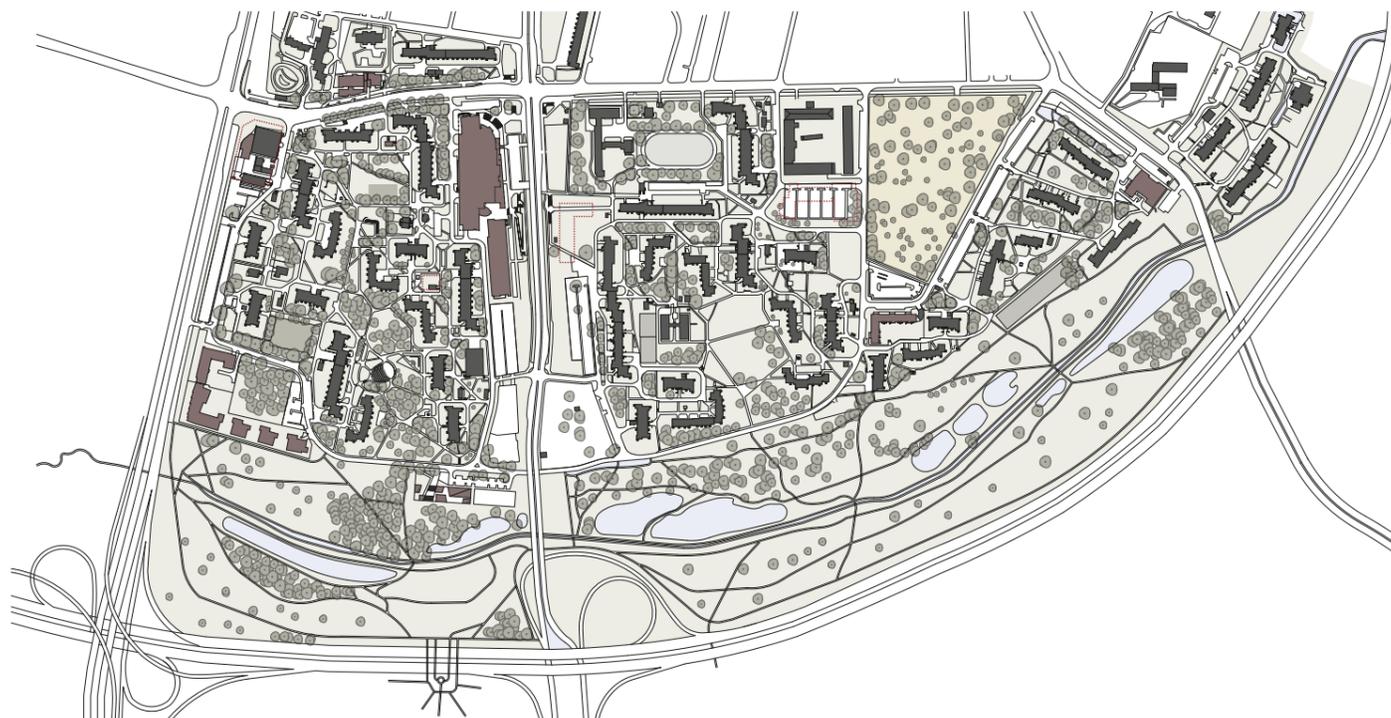


Open space of a post-socialist housing estate as collective luxury

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Research Topic

Vast verdant spaces between blocks of flats were a key design gesture of the Modern housing estate morphology. Originally anticipated to be the core of a new community and an element fostering it, the realised open space of estates has been pictured as generic and inhumane in academic and non-academic literature alike. This dissertation reviews the role of open space on a post-socialist housing estate. The Modern housing estate typology remains the typical urban dwelling in much of post-socialist Europe and its position on the socio-economic and cultural map of cities differs from that of Western cities.

The dissertation is a case study of Służew nad Dolinką in Warsaw, an early 1970's estate of approximately 13'000 inhabitants. Warsaw is the most dynamic city in Poland and its estates face pressure from a changing social composition as well as new developments of often different morphological language.

The following questions lead this project:

- What is the perception of open space among residents of a post-socialist estate?
- What is the role of open space in the formation of communities of place on a post-socialist estate?
- What form can or should a community of place take on a post-socialist housing estate?

Methodology

This dissertation is an attempt to look at the morphology of a Modern estate not as an autonomous entity but through the prism of its residents and of social changes that affect it. It is an investigation of problems and opportunities of an estate in a particular socio-cultural condition, rather than of universal laws of the morphology. Thus, the dissertation draws from sociology and critical geography, as the research questions are charged with issues of the form of human relationships, and the role of lived experience.

The first research component of the project involved semi-structured interviews with local residents. The interview investigated resident views on the estate's open space, and on changes to them in the recent past. 34 interviews were conducted with a variety of residents reached using three different methods.

The second component consisted of a residential transience survey on a 10% sample of the estate to discover the degree of resident turnover on the estate, both in owner-occupied and rented dwellings.

The last component of the project used the data collected to assess the relevance of British and American research on housing estates to the post-socialist case study.

Findings

The research conducted shows a very high degree of resident satisfaction with living on Służew nad Dolinką, primarily due to its verdant tranquil character. Interviewees praised the unrestricted access to estate grounds and advocated against any form of barriers to the publicness of the estate.

The residential transience survey shows a significant transformation on the estate. A quarter of dwellings changed their owners in the last decade. These figures may increase as original estate residents age further and are replaced with new generations. While the rental sector is only about 10% of the estate, this further facilitates population turnover in a country of a historically very low residential mobility.

The dissertation concludes by suggesting that the publicness of the space of Służew nad Dolinką should be embraced as a feature of the morphology that can address the changing socio-economic composition on the estate. This space may foster human relationships, if of a less tight-knit type than originally envisaged.

The results of the investigation also caution against generically applying different morphologies on post-socialist estates, without a prior analysis of the problems and opportunities of an existing urban form.



Estate buildings are surrounded by well-kept publically accessible green spaces criss-crossed by tarmac paths. Few fences or hedges exist on site; if they do, they border private gardens.