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Title: In place of an end

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Citation style: Szczepański Marek S., Lewicka Barbara, Gawron Grzegorz. (2015). In place of an end. W: M. S. Szczepański, G. Gawron, B. Lewicka (red.), "Urbanism as a way of life : trying to rediscover" (S. 135). Katowice : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego.



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In Place of an End

Cities, since first of them were to be established centuries ago, have always been spaces full of social actions, mass activities and collective behaviors. It is because they had an unusual power to attract people. They were and still are influential, inspiring and they arouse interest. For many reasons cities are important for common dwellers, but also for artists and thinkers. In 20th century Louis Wirth described urbanized areas in terms of high population density, social diversity and large size of population — features which seem to be obvious and natural. In his famous essay we may read:

“The degree to which the contemporary world may be said to be ‘urban’ is not fully or accurately measured by the proportion of the total population living in cities. The influences which cities exert upon the social life of man are greater than the ratio of the urban population would indicate, for the city is not only in ever larger degrees the dwelling-place and workshop of modern man, but it is the initiating and controlling center of economic, political, and cultural life that has drawn the most remote parts of the world into its orbit and woven diverse areas, peoples, and activities into a cosmos”. (Wirth 1938: 2)

In this book we have tried to consider whether Wirth’s ideas are still valid today. We have tried to find out if — when transformed — his ideas could be useful to analyze modern urban areas. The papers presented here touch different aspects of city life, but what they have in common is their fundamental source of inspiration which is Louis Wirth’s “Urbanism as a way of life”. Trying to rediscover was an intellectual challenge for the contributors. Nevertheless, we are deeply aware that our explanations do not exhaust the topic. Maybe (also) because there is no social explanation which could exhaust any social topic at all...

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