

## Does gentrification of the Praga Północ district in Warsaw really exist?

Sylwia Dudek-Mańkowska<sup>1, CDMR</sup>, Bartłomiej Iwańczak<sup>2, DFM</sup>

University of Warsaw, Faculty of Geography and Regional Studies, <sup>1</sup>Department of Urban Geography and Spatial Management, Krakowskie Przedmieście 30, 00-927 Warsaw, Poland, phone: +48 225 520 631, e-mail: [s.mankowska@uw.edu.pl](mailto:s.mankowska@uw.edu.pl) (corresponding author); <sup>2</sup>Laboratory of Spatial Information Systems, Krakowskie Przedmieście 30, 00-927 Warsaw, Poland, phone: +48 225 520 652, e-mail: [b.iwanczak@uw.edu.pl](mailto:b.iwanczak@uw.edu.pl)

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**Abstract.** Research on gentrification has been conducted for over 50 years by representatives of many disciplines. Modern gentrification is a process somewhat different from that originally described by R. Glass in 1964. Authors do not agree how to measure the process, nor how to explain its meaning (Bourne, 1993). Creating the right indicators is very difficult, especially if it is widely believed that gentrification, as a process identifying changes over time and a way of measuring dynamics, should enable the comparison of data from multiple years (Lees, 2010). The aim of this study was to identify the socio-spatial changes taking place in the Warsaw district of Praga Północ and to determine if it can be described as gentrification. The study area is a district stereotypically perceived as neglected, dangerous and deteriorated (e.g. Dudek-Mańkowska, 2011), at the same time subject to strong functional changes. Praga Północ is also an area of interest to many artists, creative industries and developers, and is undergoing gradual regeneration through municipal urban revitalization programs. It is also an area that the media portray as undergoing the process of gentrification. The results show that social and residential changes actually take place but the overall gentrification has not been felt by residents.

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## 1. Introduction

It has been over 50 years since the publication of “London: Aspects of change” R. Glass (1964), which introduced the concept of “gentrification”. The term was used by Glass in an ironic way. The prefix gentry (nobility) was to denote the emergence of the “new urban gentry” in a workers’ neighbourhood in London in analogy to the former “rural gentry” which constituted an intermediate layer between small landowners and rural aristocracy (Hamnett, 2003).

Gentrification is now defined and categorized in many ways. It is understood as a complex process involving the physical improvement of the condition of housing, and changes in their ownership status through an increase in real estate prices or rental costs and the related changes in the social area due to the displacement of residents belonging to the so-called working class by the new middle class (Glass, 1964; Grzeszczak, 2010). The two most frequent types of gentrification are: the process initiated by the bottom-up actions taken by creative pioneers (including artists) or the process initiated by the actions of local/regional authorities in the framework of revitalization or re-urbanization (Grzeszczak, 2010). The relation of gentrification to the process of revitalization is often posed in the literature (e.g. Jadach-Sepiolo, 2009).

In the classical understanding of gentrification, the initiators of changes are often artists who are attracted by a unique atmosphere of disadvantaged neighbourhoods. As Boschma and Fritsch (2008) stated, the main reason for residential preference exhibited by creative people is treating social diversity as a source of inspiration. The changing climate of a neighbourhood is then recognized by entrepreneurs deciding to open restaurants, clubs, cafes, and developers modernizing old or implementing new housing projects. This translates into an increase in property prices, which in turn can lead to the artists’ outmigration (Ley, 2003).

The process of gentrification is argued to be slightly different in post-socialist cities. The process of marginal gentrification is visible (depreciation of the centre to the benefit of peripheral neighbourhoods), accompanied by commercialization (Gądecki, 2012). According to Sykora (2005), in the post-communist cities the transformation from res-

idential functions to the commercial one is accompanied by the upgrading of standards.

The Praga Północ district of Warsaw is commonly regarded as an example of an area subjected to gentrification (Górczyńska, 2017; Jaczewska, Grzegorz, 2016; Ludzi irytuje..., 2017). Undoubtedly, from the most neglected district of Warsaw it is transforming into a place with atmosphere, full of cafes, clubs, galleries. It has been included in several regeneration programs (Local Revitalization Programme for the City of Warsaw from 2005 to 2013; Integrated Programme for Rehabilitation of the City of Warsaw until 2022). However, the question must be posed, whether the perception of the gentrification of Praga Północ, a priori, is legitimate. Perhaps some other phenomenon is taking place in the area having similar symptoms or the word “gentrification” is treated by municipal authorities and developers as a marketing slogan, not having much in common with the actual process that is occurring there. In a study of gentrification, the major problem is to identify the key indicators of the phenomenon (Lees, Slater, Wyly, 2010). This is a consequence of the complexity of the process, numerous models and limited possibilities of obtaining data. Statistical data are most commonly used. According to Badcock (1989), education is the strongest distinguishing feature of gentrifiers. Most researchers decide to take into account variables such as the average percentage of the population employed in the quaternary sector or in specialized and advanced services, the percentage of population with tertiary education, the median household income or the percentage of the population living in owned flats (e.g. The Socioeconomic Change of Chicago’s Community Areas 1970-2010 report).

Some authors recommend conducting field research and surveys (e.g. Wyly, Hammel, 1999). In this way, it is possible to capture the phenomenon not visible statistically (qualitative and quantitative changes in the residential tissue) and evaluate these changes as seen by the residents. Observation of the study area can be done using a database of historical maps and Street View imagery (e.g. Hwang, Sampson, 2014).

The next section of the paper provides characteristics of the study area. Next, the research method is explained; individual aspects of gentrification will be selected on the basis of the features found in

the literature. In the fourth part, the results of the authors' own study are presented.

## 2. Study area

Praga Północ is one of the oldest districts of Warsaw, located on the right bank of the Vistula. As one of few, it has preserved its historical character. There is still a lot of pre-war residential and industrial building stock. The district began to gain its industrial character in the 1860s due to the construction of the railway network – the Saint Petersburg Railway Station at ulica Wileńska [street] (1862) and the Terespol Railway Station (1866) at ulica Kijowska (Szwankowski, 1970). In 1864, the Kierbedzia Bridge was opened connecting Praga with the left bank of the Vistula River, which enabled the first horse tram line to pass to the district in 1866. Praga was surrounded by a network of railway tracks and limited by numerous military areas, especially at ulica 11 listopada. In the interwar period, this part of Praga began to slowly change its face. A twelve-acre zoo and some new investments were built, but the development was still limited by the military area. A lot of positive changes have been made by the railway, which led to the development of industry and the creation of modern investments. The beginning of the twentieth century, when Praga Północ (next to Wola) was the most industrialized district of the capital (Kormanowa, Ławnik, 1970), was the period of its greatest development. Praga Północ is a district that survived the devastation of the war. A major part of the buildings have preserved their historical origins, which makes it one of the best-preserved areas of old buildings in Warsaw. In the district, there are many streets which remained undamaged in WWII. After the Second World War, Praga Północ has become a place to live for poor people. The quality of life decreased. Currently, the district's image of a neglected and dangerous place with a post-industrial legacy is typical and deeply embedded in many inhabitants of Warsaw (Libura, 1990; Jałowiecki, 2000; Dudek-Mańkowska, 2011) (Fig. 1).

It is considered that the first signs of the process of gentrification appeared when artistic establishments have started to emerge in the area of ulica Inżynier-





ska (the early 1990s, Phase I of gentrification). In the late 1990s, graduates of the Academy of Fine Arts began to establish their studios and Drama Academy was founded (Phase II). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, individual artists began opening their studios and galleries (Phase III). As a result of the presence of the artists, catering and entertainment establishments (like Sen Pszczoły, Paryż Północy, Szósty zmysł, Studio23), have been located there since 2009 (Phase IV) (Dudek-Mańkowska, 2012).

Praga Północ can be divided today into the industrial zone in the north (with a small percentage of residential buildings) and the residential zone in the south. New residential developments are being built near Port Praski. As the investor informs, "Port Praski combines four complementary districts, characterized by different functions: business/commercial, residential, recreational and scientific. All surrounded by the Vistula boulevards, squares, harbours, floating restaurants, cafes and marinas. Port Praski is a symbiosis of nature and comprehensive downtown part of the city" (<http://www.portpraski.pl/>).

Because gentrification can refer only to residential space, the study was conducted on the south side of ulica Starzyńskiego. Inside this area, four main regions were identified for this study: Szmulowizna, Stara Praga, Nowa Praga (S) and Nowa Praga (N). Each of these regions has different functional and housing conditions (Fig. 2).

## 3. Research materials and methods

Individual aspects of gentrification will be selected on the basis of the features found in the literature (e.g. Galster, Peacock 1986; Carol, 2002; Cost of Good Intentions..., 2006). Questions about fifteen predictors of gentrification were grouped into four thematic blocks: satisfaction of living, social diversity, changes in urban structure and perception of gentrification. The questionnaire included two A4 pages and consisted of two parts: the main part of the research (13 questions about gentrification symptoms) and socio-demographic questions (10 questions). The research tool had a form of a structured interview.

<p>Białostocka Estate (Kolonія Białostocka) - the construction of the housing estate started in 1968 and its main part was completed in 1975. Currently the estate consists of four parts: 1) Szmulowizna A, Szmulowizna I, was created in 1969-1972; 2) Szmulowizna B, which was built between 1973 and 1978; 3) Szmulowizna Wschodnia and Szmulowizna II, built in 1972-1975 and 1978 - 1984, 4) Kolonia Białostocka is the youngest part of the estate built between 1982-1986.</p>	
<p>“Koneser” Warsaw Vodka Factory - a complex of factory buildings dating back to the end of the 19th century, maintained in Neo-Gothic style (ulica Żąbkowska). 5 ha plot in 2017 will become the lifestyle centre. Exceptional mixed-use space combining residential, retail, office and cultural functions.</p>	
<p>Ulica Brzeska - one of the main streets of Old Praga, connects to Ulica Kijowska. The street is one of the relics of ancient Praga at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and is considered to be the centre of the Praga Bermuda triangle, the most dangerous part of the Praga-Północ district.</p>	
<p>The Praga II housing estate in New Praga was established in 1953-59. The housing estate was to be comfortable for its inhabitants, so many composite axes were created, allowing convenient shortcuts in individual quarters of development for pedestrians on foot. Housing units were to be self-sufficient, so they were designed for day nurseries, kindergartens, schools and other public functions.</p>	

**Fig. 1.** Different faces of Praga housing development

Source: Based on Google Earth visualization

Socio-demographic questions concerned variables such as (a) gender, (b) age, (c) education, (d) occupation and (e) nationality. Additional questions related to (f) income and household characteristics, like (g) ownership, (h) area of the flat and (i) number of occupants. Respondents were asked about the

(j) street name or postcode to determine their place of residence. The study was conducted in the second half of May 2013. Interviewers were students of the first-year master's specialization in socio-economic geography at the Faculty of Geography and Regional Studies (University of Warsaw). They talked

with people who lived in the study area. The average time of an interview was about 15 minutes.

The collected data were coded and analysed in SPSS 19. The answers to open questions, for example stereotypes about the district, were classified manually.

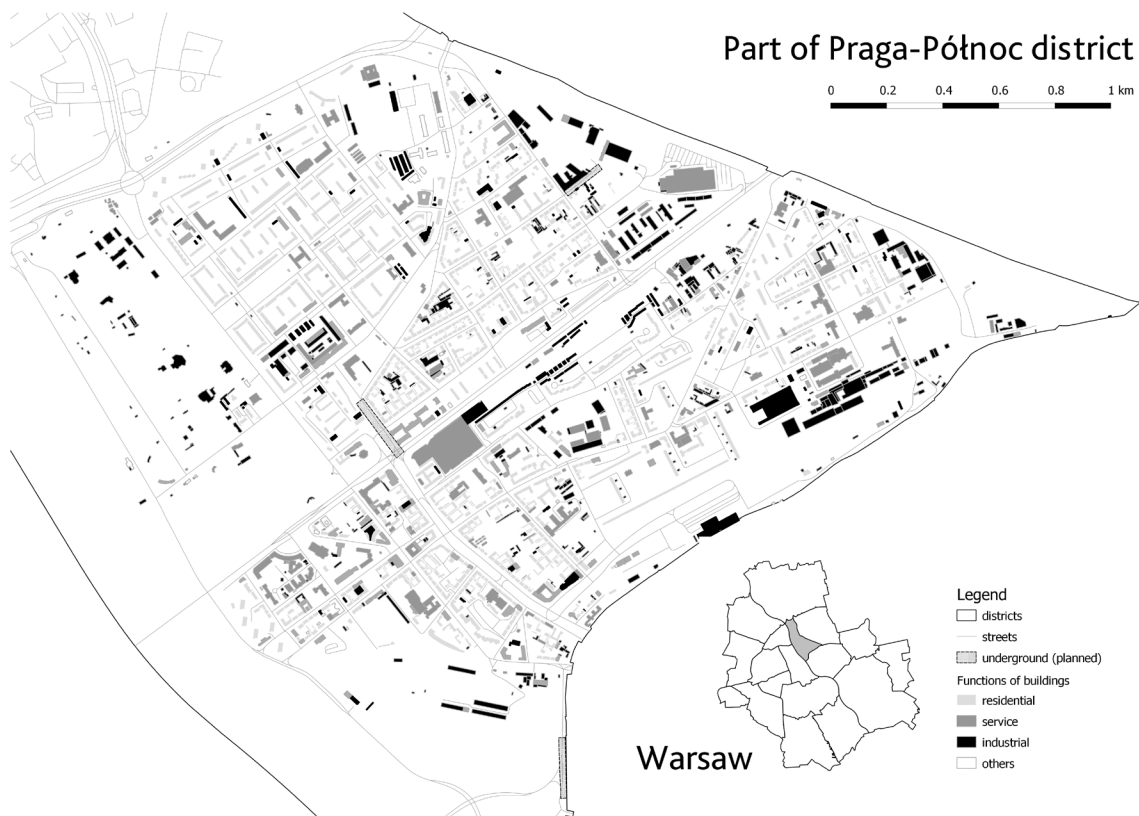
#### 4. Research results

The survey involved 272 respondents; 230 of them lived in the study area (69 in the Stara Praga, 61 in the Nowa Praga (S), 42 in the Nowa Praga (N) and 58 in the Szmulowizna). The demographic structure corresponds to the structure of the Warsaw population. The underrepresentation of the oldest age group results from their relatively low mobility and smaller activity in the public space. The structure of demographic groups is shown in the Table 1.

Only 46% of households are owned flats (including cooperative ownership). There are number of communal (24%) and rented flats (21%). Most are

inhabited by two (32%) or three (31%) occupants. There are quite a few households with four or more people (25%). The dominant income (per capita) is between PLN 1000 and 2000. However, 24% of respondents reported income of less than PLN 1000. The average time of residence is 23 years. The share of new residents (living in the district for less than 8 years) is 28%. The percentage of respondents who have lived here for at least 30 years is 35%.

Variables used to identify gentrification are summarized in Table 2. The first group of variables assumed that in the case of gentrification, people who have inhabited the area for a long time should declare low satisfaction of living in the area or greater desire to move to a different location than those who have just moved in (new residents are those who have been living in the area for less than 8 years). It has been verified that the satisfaction with residing in Praga Północ and the desire to move out is related to length of residence. Because all variables from this group were quantitative (scale of 1–5, where 1 is the worst and 5 is top), Student's t-test for independent groups was used.



**Fig. 2.** Study area and inventory of buildings  
 Source: Own research (based on OpenStreetMap layers)

**Table 1.** Respondent's characteristic

Variable	Group	Count of respondents
Gender	men	45% (124 persons)
	women	55% (148 persons)
Age	18-24 years	14%
	25-34 years	25%
	35-44 years	21%
	45-59 years	23%
	60-65 years	12%
	over 65 years	5%
Education	primary	2%
	lower secondary	1%
	vocational	19%
	secondary	30%
	post-secondary	10%
	higher	38%
Occupation	full-time work	34%
	business activity	7%
	casual employment	6%
	part-time work	14%
	care of the household	7%
	student	10%
	retiree	15%
	unemployed	5%

Source: Author's calculations (based on the answers of residents)

Differences within the answers to the question “How do you assess the quality of living in this district?” proved to be statistically insignificant ( $t=1.23$ ,  $df=164.74$ ,  $p=0.22$ ). Also for the question “How satisfied are you with living in this district”, differences were not significant in Student's t-test ( $t=-0.27$ ,  $df=144.68$ ,  $p=0.79$ ). For the question “If there was a possibility, would you like to move out somewhere else, to live in another place, another settlement?”, differences were statistically significant ( $t=-3.00$ ,  $df=134.65$ ,  $p=0.003$ ). However, the short-term residents expressed a desire to move (mean=2.58), as opposed to people who have lived in the area for a long time (mean=2.01). Therefore, all variables in this group indicate a lack of gentrification.

The second group of variables assumes an inflow of wealthy, young, single, educated people and foreigners to the study area. Respondents were asked how they perceive the social structure of neighbours. The calculated index shows the predominant responses. The ratio was 38% for small families, 8% for the wealthy, 19% for the young, 25% for the ed-

ucated. A summary of values is illustrated in the Table 3.

Gentrification decreases the heterogeneity of the space. Therefore, respondents were asked if the social composition was diversified and whether the new residents were significantly different from the existing ones. Most people said that the district had a highly diversified population (67%). In response to the question “Do you think that the differences between the inhabitants of the area are now smaller or larger than a few years ago?”, 50% of respondents confirmed that the diversity had increased, 29% said that it had not changed and 4% of them that it had decreased. The question: “Are new residents differ from existing?” revealed that 19% of respondents did not notice any difference between new and existing residents or pointed to a wide variety earlier. 43% of respondents reported the occurrence of differences and 34% indicated presence of foreigners among their neighbours.

Gentrification is also associated with new investments, restoration and revitalization. Only 38% of

**Table 2.** Question with results linked to indicators of gentrification

	Indicator of gentrification	Question	Result of confirmation
<b>Satisfaction of living</b>	People living here longer rate the quality worse than people living here shorter	How do you assess the quality of living in this district?	t=1.23, df=164,74, p=0.22
	People living here longer are less satisfied with this district than people living here shorter	How satisfied are you with living in this district	t= -0.27, df=144.68, p=0.79
	People living here longer want to move out	If there was a possibility, whether you would like to move out somewhere else-to live in another place, another settlement	t= -3.00, df= 134.65, p= 0.003 <b>PARTIAL CONFIRMATION</b>
<b>Social diversity</b>	There are many young people	How do you perceive the social structure: young or elder	19% answers no confirmation
	There are many educated people	How do you perceive the social structure: educated or uneducated	25% answers no confirmation
	There are many small families	How do you perceive the social structure: small families (including singles) or big families	38% answers no confirmation
	There are many wealthy people	How do you perceive the social structure: poor or wealthy	8% answers no confirmation
	Many residents have foreigners for neighbours	If foreigners living in your neighbourhood?	34% answers no confirmation
	District is not socially mixed	Do the residents are different due to lifestyle?	33% answers no confirmation
	Social differentiation decreased	Do you think that the differences between the inhabitants of the area are now smaller or larger than a few years ago?	4% answers no confirmation
<b>Changes in urban structure</b>	New residents are different from the existing	Are new residents different from existing	43% answers <b>CONFIRMATION</b>
	There are new investments in the area	Does your estate are new housing investments?	38% answers no confirmation
	There is renovation in the area	Are there renovations in your estate?	60% answers <b>CONFIRMATION</b>
<b>Perception of gentrification</b>	Praga Północ is perceived as a fashionable district	Do you think there is a stereotype that people from outside attribute to the district	3% answers no confirmation
	Residents understand the term 'gentrification'	What are your associations with gentrification?	3% answers no confirmation

Source: Author's calculations (based on the answers of residents)

respondents answered yes to question “Are there new housing investments?”. On the other hand, 60% of respondents confirmed renovations. It can be concluded that changes in the structure of the building exists, without distinguishing between revitalization, renovation or gentrification.

The fourth assumption was that, in the case of gentrification, the district is attractive and the residents know the concept of gentrification. We ob-

tained the opposite results in this study. 89% of the respondents did not know the term and among the rest, only 3% (7 people) provided the correct definition of gentrification. Also, only 3% of respondents identified the stereotype of Praga Północ district as related to gentrification (“art district” or “expanding district”). The vast majority of respondents define Praga Północ as a dangerous neighbourhood (18%), think that its residents have a tendency to overcon-

**Table 3.** Types of inhabitants

%	Big advantage	Small advantage	Equal participation	Small advantage	Big advantage	
Small families	5.9	<u>32.2</u>	<u>36.6</u>	20.1	1.8	Big families
Poor	11.7	<u>46.5</u>	<u>31.9</u>	7.3	1.1	Wealthy
Young	2.6	16.5	<u>45.4</u>	<u>27.8</u>	6.2	Older
Not educated	6.2	<u>28.2</u>	<u>39.2</u>	19.4	5.9	Educated

Source: Author's calculations (based on the answers of residents)

sume alcohol (13%) and define area as 'Warsaw slum' (11%) with high levels of poverty and social issues (11%). There were also several opinions that this was a district of elderly people and crumbling buildings (6%).

## 5. Conclusions

Praga Północ is considered a classic example of gentrification. The characteristics of this district (location near the city centre, good transport accessibility, the availability of land for investment, the expansion of culture and the creative sector, degraded, partially abandoned buildings) encourages the occurrence of the gentrification process. New, niche clubs, cafes and restaurants are opening. The district is being redeveloped. However, changing the functionality of buildings and the presence of culture are not sufficient to identify gentrification. Gentrification is first and foremost a complex social process. Among the four various aspects of gentrification: satisfaction of living, social diversity, changes in urban structure and perception of gentrification only two indicators comply with the criteria of gentrification. Additionally, local community has a very strong identity. It means that the presence of gentrification is not obvious. Although the variables included all main indicators of gentrification, it should be emphasized that the study concerned only the subjective perception of residents. It can be assumed that the answers are true, but perhaps respondents do not pay much attention to the ongoing transformations and the stereotype of "the sinister district" is changing to "the fashionable district". Perhaps these changes are the beginning of gentrification or contribute to its initiation. It is necessary to monitor the changes and responses of local communities and the central authorities

to problems inherent in classic gentrification. This requires repeating similar researches in a long-time perspective.

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