as due to its spatial properties. It provides plenty of space for those wishing to express their objection.

**Q2: How often were the identified urban public open spaces in Poznań used for public assemblies?**

Of the analyzed types of urban public open spaces, the highest number of events per space was registered in the city squares (14.2 assemblies per square). The popularity of city squares as venues for public assemblies can be assessed as high compared to other types of spaces. They stand out significantly as the most popular spaces for political expression in Poznań, achieving a result over three times higher than the spaces around monuments (4.63) that rank second on the list. Streets, while dominant in terms of the absolute number of spaces where public assemblies were held in 2019, are not as popular as bridges and plazas.

**Q3: What aspects determine the choice of specific public open spaces as venues for political expression?**

Political expression is one of the dimensions of urban public open spaces that, in the context of local community activity, seems to be extremely valuable and necessary. Public venues for political expression are selected on the basis of a number of factors that can be grouped into three main categories: spatial, semiotic and perception-related. They overlap and create a unique set of conditions determining the choice of a particular venue as the most adequate to the topic raised as the subject of expression. These factors influence both the selection of a particular type of urban public open space and the frequency of its selection by public assembly organizers.

The study of venues for political expression requires continuation in terms of political sciences, geography and in interdisciplinary contexts. In the course of the study, further research questions have emerged. Answering them will expand the current state of knowledge in theoretical and practical aspects. According to the authors, an attempt to answer the following research questions will be a valuable continuation of the study presented in this article: 1) What types of public assemblies occur in each type of public space? 2) How is the “taking over” of public spaces during assemblies

perceived by residents? 3) Does the increasing digitalization of society affect the way political expression takes place in public spaces? If so, in what ways? 4) Why are some spaces ignored as venues for political expression? 5) Have the factors for selecting specific open public spaces as places of political expression changed under the influence of the Covid-19 pandemic?

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