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Condemned to green? Accessibility and attractiveness of urban green spaces to people experiencing homelessness

Karolina Koprowska[a,*], Jakub Kronenberg[a], Inga B. Kuźma[b,c], Edyta Łaszkiewicz[a]

[a] University of Lodz, Faculty of Economics and Sociology, Social-Ecological Systems Analysis Lab, P.O.W. 3/5, 90-255 Lodz, Poland
[b] University of Lodz, Faculty of Philosophy and History, Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Lindleya 3/5, 90-131 Lodz, Poland
[c] University of Lodz, Center of Social Innovations, Franciszkańska 1/5, 91-431 Lodz, Poland

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ABSTRACT

The accessibility and attractiveness of urban green spaces (UGS) for individuals experiencing homelessness might be considered an example of the provision of environmental amenities for the most disadvantaged communities in the environmental justice discourse. We studied whether these people feel that they are condemned to spend time within UGS and what their personal narratives and perceptions of UGS were. The analysis was based on the triangulation of methods used in our case study city, Lodz, in Poland. First, we compiled a map of where people who live on the streets were recorded, based on data from the City Office of Lodz. Second, we conducted semi-structured and detailed interviews with streetworkers in order to obtain information regarding the use of public spaces (UGS in particular) by people who are homeless. Finally, we carried out interviews with (homeless) individuals whose activities took place within green surroundings. Our study showed that UGS are important to people experiencing homelessness, not only from the point of view of necessity or a lack of any other choice but – more importantly – from the perspective of individual preference and the fulfilment of personal needs. In this sense, our findings broaden the understanding of the accessibility and attractiveness of UGS to one of the most socio-economically disadvantaged groups.

1. Introduction

Perry, the main character in Terry Gilliam's film "The Fisher King", sought rejuvenation in parks and seemingly treated them as an oasis of calm. Regardless of the risk of being attacked there, Perry stated that "the park belongs to me the same as it belongs to some thugs." The film presented an individual narrative of a homeless person, who values green spaces, based on distinctive, personal and mostly metaphorical reasons. In our article, we attempted to deepen the understanding of what green spaces mean to individuals experiencing homelessness and how they use them. Are green spaces accessible and attractive to them differently than they are to the rest of society?

Visible homelessness in public spaces is often unsettling to the person witnessing it. This negative impression may be triggered by 'aesthetic' preferences (Speer, 2019) or a fear of crime (Sreetheran and van den Bosch, 2014), and it may lead to conflicts between the different users of public spaces, including urban green spaces (UGS). Individuals who live on the streets might be treated like 'pollution' (Bonds and Martin, 2016; Rose, 2017) and pushed to areas hidden from view, which results in increasing control of the urban public space. Indeed, the spatial exclusion and restricted 'right to the city' (Mitchell, 2003) of 'unwelcome' groups have become common trends in many Western cities (Amster, 2003; Bergamaschi et al., 2014; Doherty et al., 2008; Evangelista, 2019). Additionally, many cities and their UGS are also subject to the processes of urban renewal and – consequently – gentrification (Bergamaschi et al., 2014; Checker, 2011; Wasserman and Clair, 2011). In this situation, homeless individuals are treated even more like an unwanted 'element' of the urban landscape, which also affects their opportunities to enjoy UGS. Furthermore, these people are sometimes moved out of UGS as part of good faith dealings (Fehér and Balogi, 2013; Evangelista, 2019). Based on this and other reasons related to the hardships of living on the street, people who experience homelessness are one of the most politically and economically vulnerable groups using UGS. Paradoxically, they often suffer because of the improvements to these places (Dooling, 2012). Therefore, ensuring the accessibility and attractiveness of UGS in the case of homelessness might be considered an example of the provision of environmental amenities for the most disadvantaged communities in the environmental justice discourse (Mitchell, 2003).

Although issues related to environmental (in)justice have already

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: karolina.koprowska@uni.lodz.pl (K. Koprowska).

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been widely discussed in terms of race and ethnic background, or the low income of urban communities (Bowen, 2002; Rigolon, 2016; Sister et al., 2010), not much attention has been given to the extreme example of people who are homeless (Bonds and Martin, 2016; Dooling, 2014; Klein and Riemer, 2011). This might be partially explained by the fact that environmental justice is not the most pressing issue in the case of homelessness. However, the 'environment', as seen through the lens of environmental justice, constitutes an important aspect of the functioning of homeless people within public spaces, including UGS. From an environmental justice perspective, everybody should have equal access to a healthy, nurturing environment, which fulfils his or her needs and supports well-being (Barnett, 2001; Boone et al., 2009; Tarrant and Cordell, 1999). Based on arguments raised by various authors (Harvey, 1996; Rose, 2013; Swyngedouw and Heynen, 2003), Rose (2014) elaborated even further on the concept of socio-environmental justice, specifically applied in the case of homelessness. He underlined that social justice and environmental justice are intertwined and should not be discussed separately.

An environmentally just community might be defined as one where "the most vulnerable in society, in particular, the poorest, should not suffer the disproportionate, negative effects of environmental omissions, actions, policy, or law" (Johnson, 2008, p.4). In such a sense, environmental justice can be understood as the possibility to access UGS, but also to be included in the planning processes of urban (green) environments by all potential users, including those who are living on the street. Meanwhile, the way in which UGS are used and the attitudes towards them may differ between homeless people and the rest of society. For people who live on the street, being in a UGS might be a necessity (in order to find shelter or resources that support their existence, etc.); however, they might be unwanted or even unsettling for other people. Thus, spending time in UGS could be a negative experience for all concerned. Is it possible, then, that the experience of homelessness pushes these people to the (green) environment, which is unwanted in their case, and makes them feel that they are condemned to spend time within UGS? Or is it also a matter of personal choice, related to the distinct meanings that UGS hold for these people?

It is also important to note that while the community of people experiencing homelessness is seen by the general public in a certain light, and often demonised, in reality, it is far from homogenous in terms of behaviour and 'lifestyle' (Hagen, 1987). A common public narrative also describes homelessness as a 'choice' (Hodgetts and Stolte, 2016), overlooking other personal and structural barriers that lead to homelessness and that make it difficult to overcome (Neild and Rose, 2018). Homelessness should not be the defining factor that describes the people experiencing it. As there are many factors causing homelessness, there are no simple, zero-one explanations of it, ways of experiencing it, or solutions to it. Such an approach originates from the fields of human geography, political ecology and sociology (DeVerteuil, 2004; Neale, 1997). People who are homeless should have the right to define their own notion of 'home' (May, 2000) and be able to fulfil their diverse needs, which again varies between individuals (Neale, 1997). There are different mobility and survival strategies, showing how homeless people interact with the space (Cloke et al., 2003; DeVerteuil, 2003; Snow and Mulcahy, 2001). Although there might be general similarities or patterns in the ways people who experience homelessness use UGS, the reasons behind them might not always be as simple as "they live there because they do not have another place to stay (home)." Such a statement could be just another sign of simplifying the situation and discriminating against individuals who experience homelessness. Therefore, in this article, we examined what UGS mean, how they are experienced and used by individuals who experience homelessness and, consequently, which of their needs are being (or could be) met in these spaces.

The need to acknowledge the diverse needs of disadvantaged groups in planning public green spaces has been widely recognised (Abercrombie et al., 2008; Byrne et al., 2009; Gobster, 2002; Henderson and Fry, 2011) as part of the environmental justice discourse. In order to successfully identify these diverse needs (including the needs of people experiencing homelessness), a comprehensive approach should be applied. Considering aspects of distributive, procedural and interactional justice might be more insightful when describing whether and to what extent an (in)justice occurred (in terms of access to public space, e.g. UGS) (Low, 2013). The just or equitable planning of UGS should recognise the possible conflicts and trade-offs between the different users and propose practical solutions which should build upon, or maybe even challenge, existing theories (Campbell, 1996; Hartmann and Jehling, 2019).

In this article, we study the perception and use of UGS by people who are homeless in relation to the accessibility and attractiveness of these spaces (Biernacka and Kronenberg, 2018). Accessibility might be considered from the point of view of potential barriers, both physical and psychological, experienced by these people in using UGS, and could include whether they *can* freely enter and use UGS. Attractiveness refers to whether people *want* to use UGS, and whether those UGS meet their needs.

In order to capture the whole picture of this complex situation, the analysis was based on the triangulation of methods used in our case study city of Lodz in Poland. First, to analyse how frequently people living rough occur within UGS compared to other locations, we used the register of interventions related to homelessness, obtained from the civil services, and the results of a biennial homelessness survey, obtained from the Municipal Social Welfare Centre in Lodz. Secondly, we conducted semi-structured and detailed interviews with streetworkers employed by the Municipal Social Welfare Centre in Lodz, in order to obtain information regarding the use of public spaces (UGS in particular) by homeless people. That allowed us to gain an insight into the living patterns of these people based on comprehensive descriptions of particular examples. Lastly, to complement the picture, we carried out interviews with people experiencing homelessness whose activities took place within green spaces. We wanted to hear the unheard opinions of a group which is strongly underrepresented in the environmental justice discussion, especially concerning access to environmental amenities, such as UGS.

The article is structured as follows: Section 2 provides a description of our case study city, including background information related to homelessness in Lodz and a description of the methods used. A map was created of locations where people facing homeless were noticed, and interviews were conducted with streetworkers and people experiencing homelessness. The results summarise the outcomes of the three methods used in the study, with subsections about the interviews subdivided into thematic blocks developed in the interview guide (Section 3). Section 4 discusses the results of how UGS are used by the participants of our study through the lens of environmental justice, focusing on the accessibility and attractiveness of UGS from their perspective. Finally, Section 5 includes closing remarks.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Case study city

Our study was conducted in Lodz (Łódź), which is the third biggest city in Poland, with 693,800 residents (Central Statistical Office, 2017). The city covers 293 km^2, of which 72.1% are green spaces (according to the Database of Topographic Objects for Poland and the European Settlement Map). Most of the officially recognised UGS – large parks and forests – are located outside of the central area of the city (Fig. 1). The number and size of UGS in Lodz increase the further from the city centre they are, and they include former agricultural lands, brownfields, neglected post-industrial areas covered in greenery, and neglected or abandoned gardens and orchards, among others. These areas may serve as a shelter or living space for those who do not want to be seen by others, although it is important to note that dark, neglected

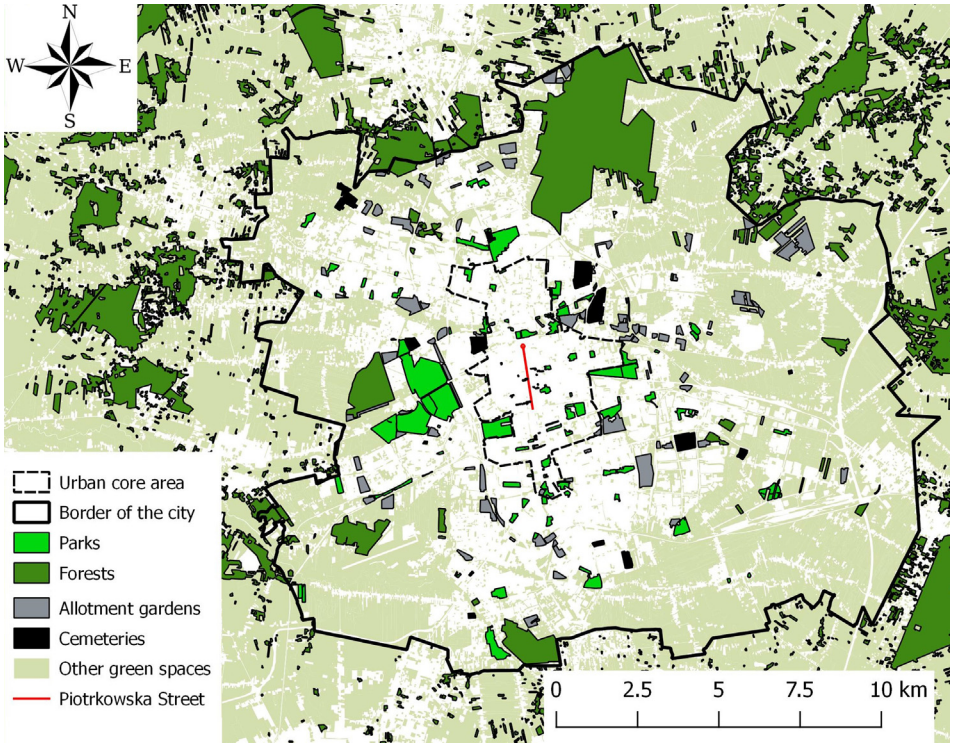

Fig. 1. Distribution of urban green spaces in Lodz and the location of the main boulevard (Piotrkowska Street).

parts of parks may serve the same purpose. The distribution of UGS in Lodz is shown in Fig. 1.

The lowest average monthly temperature is recorded in January (−2°C, average 2015–2017) and the highest in August – 19.8 °C (average 2015–2017) (Dąbrowska et al., 2018). The highest monthly precipitation occurs in July – 83.3 mm, and the lowest in January – 26 mm (average 2015–2017).

The Municipal Social Welfare Centre in Lodz estimates the number of people who are homeless to be around 1,000 people (Kuźma and Lange, 2016). This includes people living in shelters, those who have been arrested or are in jail, residents of health care facilities and – finally – those living on the street (or other open spaces). The results of the most recent survey, from 2017, yielded 1020 individuals. In comparison, in 2013, there were 1196 homeless people, of whom 317 (27%) lived outside of shelter facilities. In that survey, 70% were men. Over a quarter of the surveyed individuals declared that they made a living by collecting and selling scrap materials and from seasonal jobs. By 2015, as many as 40% of the homeless lived on the street (Kuźma and Lange, 2016).

There are few facilities in Lodz that deal with the problem of homelessness. The Municipal Social Welfare Centre in Lodz is the body responsible, governing and organising most of the services and facilities designed to help people experiencing homelessness. There are five municipal shelter facilities (three for men – with places for approximately 300 people, and two for women – with a maximum capacity of approximately 130 people). There are also other support services: two dayrooms, a warming room, plus an emergency bus. There are also violence prevention centres and a centre/shelter designed to support single mothers and their children who do not have a place to live or stay. Finally, another form of dealing with homelessness is streetworking, also handled by the Municipal Social Welfare Centre in Lodz (http://www.projekt.mops.lodz.pl/streetworking.html). The role of streetworkers is unique. Although they formally work within the municipal organisational structures, they are quite independent in how they do it. Their main objective is to develop a relationship with their 'clients' (as they call the people with whom they work – to underline their personal sovereignty) in order to support and facilitate the well-being of people living on the streets. The streetworkers have their own 'office', located in an area which is easily accessible and not discouraging to visit; this enables better contact with their clients. However, the streetworkers spend most of their work time outside, looking for and visiting people in need in the places where they stay. The streetworkers have resocialising and therapy backgrounds, and many of their methods were developed based on a bottom-up approach and not regulatory requirements.

The streetworkers are trying to build a bridge between people who are homeless and the rest of society. Their job follows a practical approach to resolving issues of exclusion (Białożyt, 2017; Dębska-Cenian and Olech, 2008; Fontaine et al., 2008). The streetworkers do that through their everyday work in the field, first by finding their 'clients' by observation, visits and simply being around. Later on, when a relationship between the streetworker and the client has been established, it is possible to work on multiple issues related to living on the street. The streetworkers motivate their clients in order to support them exiting homelessness. They provide different forms of support: practical (supply of clothes, toiletries etc.), institutional (help with dealing with formalities, application for documents etc.) and therapeutic (support groups, an individual approach – as some of them are trained in addiction therapy, for example). The streetworkers cooperate with other municipal services, the police and health centres. The unit employs only six people, who are responsible for the help of this type across the whole city. However, new positions are planned within the ongoing process of urban revival.

2.2. Triangulation of methods

In order to comprehensively describe the complex situation regarding the use of UGS by people living on the street, we followed a mixed-method approach that comprised:

- creating a map of the locations of homeless people based on data obtained from the Municipal Social Welfare Centre in Lodz and

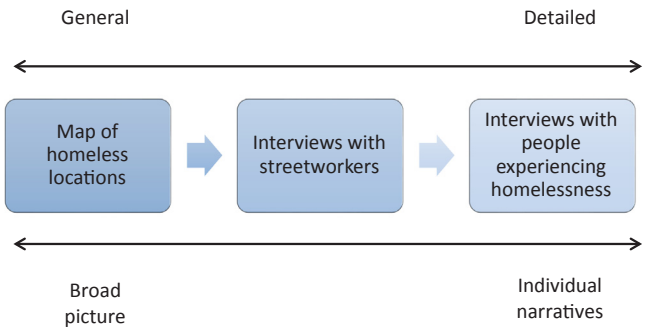

Fig. 2. Structure of the analysis.

other civil services (police, municipal city police) featuring registered locations of homeless people;
- interviews with streetworkers involved in helping individuals get out of homelessness – therefore, they are the closest to these people; and
- interviews with people experiencing homelessness, who (preferably) have experience of living in UGS.

Fig. 2 presents the structure of the analysis.

The map of homeless locations provides a clear overview of where these individuals have been reported. After analysing the locations, we aimed to obtain insights from the streetworkers on the use of UGS by their clients. They are closest to the people who live on the streets, and their input might not only explain the previously observed spatial patterns but also extend knowledge about the preferences of people who are homeless in a more comprehensive way. Finally, we also interviewed these people themselves, asking for their own narratives, based on individual experiences. In such a way, our analysis could answer our research question on the preferences and use of UGS by homeless people, starting from the most generalised and objective step and then deepening our understanding of the phenomenon with the next two steps.

The same set of topics related to the use of UGS was prepared for the semi-structured and open-ended interviews with streetworkers and people experiencing homelessness. The streetworkers provided comprehensive opinions on UGS use by their clients, supplemented with specific examples, while the participants of our study who live on the street were asked to provide their specific perspective. From the point of view of research related to environmental justice, it was essential to uncover the reasons behind the choices of particular locations and learn about the motives of the homeless people themselves. We found it necessary to extend the general description that originated from the map and that was provided by the streetworkers by including the opinions of people who live on the street.

2.3. Map of homeless locations

The map of the recorded locations of homeless people was created using geolocalised data provided by the Municipal Social Welfare Centre in Lodz. The data included the locations of places where streetworkers and volunteers had found homeless people during a biennial national survey. These locations were supplemented with data from the municipal police register of interventions, where police and other civil services had been called to intervene and, usually, displace homeless people. It is possible that some of the interventions were also aimed at helping people in crisis in emergency situations, at least in situations perceived as such by those who reported them. Both lists (from the homelessness survey and the list of interventions) were combined and included locations registered in 2013, 2015 and 2017. All of the locations were geo-coded and finally visualised on a map of Lodz. Four officially recognised categories of UGS were used: parks, forests, allotment gardens and cemeteries. Additionally, informal UGS were also included on the map, comprising, in the first case, all remaining UGS included in the Database of Topographic Objects for Poland (without the previously indicated formal UGS) and, in the second scenario, additional informal UGS identified in the European Settlement Map. The first case, based on the Database of Topographic Objects for Poland, includes large and medium-sized informal green spaces; the second case, based on the European Settlement Map, includes small pieces of informal green spaces. Large and medium-sized informal green spaces have a median size of 4706.9 m^2, while small pieces have a median size of 12.5 m^2.

The data were collected during the biennial survey, which is usually conducted in the winter months (January/February – which might be related to the need to provide emergency interventions), which means that homeless people were more likely to occupy covered locations than open spaces. Therefore, the number of people registered in green spaces may be underestimated. Locations where homeless people stay are constantly changing because of their 'nomadic' lifestyle. However, the locations of unsheltered homeless people, who take care not to be detected, could be underestimated in these registers. Therefore, the map mostly provides information about trouble-making cases, while the lives of individuals who do not disturb anybody are likely to be less evident and require other research methods.

2.4. Interviews with streetworkers

The interview guide was developed by an interdisciplinary team of researchers that consisted of a specialist with a background in the topic of homelessness, and specialists in UGS governance with a particular interest in environmental justice. The initial draft of the interview guide was discussed and reviewed several times, in order to achieve clearly formulated, objective-oriented questions as hints for the semi-structured interviews. The topics included:

- what UGS mean to people experiencing homelessness;
- how UGS are used by these people and what experiences are related to this use;
- temporal/seasonal variability in using UGS by people who are homeless;
- their different approaches to UGS;
- the description of a 'dream' green space which would meet their needs; and
- potential barriers experienced by these people in using UGS.

The interview guide was tested during a preliminary interview with a former streetworker who had worked with homeless people in Lodz for several years and who was able to provide an overview of the activities that homeless people perform in UGS. Additionally, the former streetworker reflected on the interview guide and gave suggestions for the forthcoming analysis.

Interviews were conducted with six streetworkers working in the Municipal Social Welfare Centre in Lodz at their office. The interviews lasted from approximately 30 min up to an hour. All interviews were recorded and then transcribed. The questions asked included the topics listed above, which allowed us to interpret and structure the responses in a similar way (as reflected in the structure of the forthcoming Results section). Most of the information from the streetworkers overlapped, forming a consistent narrative, and was supported by particular or extreme examples from the lives of their clients. As each streetworker is assigned to a different area in the city, they provided information regarding the use of UGS by homeless people in particular parts of the city. During the interviews, the streetworkers also said that they would help us to establish contact with some of their clients who had experience of living within green spaces.

Following our interview guide, we structured the results obtained during the interviews with the streetworkers into four thematic blocks:

- the types of UGS used by people experiencing homelessness;
- how these green spaces are used by these people and what experiences are related to this use;
- the description of a 'dream' green space, which would meet the needs of a homeless person and how it should be designed; and
- the potential barriers experienced by people who are homeless in using green spaces.

The final step of our work with the streetworkers involved a wrap-up meeting, during which we presented and discussed the preliminary results. The purpose of this discussion was to refine the results and correct potential omissions or inconsistencies.

2.5. Interviews with people experiencing homelessness

The streetworkers facilitated contact with the preselected prospective participants of the study. This approach offered a greater possibility to establish contact with and meet suitable participants (who have experience of living/functioning in UGS on a permanent basis), and they were more willing to provide information. However, this did not necessarily prove to be the case due to the unpredictable nature of these people's lifestyles.

The potential respondents were selected based on the criteria of using UGS. The initial requirement that the prospective interviewees live/sleep within UGS was relaxed (after interviewing the streetworkers) into the broader use of UGS, as the kinds of use and the relevance of UGS in the case of homelessness may be diverse. We also considered options such as collecting resources, spending time or resting within UGS. The homeless people might have had relevant experiences at different points of their lives or even through contacts and stories they heard from others. Thus, we wanted to hear opinions from people who felt that they could relate to the topic of our study.

Some prospective respondents proved to be difficult to reach or changed their mind regarding taking part in the conversation. Therefore, a few interviews took place at the streetworkers' office with people who visited the office and agreed to participate in the research. Other interviews were conducted during a visit to a shelter facility which is located on the border of a park. Several interviews took place 'on the spot' in a shelter or other place of living. We interviewed twelve people who had different experiences and attitudes towards UGS. The interviews lasted from approximately 15 min to almost an hour, although most of them were rather short, and they were recorded and transcribed. These sources of data were the most fragmented, sometimes circumstantial and most difficult to use. They supplemented the previously gathered information but still added a new, personal perspective. The questions were aimed at topics from our interview guide, although many of them remained unanswered or the answers were more indirect, sometimes based on memories or some loose associations. The researchers tried to extract meaning and/or quotes most related to the topic of the study from the gathered material.

Following our interview guide, we structured the results obtained during these interviews into the four thematic blocks we had used in the case of the interviews with the streetworkers.

3. Results

3.1. Map of homeless locations

The information gathered during the preliminary development phase of the study indicated that homeless people mostly occupy locations in the central area of the city, with the most common location being Piotrkowska Street – the most walkable, tourist-oriented street, with lots of shops, restaurants and bars (Fig. 1).

Indeed, the locations of people registered as homeless which were recorded in 2013, 2015, 2017 (all pictured in one map – Fig. 3) are clustered within the central area of the city. The central part of Lodz is somewhat dilapidated, although it also contains the most representative and 'liveable' street – Piotrkowska, and two large shopping malls, as well as newly emerging office centres. Piotrkowska Street serves as a 'hub' for city life in Lodz, it is one of the landmarks of Lodz and it is almost always plenty of people. This makes the area attractive also for those experiencing homelessness. The concentration of recorded locations is visible along the main street, which might indicate that it is the main area of the homeless individuals' activities, such as begging or socialising (although the street is considered 'representative' for the city, homeless individuals are not a rare picture there). Meanwhile, other streets in the city centre offer many abandoned buildings with relatively easy – if not illegal – access; hence they seem to provide a perfect environment for people without a home in terms of somewhere more 'permanent' to stay and sleep. In general, the concentration of recorded locations is shaped in a stellate manner, spreading towards more peripheral areas of the city. This follows the distribution of residential areas dominated by large multi-storey blocks of flats, which might serve as a shelter overnight on the top, uninhabited floors, where for example, the entrance to the lift shaft can be found. If the 'unwanted inhabitants' are detected and reported, it might result in police interventions.

There are cases where the presence of homeless people was registered in proximity to urban forests and parks, or even within these areas. Thus it is possible that there were interventions caused by the 'casual' use of UGS, as well as by these places being used as sleeping/living locations. We considered a 5 m buffer zone around each location (for formal UGS). Of all the recorded points 36%, were recorded within UGS, including the 5 m buffer zone. Of the formal green spaces, the biggest number of registered locations falls within parks (slightly more than 2%). After excluding four formal categories of UGS (parks, forests, allotment gardens and cemeteries), it appeared that, based on the Database of Topographic Objects, 6.8% of recorded points were located within large and medium-sized informal UGS. The biggest share of registered locations – 25.5% – was in small pieces of informal UGS, which were identified based on the European Settlement Map (Table 1).

3.2. Streetworkers' view on the use of urban green spaces by people experiencing homelessness

3.2.1. Types of urban green spaces used

The ongoing urban renewal of the central districts causes the displacement of people experiencing homelessness towards more peripheral areas of Lodz. In most cases, these individuals tend to be 'invisible' (especially during night-time). They occupy spots which are not attractive or easily accessible, and therefore not often visited by non-homeless people. Moreover, they avoid contact with others for safety reasons, especially when it comes to finding a place to sleep. However, during the day, more 'casual' use of UGS is more common.

In general, people who live a formally 'unsheltered' life in Lodz seek shelter in abandoned and neglected buildings; however, there is a seasonal tendency towards more extensive use of UGS during spring, summer and early autumn, depending on the weather. Both formal UGS, such as parks and forests, and informal ones, such as the greenery surrounding buildings (e.g. backyard greens and brownfields), are used. Some of the people living rough indeed use parks as sleeping spots, if they are carefully hidden, while others build their shelters in more secluded areas, such as neglected brownfields or grasslands within the city. The forests were described by the streetworkers as the most isolated types of UGS (mainly because of the location of the biggest forest in the north of the city), chosen for that reason by a specific group of people. These individuals were often loners or 'survival enthusiasts', who did not have such a strong interest in using the resources provided by the city centre.

Generally speaking, living outside was not recognised as a very common pattern of behaviour among the people with whom they work, mostly because of the climate and weather conditions in Poland (only

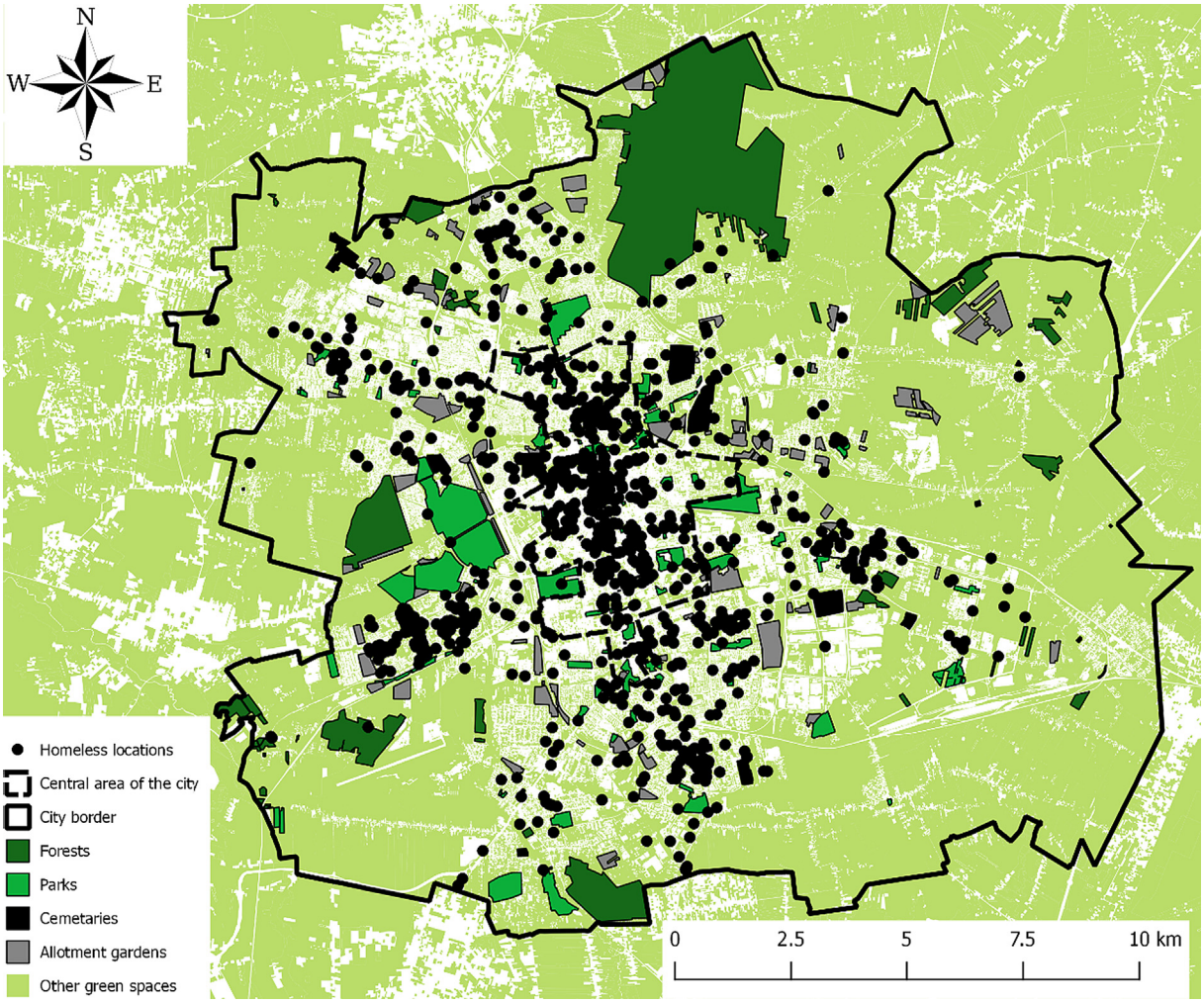

Fig. 3. Homeless locations in relation to the distribution of UGS in Lodz.

Table 1
Share of recorded homeless locations found within the different categories of UGS.

UGS category	With 5 m buffer	No buffer
Parks	2.3%	2.1%
Forests	0.3%	0.3%
Allotment gardens	0.9%	0.9%
Cemeteries	0.2%	0.1%
Large and medium-sized informal UGS (according to the Database of Topographic Objects)	6.8%	–
Small pieces of informal UGS (according to the European Settlement Map)	25.5%	–

extreme exceptions choose to stay outside in winter). The concentration of homeless individuals in the city centre (even despite the displacement measures) has a simple explanation – the main street, along with the shopping malls, provides opportunities for survival, whether it is begging (for money or food) or collecting resources. The city centre is also surrounded by easily accessible parks. The forest areas are located on the outskirts of the city, which makes them far less accessible and attractive (with fewer opportunities to make a living).

3.2.2. The use of urban green spaces by people experiencing homelessness

Green spaces are used for a variety of reasons, and they are most often used during the daytime while nights are spent in covered locations. There is also an important distinction between more 'permanent' uses, such as finding shelter, or living and sleeping there, and temporary, more 'casual' uses, such as passing by or visiting UGS to rest, socialise or collect resources.

Apart from just passing by on their way to somewhere else, some people who are homeless collect materials to recycle there, such as aluminium cans (which can then be sold). This is an alternative to begging or stealing and takes effort and time every day, which makes it possible to call this activity 'work'.

Streetworker C: *So yes, let's be honest – they are hardworking, begging or collecting material, that's all hard work.*

Interestingly, there have been cases where homeless people were picking berries and rosehip within UGS, also to sell rather than to use on their own. However, these people also need to rest after their 'work', and they often do so in UGS.

Streetworker A*: You have to understand – these guys, in fact, work hard. Either collecting scrap metal or other materials… they are constantly in motion, they walk many kilometres each day… and then, for example, they want to take a break, and they say to each other: "Let's go to the park, let's get some breakfast there and spend a nice time!"*

As previously mentioned, apart from 'work', another activity performed by people experiencing homelessness in UGS is simply "spending time, like anyone else", which means resting, meeting others (to share food, take a break from 'work' or drink alcohol) or enjoying nature. This was captured by the following comment.

Streetworker A: *They spend time there because it's nice. It's nice to sit outside on the grass… exactly the same as for anybody else in society. It's nice to drink some alcohol in the company of others, in nice surroundings. I*

think that, in a way, it's their way of escaping from the harsh reality and is a form of spending free time.

Spending time in parks also has another meaning to people who live on the street, giving them a sense of 'normality' and a form of socialisation.

Streetworker D: *It's more than just a choice – it's a necessity, not to go crazy. It's one of the very few things that connect them (homeless people) with the rest of the society: "I use the park like anyone else, I have the right to do so like everybody."*

The streetworkers have a great deal of respect for their clients, treating them in a humanistic way. The streetworkers underlined many times that their clients should be treated with respect, equally, like anybody else. It also seemed to be a method the streetworkers use to empower their clients, to give them the sense that they can get back into society, and that they are not 'condemned'.

The individuals who use UGS exclusively as a sleeping spot, where they organise for themselves temporary shacks, seem to be the most desperate, but also the biggest 'enthusiasts' of nature, according to the streetworkers. They are 'desperate' in terms of conditions they choose to live in, but at the same time – indeed it is their choice, which they make due to their own preferences and need to live on their own terms. Usually, they even state this directly as a preference towards being in nature. Contrary to common opinion, people living outside ('on the street' and beyond, within UGS) are in the minority among this group; they are extreme examples. However, there is a clear division between those who are 'sober' and those who are addicts. The streetworkers make that point that people who are not heavily addicted to alcohol and yet who choose to live in UGS, in general, deal better with the challenges in their lives. The 'sober' ones were described as better organised, more careful and able to function without attracting unnecessary attention or aggression. Sometimes their location could remain unnoticed for long periods, hidden in dense shrubbery. Also, staying away from officially run shelter facilities could sometimes be a deliberate choice. Aspects of poor hygiene, and the presence of lice and shield bugs, as well as a high rate of crime or violence, discouraged them from staying in these places. Therefore, sleeping outdoors, within UGS, was an 'upgrade' of conditions for these people (weather permitting).

The streetworkers estimate that approximately 80–90% of their clients who live on the street are heavily addicted to alcohol and other substances. This was a sad indictment, which was also supported by the therapy background of the streetworkers (one of their aims is to reduce the alcohol consumption of their clients whenever and however possible). The use of alcohol and other substances is the number one reason why these people are excluded from access to support and shelter facilities; therefore, many people who live outside are defined by this factor. This predetermines the need to find shelter somewhere else, outside, and to potentially also use UGS as a living/sleeping place. In such cases, it might be regarded as a necessity, not a choice. The streetworkers are often the last hope or support element for their clients, as they work with the most disadvantaged in society.

Other reasons to live within UGS that the streetworkers mentioned include mental conditions that force people to seek solitude (which includes staying away from other homeless people). One example that the streetworkers gave was a female who lived alone in an abandoned railway station building somewhere in the woods. She ran away from home because she was being abused there. Therefore, living in nature, surrounded by greenery, was, in a way, a safe spot, a shelter.

However, the streetworkers concluded that, in general, their clients' surroundings are a means to achieve their main goal – to survive and fulfil their basic needs – and using UGS (in different ways) is secondary, in that sense. The streetworkers also stressed that the use of UGS depends on the individual and his/her particular needs and strategies to meet them. Therefore, ending up in a UGS is, in many cases, a matter of coincidence – people experiencing homelessness live where they can find appropriate resources.

3.2.3. The description of a 'dream' green space

While living within a UGS is often circumstantial, it is hard to describe it as a 'dream' scenario. However, an idealistic description could be applied to the 'casual', more recreational use of UGS. According to the streetworkers, the 'dream' green space needs to be accessible and attractive to all groups of users, including the most disadvantaged ones, i.e. people who are homeless. There should be space for everybody, including mothers with young children, adolescents and the elderly. Thus, formal UGS – namely parks – are considered, taking into account how they should be designed and equipped to meet the needs and expectations of visitors. Such spaces should include playgrounds, cycling paths, fountains and – most importantly – sanitation units and toilet facilities. From the point of view of homeless people using these places, it would be especially beneficial to install showers so that they could have access to clean water and wash themselves, instead of 'bathing' in fountains. This could solve the problem of them smelling badly and stop these individuals from using ponds and fountains in parks for sanitary purposes. These are two of the reasons for potential conflict, or rather, sources of prejudice from other members of society.

3.2.4. Barriers experienced by homeless people in using green spaces

It was mentioned during the interviews that the homeless people who live surrounded by greenery are sometimes kind of 'survival' enthusiasts, well-organised or trained in this type of lifestyle (such as a former military officer who built his own shelter in a secluded area). Indeed, the hardships of such a lifestyle are a barrier in this specific use of UGS by people experiencing homelessness – not everybody is capable of living in such conditions. The streetworkers were often impressed by what they discovered, in particular, the quality and level of organisation of the temporary homes their clients built. Living or sleeping within UGS is seen as the most extreme example, experienced by a very small fraction of people who are homeless. The majority of the homeless community experience barriers related to more 'casual' uses of UGS. Situations related to alcohol abuse were named as the most prominent barriers to homeless people using UGS. However, indirect psychological barriers are also experienced, when these people are unwelcome and demonised just by the fact they are homeless and, in such a way, rejected by the rest of society and denied access to UGS.

There are some major differences between the use of public UGS by people who are homeless and other visitors. In the case of using UGS as a place for socialisation and spending time, the streetworkers indicated alcohol abuse as the most prominent barrier (alcohol consumption in public spaces in Poland is illegal). Because of that, the presence of homeless people within public spaces may not be socially acceptable or welcome.

Furthermore, those who are characterised by substance abuse do not care about their locations or their safety, often falling asleep accidentally, e.g. on a bench in a park. This may put them in danger, as cases of severe violence (while they are asleep or unconscious in public spaces) were repeatedly reported by the streetworkers. Homeless people are an easy target in such cases, also because there is a low risk that the assault will be detected or that the perpetrator will be punished for it. This leads to a paradox, where the victims are considered a dangerous source of trouble. Therefore, people experiencing homelessness are, in fact, victimised twice: first, directly, in a physical sense, and then metaphorically – in the form of unfair demonisation.

Streetworker A: *People are afraid of homeless people – that because of the influence of alcohol, they might be dangerous; at least that's what society thinks about them. However, I have never experienced or witnessed anything like that (in terms of aggressive or violent behaviour).*

Therefore, safety and the feeling of being unwelcome are other barriers for homeless people using UGS. Officially reported conflicts between homeless people and other users of UGS were mostly generated by substance abuse-driven behaviours, not the fact they were homeless. However, the streetworkers recognise that sometimes homelessness could be a problem anyway, as it is part of a broader issue

– the lack of tolerance towards homeless people in general – which can be a barrier to these people using UGS. As a solution, streetworkers see the need to further socialise homeless people, but also the need to raise society's awareness and tolerance of people who are homeless.

The streetworkers jointly highlighted that: *after all, they are the same as any other person; they have as much right to be there as anyone else*. People who experience homelessness are citizens and part of society, whether they are wanted or not, but rejection and denying their presence or needs will not make the problem (or people) disappear.

Streetworker A.: *Looking at it from a philosophical point of view: they can do whatever they want, whatever they feel like doing. We do not have the right – no one has the right – when they are not consuming alcohol (and because of it causing problems) to remove them from these spaces. They have the same right to use green spaces as any other citizen.*

3.3. Narratives of green among people experiencing homelessness

The subsections below present synthesised answers to our research questions. Additional information on what each of our respondents said about their use of UGS can be found in the Electronic Supplementary Material.

3.3.1. The perception of urban green spaces by people experiencing homelessness

Most of the people interviewed associate UGS with the formal spaces – the most common answer which came to their mind was parks. The interviewees also mentioned forests (as one of the best places to visit), but also – although rarely – informal UGS, the greenery surrounding their place where they are staying temporarily, non-maintained shrubs or brownfields. For some of the participants of our study, UGS hold a distinct meaning, often quite idealistic; however, in general, they are associated with positive aspects of their lives.

Ryszard (staying at the shelter facility, located in the middle of a municipal park): *It's so nice here; you can hear it yourself, Miss, when I wake up and I go outside with my coffee, and I can hear the birds singing, I almost forget at that moment that I'm homeless. I'm honest here, God gave us so much, and we can't appreciate that. It's our fault that everything gets destroyed; people destroy everything.*

Anonymous (staying at the shelter facility after a major break down in his life – the tragic death of his pregnant wife): *Do you know that this is the nicest thing that there can be? Being around nature, in the park. I really enjoy walking in the park. For me, it is the best, the most beautiful thing, because I can find peace here and I am happy that I can live this way*.

Roman: *For me, it (greenery) is everything. Simply, it is our life, and we depend on it. Without it, there would be no life.*

Even though the shelter facility (located within a municipal park) provided very poor conditions for its residents, the surroundings often had a soothing and rejuvenating effect on them. It seemed like the green surroundings fulfil some basic needs, that it is a bridge between 'normality' or their past life and homelessness.

3.3.2. The use of urban green spaces by people experiencing homelessness

One of the main reasons why people who experience homelessness visit UGS is because of the peacefulness. The interviewees go to formal UGS for pleasure, to get some rest or to socialise. Only one person said that he gets food (apples) there, while another one mentioned collecting scrap metal and using the surrounding green space outside as a toilet. For some, living outside is the only option, as they are not allowed to stay at the shelter due to their alcohol abuse (as indicated earlier, individuals, who are addicted to alcohol are not admitted to those facilities). At the same time, some of them, even though they could go to a shelter, choose to live outside, as they consider such surroundings to be much nicer. Moreover, they appreciate the freedom and the connection with nature that UGS provide.

Maciej: *So, I slept there in the woods, on the grass. It was so nice; the birds were there, flying and singing. I also drank some vodka there. That was nice.*

Table 2
The use of urban green spaces by people experiencing homelessness.

Person/Case	Practical		Metaphorical	
	Positive	*Negative*	*Positive*	*Negative*
Anonymous 1	*2*		*3*	
Anonymous 2	*2*			
Darek	*4*	*5*		
Dariusz and Malgosia	*2*	*1*	*3*	
Grzegorz	*1, 2*	*5*		
Jacek	*1, 2, 5*		*3*	
Maciej	*1, 2*		*3*	
Radoslaw	*2, 4*		*3*	
Roman	*2*			
Ryszard	*2*		*3*	
Stas	*2*		*3*	
Zenek	*2*		*3*	

1 – Place to sleep.
2 – Leisure, meeting others.
3 – Silence, place to rest, enjoy nature.
4 – Collecting resources (food, materials for recycling).
5 – Choice or necessity not to live in a shelter.
Note that the same uses may be perceived as positive or negative by different people.

It is apparent that UGS serve multiple purposes, the majority of which have a positive context. A comparison of the different meanings that UGS have to the people we interviewed can be found in Table 2. During the interviews, it became apparent that there is a distinction between the practical use of UGS (such as using it as a place to sleep, as a necessity or a choice not to stay in a shelter, to socialise and find resources) and a more metaphorical use (such as finding silence, a place to rest and enjoy nature).

3.3.3. Description of a 'dream' green space

People experiencing homelessness, in general, find the UGS to be pleasant and useful, therefore sometimes they do not find a reason to change anything there: *it is good as it is there, you need nothing more*, as Radoslaw said. However, some recognise that UGS should be multifunctional, in the sense that they should include playgrounds for children, fountains, but also toilets and showers.

Radoslaw: *The park should be for children, not for cyclists, not for drunks like myself. It should all be for children. And they should not be fake (parks should be all-natural, as they used to be in the past). It is stupid that they make it this way now, just to show off* (mentioning the current situation at the dawn of urban renewal, which includes parks).

Maciej: *This should be an open space, peaceful, where you can lie down, and it's safe. There is no risk that someone will beat you up or call the police.*

It should be noted that in their description of a 'dream' UGS, the people we interviewed did not consider it from the point of view of a place to permanently stay. In this context, UGS are used in many ways, similar to those of the rest of society.

From this perspective, it seemed that the people we interviewed treated green spaces in an idealistic manner, as a way to escape their reality. In many cases, the people who are homeless did not see UGS as a condition that defined their life position (of unsheltered homelessness). There were only two cases where the people with whom we talked treated their green surroundings as a 'necessity'.

3.3.4. Barriers to using green spaces experienced by homeless people

Half of the interviewees did not mention any barriers to using UGS. However, the rest focused on reasons of safety, and, in particular, the risk of being attacked by aggressive youngsters. Additionally, these people know that they can always be chased away by the police if someone reports their improper behaviour and asks for an intervention. People who are homeless know that they are unwelcome, accused of the

worst (such as stealing), and are largely rejected by other members of society.

Dariusz and Malgosia (a couple): *People look at us differently when we go through rubbish bins. Yes, we are rubbish to them. And they laugh, it's cruel, it's nasty. We don't steal anything, nothing. I couldn't steal… It's just that we are going through those rubbish bins…*

This couple was living within a courtyard of a building where they used to live before. The courtyard was neglected, with overgrown shrubbery, which served as a place for local addicts and thieves to hide (when escaping from the police). Dariusz and Malgosia were often accused of these activities, only because of where they stay.

3.4. Synthesis of the results

The map of homeless locations showed that individuals who were reported as homeless were mostly noticed within informal UGS. The results obtained from the interviews with the streetworkers, as well as with people experiencing homelessness, indicate that the use of UGS by the latter (both in the case of treating them as a permanent place to stay or sleep and occasional, short-term visits) might be through necessity, but it can also be a 'choice' (May, 2000). Therefore, this is the basic distinction that we made in the use of UGS by people who are homeless. However, this distinction does not categorise the use of UGS; we simply use it to refute commonly expressed prejudices and assumptions about homelessness. Those who are not allowed to use shelter facilities because of alcohol abuse might feel like outcasts and, in that sense, that they are 'condemned' to be there. However, only three out of our twelve interviewees answered in such a negative way (Table 2). Based on the answers we obtained, we decided to use a second level of distinction – whether the use of UGS is related to practical or metaphorical reasons (Fig. 4). Many participants of the study stated that apart from practical purposes, such as sleeping, finding resources or meeting others there, UGS are used and appreciated based on other motives – silence, the opportunity to rest and rejuvenate, or simply to enjoy nature. Eight out of the twelve respondents admitted that UGS hold such distinct and positive meanings for them. We found it useful to associate each of the reported uses of UGS with the positive or negative meanings they have for the respondents, in order to assess what the prevailing connotation is. The results presented in Table 2 show that, in the majority of cases, the use of UGS by homeless people is something that they assess positively.

4. Discussion

Numerous studies have classified people experiencing homelessness based on their patterns of homelessness (Koegel et al., 1986; Kuhn and Culhane, 1998; Sosin et al., 1990; Wasserman and Clair, 2011), gender (Riley et al., 2007) and ethnicity (Baker, 1994; First et al., 1988). Demographic characteristics and issues related to housing, health and/or substance abuse are indeed relevant for the sake of problem identification and providing appropriate social services. However, in our study, we aimed to broaden the research on the quality of life of people who are homeless by understanding their use of UGS. Moreover, the use of UGS (either as a shelter or just a 'recreational' spot) is not a common topic – not in studies focused on homelessness, nor environmental justice, nor access to environmental amenities and their attractiveness.

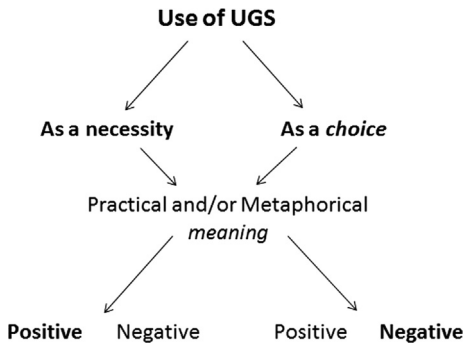

Fig. 4. The use and perception of UGS by people experiencing homelessness in Lodz.

4.1. The use of urban green spaces by people experiencing homelessness in the context of environmental justice

Klein and Riemer (2011) started a discussion about homelessness in the environmental justice discourse. Their study was based on interviews with 12 people who were homeless, and it asked whether access to a clean, healthy and safe environment is something that should be everybody's right. In our article, we also based the analysis on personal narratives, which helped us to understand the experience of people who are homeless in relation to the accessibility and attractiveness of UGS.

Dooling (2014) drew a connection between housing, homelessness and UGS. Her study was also based on the narratives of homeless people experiencing homelessness who articulated their notions of home as a consequence of a decision to live outside. For those individuals, living outside held distinct meanings: autonomy (defined as management of self by self), freedom, a sense of belonging to a community, the recovery of oneself, healing oneself in nature, and dwelling without being bounded by walls (Dooling, 2014). Our study confirmed the relevance of these aspects of UGS to people experiencing homelessness, in the form of metaphorically-oriented types of use. Dooling also underlined the interrelation between social and environmental processes, as well as differences in understanding the notions of 'home' and 'urban green spaces' by individuals who are homeless and policymakers. The author referred to the concept of *ecological gentrification*, which she understood as "the displacement of vulnerable human inhabitants resulting from the implementation of an environmental agenda driven by an environmental ethic" (Dooling, 2014, p. 167), and which she had elaborated on in her previous works (Dooling, 2009, 2012). In such a sense, after the implementation of greening projects, for example, those related to urban renewal, people experiencing homelessness might become the most affected group. These projects might be based on the sterilisation of public (green) spaces and lead to displacement and further demonisation. The intensification of formal actions aimed at sterilising public (including green) spaces (Amster, 2003; Bergamaschi et al., 2014), which is also driven by urban renewal projects (Checker, 2011) is often accompanied by informal movements, such as NIMBYism (not-in-my-backyard), which might be directly aimed at homelessness (Lyon-Callo, 2001; Oakley, 2002). Displacement and anti-homeless policies might also be a result of seemingly innocent beautification projects to increase the aesthetic values of public spaces (Speer, 2019), or redevelopments, which encompass progressive measures, but unfortunately not in the case of social justice and homelessness (Mitchell and Staeheli, 2006). Conversely, there are examples of campaigns preventing even the visibility of homeless people in public spaces, based on harassment and revanchist motivations (Evangelista, 2019; Goldfischer, 2018).

The problem of homelessness and the accessibility and attractiveness of UGS for homeless people might be considered from the environmental justice perspective (where ecological gentrification is part of the broader discourse) (Rose, 2019). Neild and Rose (2018) and Rose (2019) indicated that the presence of people experiencing homelessness, contrary to common opinions, does little to negatively affect the recreational potential and ecological functioning of these spaces. Therefore, implementation of displacement strategies is not only unnecessary, but also represents a hostile, oppressive approach towards dealing with the problem of homelessness in public spaces. Moreover, Rose (2013, 2014) investigated the relationship, which homeless people have with green spaces, where they live, based on the 16-month long

ethnographic field research. He drew a complex picture, explaining that residents of Hillside, the researched study site, developed special ways of interacting with nature, which expands our understanding of how and why these people use this space. Residents described in the study live in between private and public, nature and society, yet – they do not feel homeless. Nature brings a sense of belonging to them. Their story served also as a premise for discussing questions related to nature (both literally and metaphorically) of public spaces, through the lens of political ecology and specifically – (socio)environmental justice.

Still, it is important to note that, with only a few exceptions (Bonds and Martin, 2016; Dooling, 2014; Klein and Riemer, 2011; Rose, 2019), the case of homelessness is a unique and extreme example in the field of environmental justice. As the most disadvantaged and unprivileged group, people experiencing homelessness still use UGS in many ways similar to other people, although they are subject to different kinds of injustice. They are often 'invisible' even in the environmental justice discourse and somehow neglected in this otherwise socially sensitive research field. Obviously, there are exceptions. Harvey (2003, 2013) examined the term 'the right to the city', asking 'whose rights' and 'whose cities' they should be. It is also the question of how access to environmental resources and benefits is distributed between different members of the society, with an emphasis on the most disadvantaged – people experiencing homelessness (Rose, 2019). In the era of capitalism, designing and creating cities which are socially just and 'green enough' (Haase et al., 2017; Wolch et al., 2014) poses a challenge for policymakers but also for urban residents. The case of homelessness in terms of public (green) space should be considered from a broader perspective than overcoming 'punitive' or 'revanchist' measures in the city (DeVerteuil, 2006; DeVerteuil et al., 2009). New poverty management (DeVerteuil, 2003) might benefit from taking into account the perspective of homeless people who function within UGS. Such an approach would help to create a model of common space where different groups of users may coexist.

Almost by definition, cities are places where different people interact with each other in a public space – as Mitchell stated (2003, p.18) "the city is the place where difference lives." Therefore, all city residents should have 'the right to the city', including the opportunity to interact with and within the space on equal terms with all other users of the space. In light of our study, there are different aspects of environmental justice that might be applied in terms of access to UGS, according to Low (2013). From the perspective of distributive justice, people experiencing homelessness in Lodz do not have officially limited access to public parks or forests; they may enter just like anyone else. However, when it comes to procedural justice, i.e. being included in any consultation, planning or policy options regarding the use of UGS, people who live rough are definitely the most excluded; they are invisible users of the space. Implementing beautification or sterilisation measures in public parks would be an example of such an injustice. In terms of interactional justice, people who are homeless do feel discriminated against, whether it is a feeling of being 'unwanted' or even detested by other users of UGS or the (justified) feeling of being unsafe, due to the threat of violence. Nevertheless, as indicated by our study, although they are unwelcome in public (green) spaces, people who experience homelessness are still keen to use UGS.

Socio-environmental justice is an appropriate concept to address the discrimination of people experiencing homelessness in their use of UGS. Socio-environmental justice, however, should be applied more broadly than just the monitoring and reporting of injustice (Rose, 2014). It is a framework that applies a critical and proactive approach to seeking alternatives and finding solutions. Political ecology argues that socio-environmental analysis should be used to achieve a socially just environmental policy, addressing the needs of the most disadvantaged individuals and communities (Forsyth, 2008). In that sense, socio-environmental justice means advocating for the equity, dignity and rights of all members of society. In practice, this can be achieved by applying a deliberative, participatory and relational management approach (Karvonen, 2011). An environmental justice framework (Taylor et al., 2007) calls for collaborative planning between park managers and local communities, including people who are homeless who reside there, and local service providers, in order to meet the needs of all members of the community. Schneider et al. (2019) underlined how listening to personal experiences and stories of people who are homeless can help overcome three levels of oppression: individual, cultural and systemic (Walsh et al., 2016), which promotes social change. Societal and structural barriers preventing the inclusion of people who live on the street in planning and management of UGS should be addressed, and this requires social transformation. In this case, it may include public education, park use policies, advocacy, and collaboration between different stakeholders at different levels (Neild and Rose, 2018). Promoting diversity and the tolerance of the unsheltered residents of UGS can support inclusive and equitable access to these spaces (Kosnoski, 2011).

Although socio-environmental justice underlines the importance of the 'social' aspects in pursuing justice and equity (or rather 'fairness', which seems more relevant in terms of socio-spatial distribution of hazards and amenities), this is actually originally embodied within the meaning of environmental justice, from the start of grassroots movements to the further development of the concept in academia and policy (Reed and George, 2011; Swyngedouw and Heynen, 2003; Walker and Bulkeley, 2006). Therefore, we interpret 'socio-environmental justice' as environmental justice, and we analyse its dimensions on the example of the most socially vulnerable group – people experiencing homelessness. We discuss and link aspects of distributive, procedural and interactional justice with the availability, accessibility and attractiveness of UGS. We focus, in particular, on the accessibility and attractiveness of UGS, which provide additional layers to understanding (in) justice, compared to seeing it as merely the availability of UGS (Biernacka and Kronenberg, 2018; Biernacka, Kronenberg and Łaszkiewicz, 2020). UGS availability can be linked to distributive justice; however, in the case of homelessness in Lodz, we can consider it more in terms of fairness, as in fact it is linked to the geographical distribution of green spaces and the geographical location of places where people who are homeless find most of their resources (Fig. 3). In that sense, there is no apparent distributive injustice. As shown before, however, there are examples that indicate procedural and interactional injustice, which we link to the accessibility and attractiveness of UGS to people who are homeless.

4.2. *The accessibility and attractiveness of urban green spaces for people experiencing homelessness in Lodz*

The only official bans which may apply to homelessness are related to antisocial behaviours, such as littering, using public spaces as toilets or the consumption of alcohol. Those bans apply to everybody, however. More indirect actions may involve, for example, the placement of benches, designed in a way that it is impossible to lay down and sleep on them. In Lodz, these aspects should be kept in mind for the sake of the forthcoming Horticultural Expo which Lodz plans to host in 2024, and which involves a high risk of sanitising UGS. Early signs of urban renewal projects can already be seen around the city, including in UGS. Prospective ideas to upgrade the image of urban parks include the expansive use of lighting, modern illuminations and CCTV monitoring. The intentions behind these are driven by the need to develop or renovate public spaces in a way that looks more 'prestigious'. From the point of view of accessibility, so far, it might mostly be seen through the lens of psychological barriers potentially experienced by people who are homeless (Biernacka and Kronenberg, 2018). Similarly, opposition from local inhabitants eventually resulted in the relocation of one of the shelters – initially located next to a park, in a quiet, residential area, and eventually moved to an industrial area.

The diverse examples of how UGS are used by homeless people paint a picture of a group which is very heterogeneous, despite the

common opinions that are held by the rest of society. As indicated by our study, apart from fulfilling basic needs, such as shelter or finding resources, UGS provide safe spots for leisure, socialising, and rest and rejuvenation, through contact with nature. This preference for using UGS proves the attractiveness of these spaces to people experiencing homelessness. Our findings are similar to those obtained by Speer and Goldfischer (2019), who underlined the personal meaning of urban parks to people who are homeless, despite also facing surveillance, deprivation and violence. The initial distinction we made in our research, based on necessity or 'choice', showed that only a small fraction of the participants of our study experience their life within UGS (either as a place to sleep or to spend time during the day – when they have to leave official shelter facilities, as well as to 'casually' spend time) as enforced and sign of their hardships. Most of them consider their use of UGS in a positive way, especially based on leisure-oriented and metaphorical types of use. However, we underline that the 'choice' that we mean is related to personal sovereignty and preference, not a socially derived stereotype (Hodgetts and Stolte, 2016).

Our initial assumption was that most individuals who live on the streets (surrounded by greenery and using UGS to a certain extent anyway) are forced or 'condemned' to use UGS. Such 'humane gains' drive various relocation initiatives, within which people who are homeless are either forcefully or voluntarily moved out of UGS (Fehér and Balogi, 2013). However, we know from the interviews that in many cases, it is also a deliberate choice. As stated in the interviews, and similar to the findings of Dooling (2014), the homeless people in Lodz appreciate the freedom, the connection with nature and the peacefulness provided by UGS. Nevertheless, considering all the negative aspects, such as weather conditions and safety, we are far from able to recommend that living outside all the time, within UGS or on the streets, is a perfect choice, or that the individuals living there should be left on their own. Rather, we would like to underline that such a decision possibly results from the lack of other viable options. Shelters are often experienced by homeless individuals as spaces of violence, with poor sanitary conditions and enforced discipline, which is not in line with the individuals' needs or sense of sovereignty (Johnsen et al., 2005). Therefore, the choice to live within UGS might be related to their attractiveness, in terms of the positive metaphorical meaning that UGS bring, as well as being an alternative to the negatively associated options provided by institutional services.

Our findings are in line with studies on the perception and meaning of UGS to the general population (Burgess et al., 1988; Grahn and Stigsdotter, 2010; Jim and Chen, 2006). The results we obtained show that, in most of the cases, people experiencing homelessness want to use UGS like anyone else – to enjoy silence and nature, and also because of the possibilities to meet others and socialise there. In that sense, these people do not treat UGS as an ultimate refuge and they do not want to be treated as outcasts. Additionally, leisure activities within UGS may serve as a way of escaping the hardships of homelessness and stigma (Harmon, 2019; Hodgetts and Stolte, 2016), which was also mentioned by the streetworkers who took part in our study. However, it is important to note that, from the perspective of choice and in extreme cases, homeless individuals living in UGS may live in almost complete isolation from modern society. This may result from their pursuit of a simpler life and solitude, like extreme examples of modern hermits (Finkel, 2017). Perhaps this is why they are more frequently recorded in informal rather than formal UGS (Rupprecht and Byrne, 2014).

5. Conclusions

Our research revealed that the attitude represented by Perry in "The Fisher King" is not an idealised picture. Although Perry is a fictional character, he embodies very human need for belonging and bonding with a (green) place, where he finds metaphorical shelter. Similar findings emerge from our study, underlining individual preferences and needs of individuals who spend most of their lives outside.

Our analysis showed not only that people experiencing homelessness are far from a homogenous group, especially considering their perception of UGS, but also that they are not necessarily 'condemned' to UGS. In most cases, UGS have positive associations, holding distinct meanings for their users, specifically from the perspective of metaphorical types of use. From that point of view, UGS are attractive spaces to socialise and rest, where aspects of peacefulness, brought by contact with nature, are highly valued. However, although the accessibility of UGS for people who are homeless is not officially restricted (no more than for the rest of society), they still might experience psychological barriers when using UGS. The environmental injustice they experience is mostly procedural and interactional – they are being excluded from the planning processes, where their voices are unheard and their needs ignored. People living on the streets still use and enjoy UGS, however, and they find their own way to do so. It seems that the more prevalent problem is the interactional injustice, which is sadly part of the experience of homelessness. Feeling unwelcome and discriminated against (or the limited psychological accessibility) calls for new means in socially inclusive measures, both in the case of education (of other members of the society) and planning. Our research helps to raise awareness and the visibility of the issue of homelessness in the field of just urban planning. The findings of the study convey the overlooked perspective and needs of people who often have no chance to be heard. As homeless individuals are members of society, just like anyone else, bringing their arguments to the table supports the socially just, but also practical planning of UGS. However, people experiencing homelessness still need advocacy to facilitate this process. Ignoring the problem of homelessness does not make it disappear.

The relatively little attention paid to homelessness in the environmental justice literature raises another question about why this extremely unprivileged group is also neglected in this sense. Our study provides an additional insight which is relevant not only from the perspective of research related to homelessness in general, but in our understanding – and more importantly – it broadens the scope of environmental justice, including topic of access to environmental amenities for a highly marginalised group of people. Our study showed that UGS are important to people who are homeless, not only from the point of view of necessity or a lack of other choice but, more importantly, from the perspective of individual preferences and the fulfilment of personal needs, which is also related to the metaphorical meaning UGS hold for these people. In this sense, this study broadens the understanding of the accessibility and attractiveness of UGS to one of the most socio-economically disadvantaged groups. Our research shows that the expectations that people who are homeless have towards UGS are not necessarily very different from those of other urban residents. Finally, the voice of the community of people experiencing homelessness should be included in discussions regarding the planning and management of UGS.

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CRediT authorship contribution statement

Karolina Koprowska: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing, Visualization. **Jakub Kronenberg:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing - original draft,

Writing - review & editing, Supervision, Project administration, Funding acquisition. **Inga B. Kuźma:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing - review & editing. **Edyta Łaszkiewicz:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing - review & editing, Visualization, Supervision.

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Appendix A. Supplementary material

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2020.04.017.

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