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MY COUNTRY. MY CITY. MY PLACE

1. INTRODUCTION

It is the residential area, the residential street to which most of our wealth is tied and where we spend most of our lives. We all want that the place we have chosen as our place to live to possess characteristics that allow us to say "I live a good life here; this is my place on Earth".

Such a description is an individual feeling, of course, a personal perception of the world. Perception of the world is always connected with human endeavours to valorize one's life, to discover whether now and here one feels well and what one's quality of life is. An individual human being lives his or her life in the reality created by society and the manner of its organization and functioning. While a collectively shaped reality creates circumstances for life for every single human in a certain area, we always valorize real circumstances of our lives through our individual, private experiences, ideas, aspirations and expectations. Thus, quality of life is the resultant of every-day circumstances (reality) and individual characteristics (personal circumstances) in a given area and at a given time.

„Myness" of space

Quality of life is always related to the space in which life proceeds. Having a piece of space that one can term as "MY PLACE" is the natural need of every man. What characteristics does a piece of space require before I may declare that "it is MINE"?

MY SPACE is the piece of space that I can describe as follows:

- I know it – I know its strengths and weaknesses,

- I have it – It is my achievement, it is what I have created,

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M.Dąbrowski, J.Małuj, P.Szafranowicz

- I control it – I have the right to change the place and innovate within it,

- I feel it – the result of knowing the place and emotions connected with it,

- I identify myself with it – I feel connected to it and I am interested in what is relevant to it.

This feeling of "myness of space" is one of the main personal factors that affects the description of quality of life. Man can enhance his quality of life in the place he identifies himself with so much that he perceives it as a piece of himself. It is because this space about which a man can declare "IT IS MINE", affords the best opportunities for improving the quality of life.

The reality in which we all live comprises thousands of such "MY places". Searching for and shaping "my places" often creates conflicts between owners as well as between private and public interest. One of the main objectives of the organization of social life is the prevention or minimisation of conflicts. To sustain private and public interest, democratic society requires proper management of space.

Attractiveness of space

Proper management of space composed of individuals means creating a space that will:

o be directed on fulfilling every individual's needs and values (enhancing the well-being and prosperity of every individual),

o secure public interest,

o secure the needs and values of the natural environment.

From the individual's point of view, the proper management of space means creating a space that provides:

o conditions for today's well-being,

o conditions we need or will need to enhance quality of our life today and to fulfil our future potential.

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In our opinion, space that provides this group of possibilities is perceived as an attractive space. The term "attractiveness" has strong marketing connotations. Something attractive means something appealing, winsome, something interesting. It is a response to our present needs, but goes beyond what we have today and what we need today to make a living. Attractiveness is a kind of proposal, an offer from outside, carrying possibilities. Similarly the attractive space carries an offer for us to maintain the quality of our present life while also providing opportunities to improve it and conditions for our personal development. Attractiveness is connected with hope, with a kind of future security.

Changes that occur in the style of life (increasing mobility of people and rising importance of the service sector) and in the economy (detachment from natural resources in favour of a better position in the transportation network and a well-educated labour supply) lead to changes in demands made on environments of human life. Contemporary human settlements should provide conditions for a high quality of life understood as the opportunity for residents to meet their needs and values. Contemporary man requires to:

o   be safe,

o   be healthy,

o   feel well.

in the place in which he lives.

An attractive space meets such requirements.

Creation of an attractive space depends not only on factors that come from the local level understood as an actual place of human living. For correct analysis, estimation and setting targets for the enhancement of the attractiveness of the human living environment, we also need to take in account other factors that come from the broader context: place is that part of a city that has its own characteristics; the city is in a country that dictates the framework of reality.

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Thus, the attractiveness of a space and the quality of life connected with it is the resultant of factors that work on three levels: place, city and country.
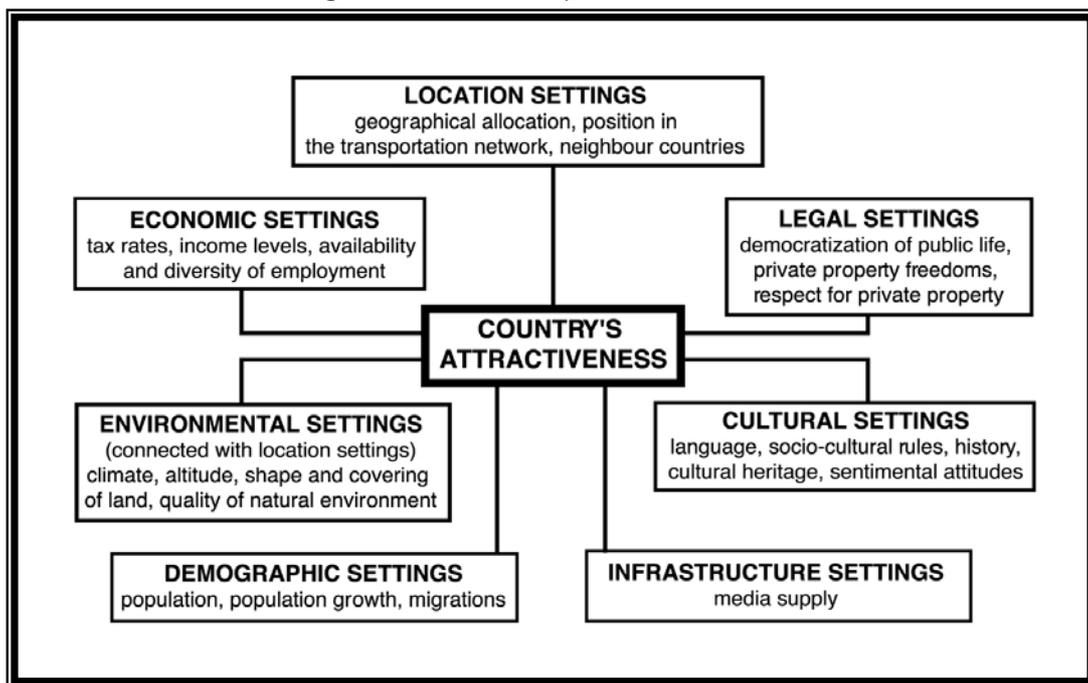
I live in MY PLACE – MY PLACE is in MY CITY – MY CITY is in MY COUNTRY.

2. MY COUNTRY

Nature, cultural differences, history, ideologies and the different ways in which human activities organise a social space have created administrative, political and cultural divisions that make the world so colourful and interesting. Although the social and administrative divisions of separate countries are slowly blurring in the age of globalization and EU expansion, language and cultural and historical heritage still define the separate character of countries.

The country is still the basic unit of organization in the world. The framework of reality and the circumstances for shaping citizens' quality and standards of living stems from some factors that are characteristics of a country. Factors that affect a country's attractiveness are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. – A Country's Attractiveness

Source: ZOOM

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Z O O M s.c.
M.Dąbrowski, J.Małuj, P.Szafranowicz

These factors describe space, environment and quality of life conditions in a given country; they also frame borders, constitute the basis for enhancing quality of life and can influence the country's residential attractiveness and appeal as a business location. Living and investing in the country could be as attractive as these general settings allow (see also Nivola, 1999).

Although some settings are constant and cannot be changed (location settings, environmental settings) and some have limited potential for change (quality of environment, position in the transportation network or cultural settings), factors still exist that we can affect and improve (legal, demographic and infrastructure settings) or undergo change from globalization, technological development and socio-cultural changes that take place in the world.

Therefore, what factors permit me to say about a country that "it is MY COUNTRY"?

My country is a country that provides conditions and circumstances for me to feel happy – conditions for creating quality of my life and that permit me to realise my potential – my needs and my values. Cultural and historical settings (especially language) are important issues on this level as are some sentimental reasons such as: country of origin, family and friendship and private experience.

3. MY CITY

The city is the main form of human settlements in the world. It exists and its residents shape it and create its image. As the city exists due to people who live within the city, the prominent objective of urban policy is to enhance the well-being and prosperity of residents, so that everyone can say "it is MY CITY".

Why should the city be attractive?

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If the city exists by its residents and for its residents, in order to achieve the prime objective of urban policy (that is, to optimise welfare and prosperity), the city must strive to enhance the quality of life in its area in the general conditions defined by attractiveness of the country.

Economic, social, demographic and technological evolution and changes that take place in the world affect the role of cities in the economy. If a city wants to be well organized and provide a sustainable high quality of life, it must constantly develop its structure and be competitive (this applies to other cities in the country and in the world). "*Globalization, the single Europe and increasing mobility of people and companies make for keener competition among cities*" (Berg, 2000). Attractiveness is connected with competition between cities in a contemporary network of modern urban settlements. Cities strive to raise their attractiveness as well as to maintain their present citizens – by providing them with attractive conditions they need to improve their quality of life, so as to attract potential new users of the urban space that the city needs for further development. The main objectives of raising a city's attractiveness are the:

o constant provision and improvement of conditions for citizens' quality of life – to maintain present citizens and to attract new ones,

o obtaining of funds necessary for infrastructure and other public services – for business development,

o improvement of the city's image and its position in the international network of the urban centres – *i.e.*, to raise the city's attractiveness as a tourist destination.

Thus, nowadays a city must strive to enhance its appeal to all its users more energetically than ever.

To whom should the city appeal?

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To increase the prosperity of its citizens, a city needs to be attractive for all its holders, for all target groups. Although residents are the city's general target group, they are not the only group that a modern city needs to be attractive and competitive.

Other important target groups of a modern city are (Berg, 2000):

o   residents – internal and external;

o   business companies – internal and external;

o   visitors – external.

Talking about a city's external target groups is important as "*the place that used to be the city now determines the aspect of entire region. Residents and companies situated formally outside the boundaries of the central municipality, yet feel a functional and emotional bond with 'the city' ''* (Berg, 2000).

What makes cities attractive?

The attractiveness of a certain city depends on many factors and differs by target group. Each of the target groups listed above uses its own criteria to estimate and define the city's attractiveness (Berg, 2000).

For residents, the following issues are important:

o   good, affordable dwellings;

o   clean and safe environment;

o   availability and diversity of employment;

o   supply of high-grade services in education, culture, health care, recreation, shopping and religion;

o   safety.

For companies, the following issues are important:

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- o availability of space;

- o tax rates and other legal regulations;

- o quality and quantity of labour supply;

- o presence of other establishments (suppliers and customers);

- o market demand;

- o status of a location;

- o quality of living environment;

- o safety.

For <u>tourists,</u> the following issues are important:

- o tourist attractions, museums, events;

- o climate and quality of the environment;

- o landscape;

- o safety;

- o services – hotels, restaurants, shops;

- o city's accessibility.

The factors that determine a city's attractiveness also determine the quality of life of its residents. The more attractive the city the easier it is to meet the needs and values that define the quality of life. On the other hand, the higher the quality of life in a given city the more attractive it is as a place to settle down.

Yet, a modern city comprises not only residents but also other target groups. All of a city's target groups combine to create the city and factors that determine a city's attractiveness are bound to one another. Moreover, the target groups appear to need each other. Thus, we cannot discuss the residential attractiveness of cities without also taking into

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Z O O M s.c.
M.Dąbrowski, J.Małuj, P.Szafranowicz

account aspects that come from the city's attractiveness for groups of a city's holders other than its residents.

If we ignore individual and personal factors that stem from human nature and factors that stem from the country level, we can assert that the attractiveness of a given city is shaped by interdependencies and interpenetrations of factors that are resultants of the following conditions:

o socio-political – *i.e.* demography, citizens' education, crime, local government and other parties' activities;

o economic – *i.e.* employment opportunities, fiscal conditions, costs of living and costs of business operations and the local market;

o spatial and environmental – use of land and planning, transportation network, infrastructure, quality of natural environment and natural features (such as access to open water and forests), landscape and cultural heritage.

Other factors that influence a city's attractiveness stem out from the regional context or the city's location as a part of an agglomeration. Extra-local features (such as existing companies important for locating a business and an attractive natural environment and cultural heritage important for tourism to name a few) exist that can substantially raise the city's attractiveness even though the city itself does not possess characteristics that would permit its description as an attractive city. Moreover, the situation in which the region or neighbouring cities are able to complement or even trump a given city's offer[1].
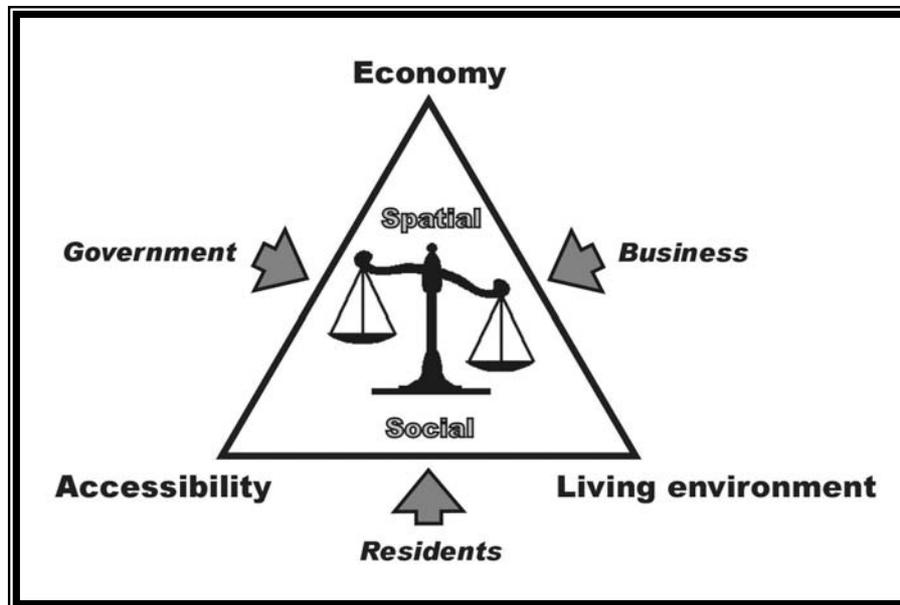
A balanced city

Because the factors determining a city's attractiveness as well as all target groups are complementary and require each other, enhancing a city's attractiveness needs control.

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[1] Sopot in Poland can serve as an example of such a situation. The city is located in the middle of the Tricity agglomeration, between two other cities - Gdansk and Gdynia. Most of Sopot's citizens do not work in the town in which they live but in Gdansk or Gdynia. Although Sopot does not provide them with enough employment opportunities, it has maintained its natural environment, landscape and character of a health resort, which makes it attractive as a place of residence.

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M.Dąbrowski, J.Małuj, P.Szafranowicz

"Although cities will always specialise to some extent, a degree of equilibrium in functions as well as target groups is advisable" (Berg, 2000). An attractive city is a balanced city (Figure 2.).

Figure 2. – The Balanced City

Source: ZOOM, following Berg, 2000

Moreover, to maintain a city's attractiveness *"not only spatially (in terms of functions and target groups) should a city be harmonious, but also socially. An accumulation of social problems (such as unemployment and crime) in a few neighbourhoods can have a negative effect on a whole city."* (Berg, 2000)

<u>*Who makes the city attractive?*</u>

Who makes a city attractive? As we have contended, the city exists by and for its holders. But a city's various target groups have different needs and preferences and that sparks conflict. To maintain harmony among private interests or between private and public interests and to enhance its attractiveness, a city requires management.

Although cities exists in the general settings established on the country level by a federal government, the key role in enhancing a city's attractiveness belongs to the local government.

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Local government, however, is not the only actor in the city. All the city's users (residents, companies, tourists, private and public parties) – through their activities – affect the state of the city and thereby the city's attractiveness, quality of life and image[2].

A city is a spatial unit placed between the country and place but it is the most important level for building quality of life for its residents. If the city provides opportunities and conditions for current well-being and prosperity for its residents (such as home and environment, employment and facilities, etc.), as well as an attractive offer for future development and is able to make people identify themselves with it, it becomes the city about which its residents can say "it is MY CITY".

Of course the feeling, that a city is MY CITY is an individual issue, a personal perception of the world; yet, creating the space that provides as many citizens as possible the chance to say this is the key pursuit of enhancing the quality of life within a certain city.

4. MY PLACE

Most of us live in a residential area; it is here where most of our wealth is tied and where we spend most of our income. It is also in these areas that we will spend the greater part of our lives. We all want the place we have chosen as our place to live to have characteristics that will enable us to proclaim: I live a good life here, this is MY PLACE.

Changes that have taken place, including technology, wealth and society itself have influenced our present demands with regard to attractiveness and quality of life in residential areas. People are demanding increasingly higher standards in the type and quality of home and neighbourhood.

"Residential areas have to meet a wide range of different needs .... There are many different and complex individual needs to be balanced and met to varying degrees. But the goals are simple:
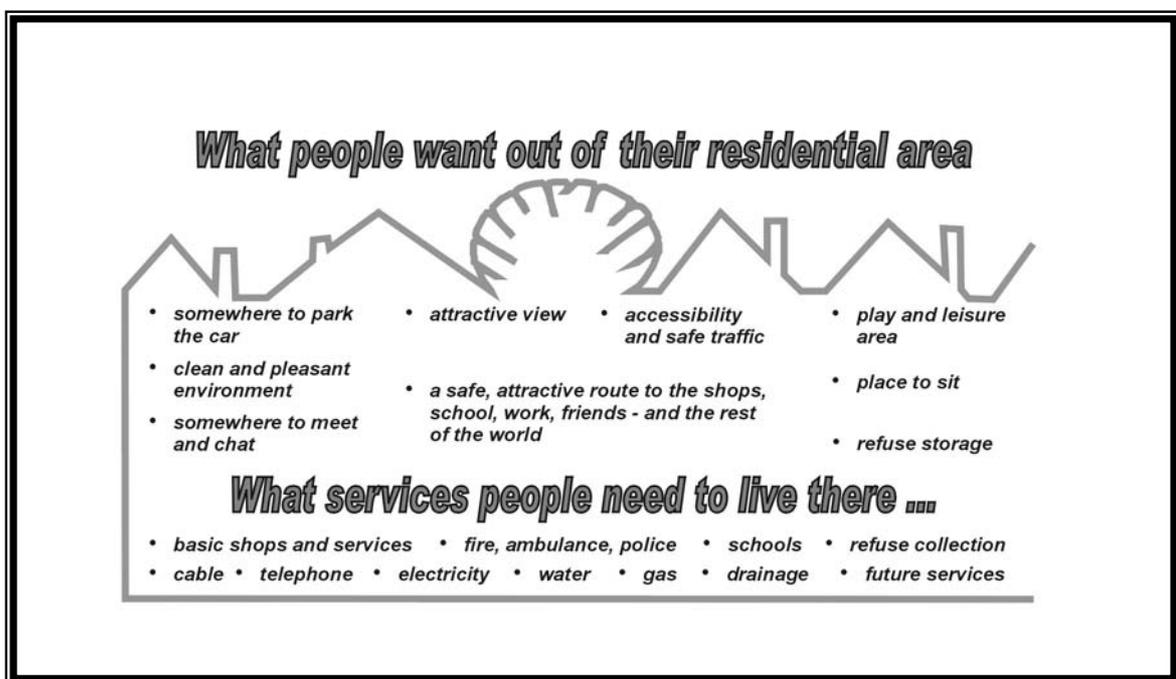
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[2] The degree of complexity of the process of a city's creation is well illustrated in the work of I. Sagan (2000)

o   *residential areas need to look good,*

o   *they need to be functional,*

o   *people need to feel safe there."*

(Returning Roads to Residents, 2001)

Figure 3. presents what people want out of their residential area and what services they need to live there.
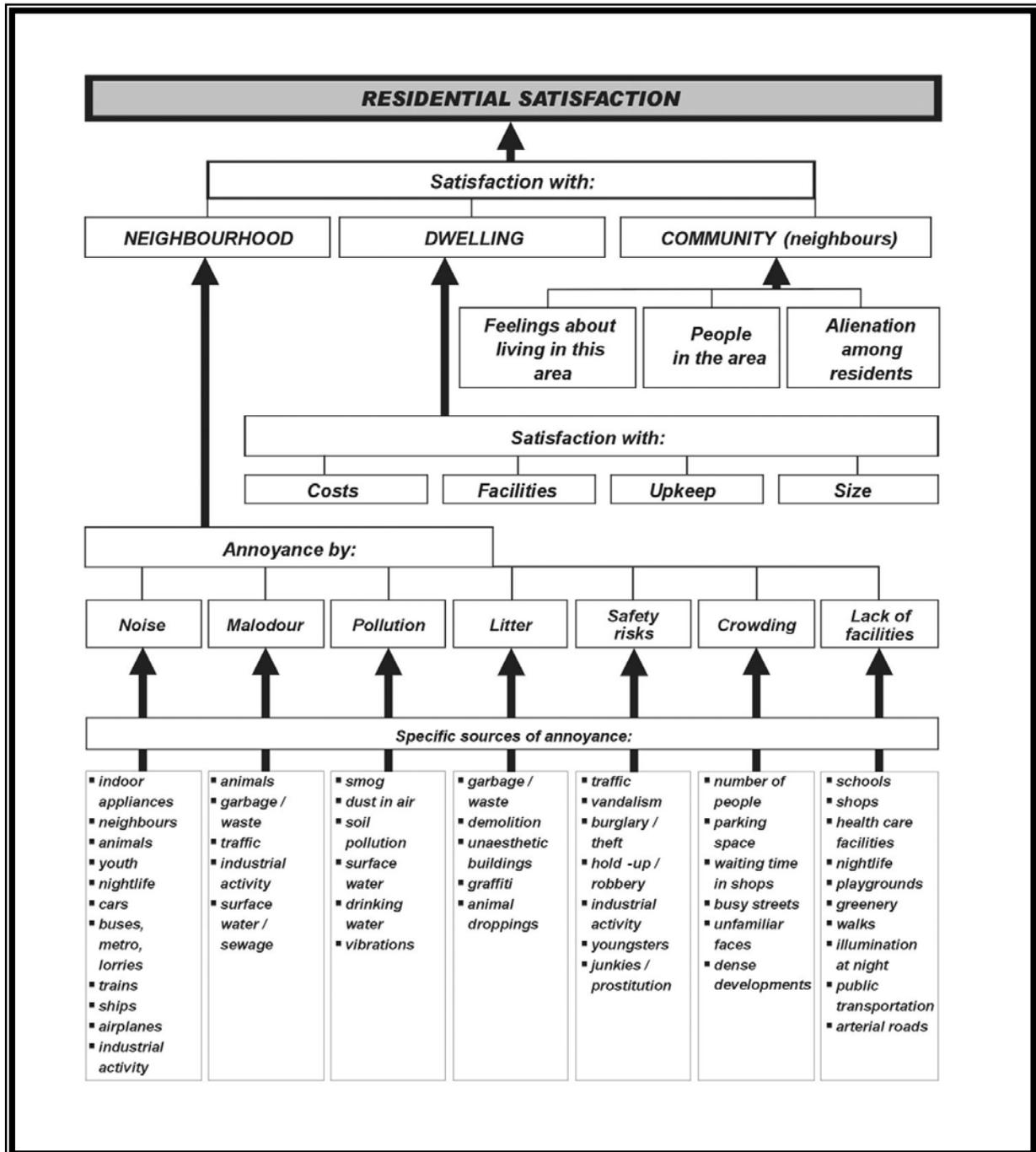
Figure 3. – What do we need from a residential area?

Source: ZOOM, following Returning Roads to Residents, 2001

Research on the satisfaction residents experience under current conditions of their living environment can determine other factors that affect the quality of life and residential attractiveness of the area (especially in existing residential areas). Satisfaction with the residential environment is a common measure of quality of life in the current area (Poll, 1997).

The degree of residential satisfaction that residents experience can represent the quality of life.

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GRUPA PROJEKTOWA
Z O O M s.c.
M.Dąbrowski, J.Małuj, P.Szafranowicz

According to the hierarchical, multi-attribute model of perceived quality of the urban residential environment depicted in Figure 4., the amount of residential satisfaction that residents experience can represent the quality of life. (Poll, 1997).

Figure 4. – Hierarchical multi-attribute model of urban residential quality.

Source: Poll, 1997 p. 24

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GRUPA PROJEKTOWA
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M.Dąbrowski, J.Małuj, P.Szafranowicz

As shown in the model, residential satisfaction depends on residents' satisfaction with the neighbourhood, the dwelling and the community. Satisfaction with the community depends on many "neighbour attributes" but the most important are:

o how people feel about living in the area,

o what people live in the area,

o alienation among residents.

Satisfaction with the dwelling depends on such attributes as: costs, facilities, upkeep and size.

Factors that determine neighbourhood satisfaction can be easily defined by annoyances such as: noise, malodour, air/water/soil pollution, aesthetics of the area, safety risks, crowding and the lack of neighbourhood facilities. Each of the seven features that define satisfaction with the neighbourhood is divided into specific sources of annoyance.

The perceived quality of a residential area can be assessed by asking residents for their opinions about it. Naturally, some of these aspects are closely tied to personal and personality characteristics. If we want the residential area we live in to be "MY PLACE", however, this level – the level of place – should be the most important response to the residents' personal needs and values.

CONCLUSION

As demonstrate in this paper, the quality of life and residential attractiveness do not depend solely on local characteristics. Factors originating from each of the three levels – country, city and place – are interdependent, complementary and interpenetrate one another. To enhance the quality of life and residential attractiveness of cities, and especially in the age of globalization and EU expansion to compare these features, we also need to take in account the facts that come from a broader context. Even if a city could be perceived as an attractive city in which to live, it does not mean that it is attractive enough because the country in which

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Z O O M s.c.
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it is located does not possess characteristics that would allow one to describe it as attractive. Similarly, a place could be as attractive as the city's conditions of which it is part allow it to be.

At this point, a definition of the boundaries of these "my spaces" encounters another problem. What do I perceive as "my place"? My house, my street, my residential area? What do I perceive as "my city"? Is it only the city in which I live (its administrative boundaries) or other cities in the agglomeration?

Improving the quality of residential areas enhances a city's residential attractiveness. Due to its personal nature, the quality of life as a measure used for the standard of living and satisfaction we experience with our life is a very complex issue that is difficult to formulate. Because of its complex character, it calls for the close cooperation among experts from many different specialities: psychologists, sociologists, geographers, ecologists, planners, architects, engineers and of course government and other participants in the process of city creation.

We hope that further works on the issue of quality of life will inspire us to sing about the cities in which we live in the same way the great Frank Sinatra sang: *"...My kind of town. Chicago is my kind of town ..."*.

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