



You have downloaded a document from  
**RE-BUŚ**  
repository of the University of Silesia in Katowice

**Title:** Foreword

**Author:** Marek S. Szczepański, Grzegorz Gawron, Barbara Lewicka

**Citation style:** Szczepański Marek S., Gawron Grzegorz, Lewicka Barbara. (2015). Foreword. W: M. S. Szczepański, G. Gawron, B. Lewicka (red.), "Urbanism as a way of life : trying to rediscover" (S. 7-10). Katowice : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego.



Uznanie autorstwa - Użycie niekomercyjne - Bez utworów zależnych Polska - Licencja ta zezwala na rozpowszechnianie, przedstawianie i wykonywanie utworu jedynie w celach niekomercyjnych oraz pod warunkiem zachowania go w oryginalnej postaci (nie tworzenia utworów zależnych).

## Foreword

It was July 1938 when Louis Wirth published his “Urbanism as a Way of Life” in the *American Journal of Sociology*. The paper was seen by many as the one defining the city as a social phenomenon. Looking beyond its physical structure, economic product or cultural institutions, the author discovers those “elements of urbanism which mark it as a distinctive mode of human group life” (Wirth 1938: 4).

Wirth argues that three key characteristics of cities — large population size, social heterogeneity, and population density — contribute to the development of a peculiarly “urban way of life” and a distinct “urban personality”. In his opinion, for centuries casual observers have noted deep personality differences between urban and rural people and between nature-based and machine-based styles of living. He attempts to explain those differences in terms of the functional responses of urban dwellers to the characteristic environmental conditions of modern urban society. According to Wirth, people living in cities are weakly integrated; they take part in impersonal relationships being rather concentrated on self-activities than involved in social engagements. Segmental roles, isolation and disorder result in the city dwellers’ susceptibility to persuasion or manipulation as their personalities are not coherent enough to fight external pressures. Moreover, people whose mentality was built in unfriendly city environment are likely to suffer breakdowns or commit suicides much more often than those living in rural areas. Although Wirth mentioned some positive aspects of living in the city like freedom or tolerance, his most meaningful ideas on the urban lifestyle were quite pessimistic with special attention paid to insecurity and loneliness experienced by city dwellers. As John Scott put it: “There was an anti-city bias in Wirth’s approach that reflected a widely found nostalgia in industrial societies for the life of the rural village”. (Scott 2003: 496)

According to some authors, Wirth's explanation of the sociology of urban life is nothing more but the attempt at social scientific verification of the obvious. For others, such things as an "urban personality" or an "urban way of life" simply do not exist at all. Anyway, although highly criticized, Wirth's essay — due to many reasons — has become highly influential and his new approach to the city — convincing. It is worth to mention here at least two of his prominent opponents: Anthony Giddens (1981) and Herbert J. Gans (1968). In Giddens' view, there is something like a distinctive urban lifestyle on the one hand, while, it cannot be described anymore, on the other. In modern capitalism this is not the place which could be acknowledged as responsible for shaping people's lifestyles. Instead, how much people earn and what they spend their money on do matter in a given context. In Gans' view, there is not only one urban way of life. Nonetheless, Wirth gave us detailed descriptions of city conditions and their impact on society, it is not true that people lead the same lifestyles. Among the lifestyles distinguished by Gans are the following: cosmopolites; unmarried and childless; ethnic villagers; the deprived and the trapped. Only the deprived and the trapped were recognized as suffering social anomie, contrary to Wirth's assumptions pointing to anomie as a natural characteristic of all city dwellers.

There is a long list of Wirth's opponents and enthusiasts what is not strange taking into account how vital problems concerning modern city and its dwellers his short essay comprises. The main objective of the authors of *Urbanism as a way of life. Trying to rediscover* was to prepare a collection of articles that will show the diversity of perspectives on "urban way of life" in contemporary cities.

The book is opened by "Like fruits of the Bible tree. Moral status of metropolises" in which Piotr Skudrzyk, based on studies of selected intellectuals, concentrates on discovering moral aspects of living in metropolis. To accomplish the task, he refers to Spengler's catastrophism and Castells's theory of network society. Finally, he undertakes an attempt at approaching the concept of the moral status of metropolis in the highest ethical categories.

In her article "Behind the urbanism. Images of the city in modern marketing" Barbara Lewicka tries to reconstruct the image of the city as a large overpopulated conurbation, full of alienation, depersonalized interactions in contrast to an attractive place, being synonymous with modern and interesting lifestyle. The article presents the examples of how associations with the term "urban" are used in marketing campaigns of various products.

Creative class is the subject area of analyses of many contemporary researchers. In her paper "Creative class — around related concepts. An attempt at critical sociological analysis" Małgorzata Suchacka proposes sociological theoretical considerations and critical reflections on the concept of creative class on the basis of several main themes connected with the process of its formation and determinants of its functioning. The aim of the study was to make an attempt

---

at critical reflection on the concept of creative class with the use of the notions of human and social capital. An attempt was also made to assess usefulness of over a hundred years old concept of leisure class by T. Veblen in the analysis of the notion of creative class. Considerations were focussed on identification of similarities and differences of these two theoretical approaches.

The next study “Spatial identity in the theoretical and empirical contexts” by Krzysztof Bierwiazzonek raises the issue of functioning and importance of the spatial identity. According to Peter Weichhart, one could distinguish three levels of it: individual, social and institutional one. Based on the data presented in the article, it is possible to find out the existence of the community of spatial experience which influences formation of the urban identity both in its individual and social dimension.

In his paper “Living longer in urban environments — developing “age-friendly” cities and communities in selected models” Grzegorz Gawron presents the main assumptions and models comprising the idea of “age-friendly” cities (AFC). The idea (and the article) should be treated as a significant input into discussion on how our cities will look like taking into account needs of contemporary societies among which growing demand for creating concepts securing the future of contemporary societies connected closely with the local (urban) perspective seems the vital one.

The next study “Urban space and sustainable development. Social challenges to contemporary design” by Paulina Rojek-Adamek concentrates on the problem of sustainable development in the perspective of creating urban spaces. Referring to the concept of “sustainable design”, the author presents a wide spectrum of the roles fulfilled by specialists influencing the urban environment, i.e. urban planners, architects, designers. Based on the selected activities of the Design Council (UK), she shows how to ensure sustainable growth and prosperity of residents in long-term development perspective.

In her paper “Urbicide — when the city becomes a target” Karolina Wojtasik explores changes in the urban space resulting from armed conflicts — wars, terrorism or “urbicide”. As a consequence of changes in the attitudes to military operations, technology development, globalization and the emergence of the “asymetric threats”, armed conflicts moved from the battlefield to the urban space. The cities are fought for. They are taken over being divided into areas of influence of one side of the conflict or another.

The volume is closed by the article “Residents of urban and rural areas. The same or different?” by Zbigniew Zagała. Based on statistics and nationwide sociological research, the author undertakes an attempt at defining the similarities and differences between the residents of cities and villages. How they are perceived by different respondents? Are there or not differences in social perceptions? What is similar and what is different? Those and other questions were tried to be answered.

As the editors of this volume, we hope that it will be an interesting collection of various perspectives on urban life in modern cities. We also do hope, it will encourage reflection on multidimensionality of this social phenomenon.

*Marek S. Szczepański*  
*Grzegorz Gawron*  
*Barbara Lewicka*