

## THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF COURTYARD SPACES IN PRESERVING THE IDENTITY OF THE URBAN FABRIC. EXAMPLES FROM BYDGOSZCZ

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**Purpose:** The objective of this article is to analyse the condition of the preserved courtyards in the city centre part of Bydgoszcz, to determine their division in terms of the degree of functional and formal transformations, and to show how this space influences the shaping of the image of the city's identity and social behaviour.

**Design/methodology/approach:** In the research, methods of case studies, analysis and critique of sources, including planning documents and direct observation were applied. The spatial scope of the study was limited to the centre of Bydgoszcz. Detailed analyzes were carried out in five areas, after getting acquainted with the architectural and urban structure of 30 solutions

**Findings:** The assumption is, that the revitalised or preserved in their traditional form urban courtyard spaces constitute an important element of the city's cultural legacy and a record of the life and activities of earlier generations. They therefore require protection and care in their historical expression to complete its image.

**Social implications:** Public spaces, as elements of the city's structure and a reflection of its history, are the official, created image of urban life and are intended to demonstrate its character. As open spaces they stand in opposition to what is associated with the notion of the home, its nearest surroundings and what is associated with the sense of identity of place.

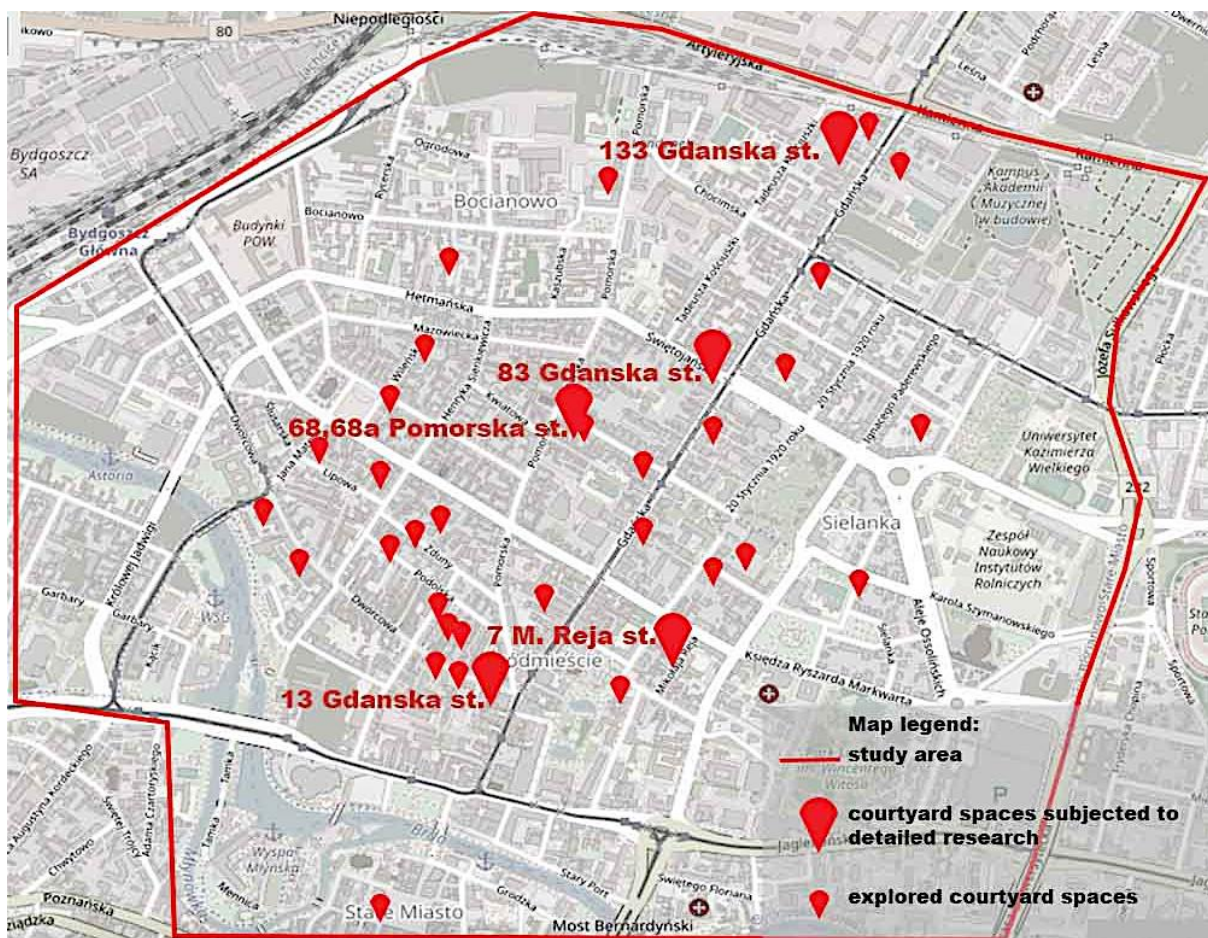
**Originality/value:** Studies of the literature on the subject have shown that the previous research on the space of backyards as an important element of the social spaces of the city was carried out to a small extent. In scientific publications of the architectural and urban structure, the information comes down to cataloging their form, without indicating their role. The lack of studies opened the possibility of undertaking research studies on their form and function, its evolution serving the purpose of preserving urban identity, and indicating examples that determine the right directions of changes in this area.

**Keywords:** architecture, urban planning, city identity, European funds, backyard spaces.

**Category of the paper:** Research paper.

## 1. Introduction

Public spaces, as elements of the city's structure and a reflection of its history, are the official, created image of urban life and are intended to demonstrate its character. As open spaces they stand in opposition to what is associated with the notion of the home, its nearest surroundings and what is associated with the sense of identity of place. The courtyard can be regarded as such a space, which is an extension of the privacy of the open space. According to the Grand Dictionary of Polish Language "it is the area inside a group of buildings or around a building but forming a certain whole together with it". It is also a social space. As pointed out by J.M. Chmielewski, the term itself derives from the Latin word *socius*, which means common, united. In the discipline of architecture and urban planning, it defines a group space, i.e. a group of individuals who are united by a community of place and purpose. The prerequisites for the creation of such a space are the areas and objects of common use, the established forms of social coexistence, a sense of identity of place and identification with that area (Chmielewski, 2010, p. 18). Such a role in the city centre residential developments, has also, until recently, been played by courtyards.



**Figure 1.** Research area of backyard space in the center of Bydgoszcz.

Source: author's own study.

The spatial scope of the study was limited to the centre of Bydgoszcz. It is a fragment of the city, the area of which amounts to 542 ha, and is delimited by: Artyleryjska and Kamienna streets to the north, the so-called Zbocze Bydgoskie of the Brda River to the south, Ogińskiego and Sułkowskiego streets to the east, and Zygmunta Augusta street, Czarna Droga, Kruszwicka street to the west. The area started to develop dynamically in the XIXth century, mainly along the axis of Gdańska, Dworcowa, F. Focha and Jagiellońska streets. At that time, a number of important administrative and service facilities were being constructed in the city, residential buildings were expanding, courtyards were being formed.

Nowadays, thanks to the grants acquired from the city council, such as the Municipal Revitalisation Programme 2023+ or the Cohesion Fund within the Technical Assistance Operational Programme 2014-2020, the planned revitalisation works give hope for the improvement of the inhabitants' quality of life in their immediate, everyday surroundings.

## **2. The role of courtyards in the historic structure of urban development**

The areas of courtyards are mainly accompanied by residential buildings. Their shape has its origins in the form of the ancient peristyle, atrium, patios and medieval viridor. In the Renaissance, their equivalent was the quadrilateral type of enclosed arcaded courtyard. In the architecture of the Baroque and Classical periods, open, extended representative forms of buildings became widespread, which were preceded by forecourts highlighting the existing buildings (Kozakiewicz, 1969, p. 97). On the other hand, the small spaces accompanying XIXth century multi-family houses, the so-called courtyards, served a particularly utilitarian and economic role. According to the Polish language dictionary, it is a square next to a house, fenced off or surrounded by buildings (<https://sjp.pwn.pl>, 2022). The courtyard, within this sense, forms the space of a person's daily life, his or her immediate environment with the issues and situations that affect him or her. (<https://wsjp.pl>, 2022). As pointed out by Anna Rumińska in 'Antropologia podwórka' (Jarczewski, Huculak, Janaś, Klepacki, Rumińska 2013, p. 51), two concepts of space that remain in opposition to each other are linked here: public and private. Courtyards are located next to single-family houses as well as multi-family houses. In both cases, they are private spaces, but belonging to a specific local community, surrounded by a boundary marking the area of ownership and access.

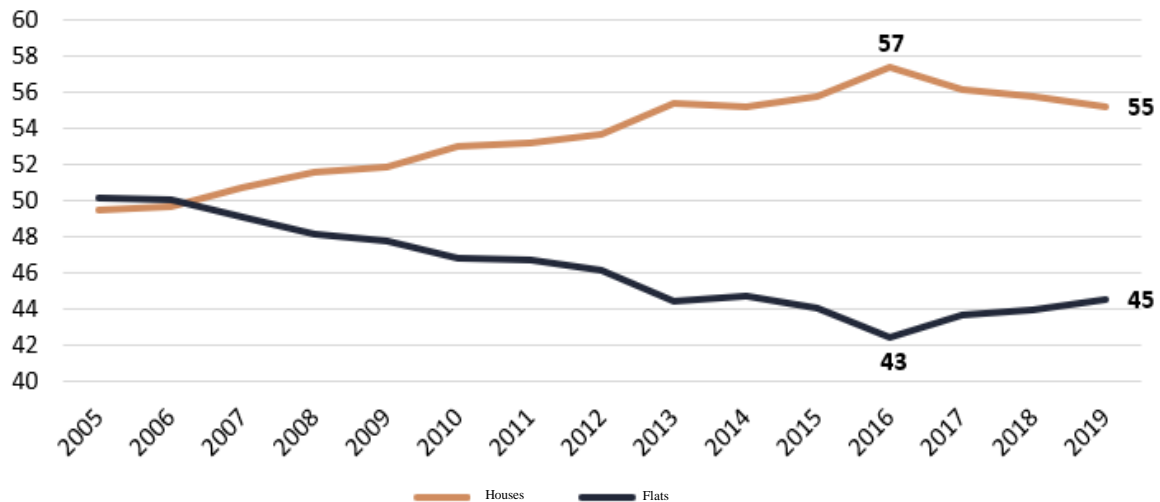
In the central areas of cities, they are most often located next to tenement houses. This form of multi-family housing, which first appeared in Poland in the Middle Ages together with German settlers, became the most popular structure erected in cities in the XIXth century. Buildings of this type were inhabited by representatives of different classes and of different levels of wealth. In city centres there dominated complexes of frontage, tenement buildings. Typically, in wide plots of land, a magnificent front house was built, to which from the yard, as the number of inhabitants increased, wings or outbuildings were added, in various configurations. As such, courtyards with different functions were separated. Within them, the hidden and less official life of the town was going on. It was here, that small craftsmen and workshops were located, as well as bakeries, carpenters, furriers and shoemakers. It was in the courtyards that enthusiasts of the breeding industry had their chicken coops, pigeon houses and small gardens. It was also here that there were all the kinds of storerooms and "conveniences", i.e. toilets for buildings without sewage systems, and even stables. In the courtyard, often paved with stones, the so-called "cobblestones", for the convenience of carts carrying supplies or firewood, there was a carpet beating stand and often a cast-iron pump. Older residents basked in the sun on makeshift benches, boys played football. There was also always a place to hang out the washing on a sunny day and other children's games. A glazier, an organ grinder and an antique dealer came to the courtyards.

Together with the increasing number of inhabitants in the tenements, legal regulations were implemented to ensure a proper quality of life and to improve the hygienic and sanitary conditions of their tenants. In one regulation it was ordered, that from the windows of the ground floor of the outbuildings, the sky should be visible. Even though the purpose of construction regulations was mostly to protect buildings from fires, efforts were also made to make them aesthetically pleasing.

The issues concerning the development of tenement buildings in Poland have been addressed in a number of scientific studies, including monographs, chapters in periodicals and articles (Ostrowska-Kęłowska, 1982, pp. 73-78; Łupienko, 2015; Putkowska, 1985, p. 181; Kwiatkowski, 1973, p. 192).

The form and shape of courtyards are determined by the surrounding architecture. Nowadays, their role is mainly determined by the way in which they are developed by the users. In terms of ownership, these are the areas belonging to the commune authorities or are private spaces. They are usually closed areas and are inaccessible from the outside, separated from the public space usually by a gate or grating. In the anthropological studies conducted within the frame of the "Backyard Culture" project, A. Rumińska pointed out that this space is an extension of the home. Therefore, the expectations of contemporary residents regarding their courtyards focus on ensuring safety, creating a pleasant and friendly atmosphere for different age groups. Courtyards are now perceived as a refuge and a place of recreation. They are intended to be quiet areas, providing opportunities for carrying out household activities and hobbies. Their potential users expect that these within these areas will include greenery, both trees,

bushes and colourful seasonal plants. There will be installed elements of small architecture such as benches with backrests, fountains, paddling pools, roofing, trellises, canopies, playing fields, playgrounds, climbing walls, dance and performance platforms, dog runs, entry barriers and closed gates.



**Figure 2.** The chart shows the change in the structure of residence from the overwhelming number of multi-family apartments in 2005 to single-family houses in 2019.

Source: HRE Investments and Eurostat data, <https://zdrowie.dziennik.pl>, 20/09/2022.

The quoted statistical data from 2019, worked out by Eurostat, show a change in the housing structure of urban residents over the last 15 years. They showed that around 45% of residents now live in multi-family buildings and the courtyard is still a space of daily life for them. „The courtyard is a spatial anchor of memory and a text of culture. It is a book of intergenerational, intercultural and peer education, a territory of challenges posed by strangers to their own when the latter comes here for a certain reason” (Jarczewski, Huculak, Janaś, Klepacki, Rumińska, 2013, p. 52). Anna Rumińska defines the courtyard phenomenon in a similar way in the publication chapter *Anthropology of a courtyard*. She thinks that, the flat and the courtyard construct the *territory of the house*. The courtyard becomes a grouping of many fragments of someone's *houses*, a semi-private and sometimes even private space, - if a local group feels an exceptionally strong commitment to this space and the flat does not constitute for them a territory sufficient for the construction of their local identification”. As an area where residents separate themselves from the public space, left behind gates or bars, it constitutes an area they can control and manage themselves. Nowadays, to a large extent, it should depend on the initiative and creativity of the users of this space, whether the yards and courtyards become a zone which improves the quality of life of a particular community, or whether it is a place which nobody takes care of, often exposed to inappropriate behaviour, abandoned and degraded, deprived of the role and character ascribed to it.

### 3. Courtyards in the XIX c. Bydgoszcz city centre development

The multi-family housing in Bydgoszcz started to develop at the turn of the XVIIIth and XIXth century, after the period of the devastating Swedish wars, the post-partition loss of independence and numerous fires. The new Prussian authorities undertook a comprehensive modernisation of the housing development and its expansion. These activities transformed the town into a big industrial centre. According to the specified architectural and urban plans, private and tenement houses were erected, which were constructed according to two types of solutions. One developed inside the plots, the other drew patterns from German functional and formal tendencies (Bręczewska-Kulesza, 2014, pp. 14-18). Their shape was derived from particular building regulations, however, in the XIX century very liberal, adapted to private investors. A change in the rules for the construction of new buildings occurred initially in 1905 after the publication of the "Regulation of the building police for cities and several rural municipalities with the urban way of building of the regency district of Bydgoszcz". Detailed regulations concerned also the courtyards and areas of vacant land, where it was indicated that the property could only be developed in  $\frac{2}{3}$  (corner  $\frac{3}{4}$ ) of the area, and each plot must have a vacant courtyard with a minimum side dimension of 6 m and an area of 60 m<sup>2</sup>. The only exceptions were plots of up to 200 m<sup>2</sup> and corner plots, but in such cases the courtyard could not be less than 36 m<sup>2</sup>.

The courtyards in the central part of Bydgoszcz were shaped by the XIXth century development. In their interiors, similarly to the generally prevailing trend of those times, there were constructed smaller buildings with craftsmanship, workshop and also economic functions. There were also rooms intended for stables, dovecotes, chicken coops, toilets. The spaces were often complemented by impressive entrance gates, fences and small architectural elements that appeared at different time intervals such as benches, decorative low walls, stairs, balustrades, verandas and the indispensable carpet beating racks and, sometimes, a summerhouse. In the majority of the tenement buildings, mainly private, the courtyards to the rear were accompanied by extensive garden areas, which, not always open to the public, formed their green hinterland. These areas together with the city's greenery formed a system that not only provided the proper aesthetic qualities of the surroundings of the tenements, but also positively affected the proper functioning of the entire urban ecosystem.

The form and function of the Bydgoszcz city centre courtyards often had a specific character, resulting from the specific nature of their development. The predominant space was rectangular in plan with a front tenement with one annex wing and outbuildings. In some of the larger plots, an additional back building was constructed behind the outbuilding. The main buildings were constructed peripherally along the building line, which resulted in the formation of yards behind them, including garden yards. The large, representative edifices had a small auxiliary courtyard providing light to the staircase and additional rooms.



**Figure 3.** The state of development of the space of the damaged yard at Gdańska 133 st.

Source: a: own study based on <https://metropoliabydgoska.pl/>, 10.08.2022; b, c: author's own photo.

Contemporary architectural transformations in the city, due to often ill-conceived development decisions, have eliminated much of this urban structure, built up over the decades. In the historic part of the city, there have disappeared and are still disappearing many yards, gardens and courtyards that are unique in their specificity. They have been developed or transformed into paved areas with a utilitarian function, mainly for parking. However, there are still such spaces in the city, mainly in private tenements, where the owners, together with the residents, wish to restore the proper role and importance of their surroundings. As the studies indicate, i.e.: "The culture of the courtyard", "About the tenement houses", the users of these areas perceive them as an extension of the space of the home, a place for meetings, leisure and the execution of hobby activities. The fulfilment of these expectations is possible with the active participation of those concerned and the involvement of the city authorities in the process of

revitalisation or regeneration of these areas. From the conducted analyses and observations of courtyards in Bydgoszcz, it appears that this is possible to a limited extent or, due to the irretrievable destruction of these spaces, no longer realistic.

An example of the complete destruction of the neighbourhood space, including the courtyards and the extensive garden belonging to the back of the tenement house, is the area at 133 Gdańska st. In the years 2019-2022, on the area of the former gardens, vegetable gardens, greenhouses, outbuildings, annex houses and playgrounds, there was constructed for one of the grocery store chains a large 900 m<sup>2</sup> commercial facility, a concrete hall surrounded by XIX-century buildings. The district between the city's main street and Kościuszko street, with an area of over 0.4 hectares, constituted a direct space for the residents of one tenement house and indirectly for the four adjacent ones. This area, through many years of building layering, constituted an element of a system of linked urban interiors, the composition of which for more than 100 years has been characteristic for the whole city centre. The service facility, with a standard form for this type of function, has broken the traditional connections, has dominated with its size the plots bordering it, depriving them of their role as neighbourhood spaces. In the area of the former gardens, there dominates an extensive, monotonous car park, devoid of plants. From the windows of the upper storeys of the tenement houses, there is a view of the finial of a flat roof with technical infrastructure. The designers, wishing to preserve the frontage line of the development from Gdańska street, have suggested the creation of a concrete structure of the height of the neighbouring buildings, acting, however, as an advertising wall. This form, which merely introduces the shopping and parking area, has not been assigned, through deliberate compositional elements, any aesthetic or functional attributes that would attest to a link with the XIX century architecture.



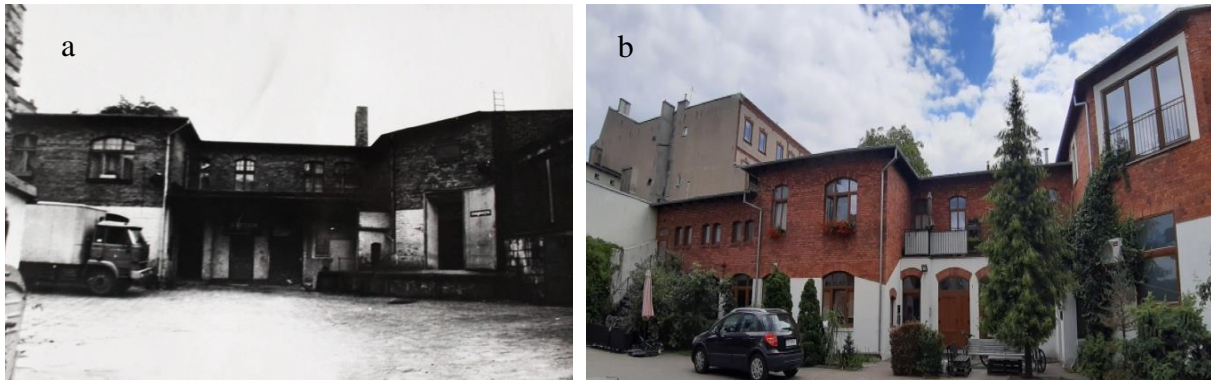


**Figure 4.** Yards spaces with servis building at 58 Dworcowa, 13 Gdańska, 7 Stary Rynek, 2 Matejki streets.

Source: author`s own photo.

Another predominant example of contemporary courtyards is their transformation into homogeneous parking areas, with a division between the ability to leave as many cars as possible, whether for residents of the tenement house or for visitors. The first solution dominates in most of the analysed courtyards. The opportunity to change the function of the courtyards into spaces accessible to the cars of all those wishing to park often stems from the activities of the service premises which are located behind or within the front building on the property. In addition, the access is provided from the back street connected to the outbuildings and annexes. The areas of both the groups are characterised by paved driveways and parking places, made of cobblestones, which have been introduced instead of lawns or stone paving and which significantly disrupt the harmony between the block of the tenement house and its, devoid of original character, surroundings. The detail of the XIXth century buildings, the colours, the materials used in the buildings are juxtaposed with the fine, monotonous forms made of concrete. Tightly filling the courtyards with this material also changed the mass of rainwater runoff into the ground and the urban rainwater system, additionally burdening it. In the historic centre of Bydgoszcz, there are some exemplary models of such solutions in multi-family houses around the Old Market and in Długa st., 35 Gdańska st., 1 Pomorska st, Podolska, Zduny, doctor E. Warmińskiego streets. Solutions of the second type dominate in the very centre of the city, e.g. along Gdańska and Dworcowa streets. Their common feature is that they combine into one parking system of the whole system of internal quarters between tenement houses.

The third type of courtyards are the areas where the service developments have been erected or preserved. In the area of Bydgoszcz's city centre there are numerous factories and craftsmen's workshops, and nowadays offices, which are connected to the main streets of the city through a gate passage. They do not create social spaces that improve the quality of life of the residents, but when taken care of and skilfully managed, they successfully fulfil a commercial function. These locations are often fronted by a parking and entrance area to the buildings. An example of such a solution are the areas at 29 Gdańska st. or 22 Dworcowa st., where service companies, retail outlets, catering facilities, customer car parks, among others, have been located inside. Some of the solutions are distinguished by the details of greenery and small architecture (gazebos, benches, carpet beating racks and swings for children), which are left in the use of the tenants. Some examples of courtyards are the courtyards of tenement houses at 7 and 13 Dworcowa st. or at 58 Gdańska st. A solution of this type is also the courtyard at 13 Gdańska st., developed between the main building and the inner annexe. In 2016, a coffee shop combined with a cinema was opened there. In the intimate space, a cultural space has been created for the townspeople, with shows, meetings with artists and thematic fairs taking place there. The courtyard does not perform the social function previously assigned to it, as it is an area for the customers of the service and catering facilities. The development for the residents of the tenement building is limited only to the area designated for the rubbish bins and the carpet beating rack.



**Figure 5.** Courtyard of Photography Foundation at Pomorska 68a street.

Source: a: [www.fotografistka.pl](http://www.fotografistka.pl), 16.09.2022; b: author`s own photo.

A similar solution can be found at 68 and 68a Pomorska street. The courtyard space there consists of two parts. The first one closer to the front building belongs to the residents. It is dominated by untidy greenery with three parking spaces, garages and a technical zone. From the north, along the border with another plot, there is a road leading to the second part where, similarly to 13 Gdańska street, one of Bydgoszcz's cultural institutions is located. The history of the complex of buildings dates back to the end of the 1870s. The first owner of the area constructed a stable here and later a residential annexe, which was expanded in subsequent years. In the 1890s, the area was bought by the Kunterstein brewery, which equipped a mineral water and beer bottling plant here. Over the years, the premises have changed their function, but until the end of 1999 they were connected with the brewing industry. On the top floor there was also invariably a residential facility. Currently, in the renovated premises, the seat of the Photography Foundation is located, and the former industrial rooms have been used as research studios, photography galleries with workshop and exhibition spaces. The courtyard contains a separate parking area and a section that forms the foreground of the gallery. There are three separate entrances to the building complex, which are preceded by tall and medium-high greenery. Its purpose is to separate semi-private and private spaces, where elements of small architecture are located - benches, tables with chairs, bicycle racks. Shows, vernissages and thematic meetings take place here. The entire premise is dominated by a mural depicting the figure of Jadwiga Szopieraj. The artist ran her photography business in the building enclosing the courtyard on the north side, where the mural is located. The courtyard is fenced off, but open to the public during gallery hours. The operation of the photographic studio does not restrict the accessibility of the area to local residents.

To the overview of Bydgoszcz's courtyards, an example of an interior type unchanged since the architectural building was erected should be added. In the city centre, the tenement house at 83 Gdańska St. was chosen. The first owner of the eclectic building, erected in 1890, was Carl Rose, a master bricklayer and carpenter, the author of several buildings in the city. This tenement house closes the corner of the main street frontage and Świętojańska street. In 2017, the front elevation underwent a careful renovation that restored its original appearance.



**Figure 6.** Bydgoszcz, a downtown tenement house at ul. Gdańska 83, the renovated façade in the front part and the inner courtyard built in 1890.

Source: a - own study based on <https://bydgoszcz24.pl>, 22/09/2022; b, c - author's own photos.

The courtyard is separated from the public space by a metal gate topped by an arch. From the beginning, it was used as a business and utility area for the residents; there was no green space. In the rear elevation, a separate entrance has been preserved, which led to the kitchen staircase for suppliers and servants. A second entrance was used by the tenants as a downstairs to the basements. Carts carrying coal, agricultural goods and other supplies were driven in through an extensive gate. The courtyard was paved with solid granite cobblestones. The geometric, rectangular-shaped courtyard space has been preserved unchanged. This space, enclosed on four sides by walls that did not give access to the sun's rays, still allows us to clearly read the functions that this courtyard performed. The unchanged shapes of the windows and their arrangement in the tenement, indicate the original location of the toilets and utility rooms on the side of the courtyard. The logical and well-thought-out development of this space, the location with regard to the sides of the world and the functions of this courtyard, have decided to keep its form unchanged.

The last presented examples are courtyards that have been renovated and revitalised, taking into account the needs and expectations of residents. These include courtyards located in various parts of the city centre, e.g. at 7 M. Reja st., 74 Pomorska st., 13 Cieszkowskiego st., 13 H. Sienkiewicza st., 27 Dworcowa st. Among those mentioned, the property at 7 M. Reja st. stands out, where on the initiative of residents revitalisation works were undertaken. The two-storey tenement consists of a front section to the east and an outbuilding wing to the north, which emphasises the geometric rectangular shape of the courtyard. To the west and south it is separated from the neighbouring plots by a wall. In 2015, the works, started four years earlier by the local community, were completed. The renovation was the culmination of the activities of previous investments concerning: technical infrastructure, roof replacement, renovation of the staircases. The tenants have jointly developed a functional programme. In an area with dimensions of 20x20 m, it will separate the following zones: children's play area, leisure area for adults and technical area. The casual composition of the whole is

emphasised by the green dominant, which is a specimen chestnut tree. The urban floor is mostly a lawn area, as well as hardened surfaces made of recycled solid ceramic bricks and permeable sand, safe for the playing youngest users. There are suspended trellises on the walls of the fence and house, with ivy climbing up them. On the west side, a small square has been constructed, complemented by pruned shrubs and a bench has been placed. On the north side, an area was located with a house for storing garden tools, chairs with a table, a wood shed, bicycle racks and a covered arbour. Under the windows of the flats, on the east side, low ornamental plants have been planted. In the south-east corner of the courtyard, a rock garden was created using the elevation of the terrain. The space does not have a gated opening with the street, so no parking spaces for cars have been planned. As a culmination of these efforts of the housing community, it has twice been awarded the highest prize in the competition "Aesthetics around the house", organised by the Bydgoszcz Municipal Houses Administration.



**Figure 7.** The courtyard revitalized by the residents at M. Reja street, creating a social space for the community.

Source: own study based on <https://bydgoszcz.wyborcza.pl>, 16.09.2022.

#### 4. Summary and conclusions

As demonstrated by the studies of the literature on the subject, to date, research into courtyards in the city centre has been conducted to a limited extent. In studies dealing with architecture or the functional-spatial structure of Bydgoszcz, their role and importance is limited to signalling their occurrence. This lack of scientific publications has contributed to taking up the subject and analysing the compositional solutions of courtyard areas and searching for factors that condition the proper protection of this cultural heritage and its modern management.

The discussed examples of Bydgoszcz's courtyards make it possible to qualify them. Among the indicated five types of tenement interiors, group space for residents is only found in two types of courtyards. The first are the traditionally unchanged areas and the second are the areas revitalised with the participation of residents. In the remaining examples, the function given to them today has deprived the courtyards in the historic part of the city of the role they were originally given. The solutions applied in them restrict them to mainly commercial and parking spaces.

At the same time, it has been shown that the factors that are responsible for building relationships with the immediate surroundings that is the courtyard and social with neighbours are: the identification of tenants with their place of living, a conscious reading of its historical significance, the preservation of the traditional arrangement of the interior system in the development quarters, taking into account both the areas of residential and commercial outbuildings and green areas.

Another factor contributing to this relationship is the proper urban composition, which creates the boundaries of the individual neighbourhood spaces, assigning them a specific meaning of a place. Elements complementing this picture are the preserved architectural details in parts of the facades of the buildings, but also the shapes and decorations of the entrances to the staircases and entrance gates, restored or reconstructed their original sections. Of equal importance is the retention of historic materials and patterns in the floors.

Due to technical reasons, it is important to separate utility zones depending on the needs of the tenants, such as shelters for waste bins, bicycle racks, the right proportion of parking spaces, space for drying laundry, or beating dust out of carpets. The details of the small architecture foster social relationships in this space. The basic attribute of a courtyard is a bench with a backrest, as well as pergolas, covered gazebos, places for communal meals, stages for shows and performances.

An indispensable complement to this space is the greenery exposed in the form of decorative and functional gardens already traditionally functioning in the development quarters and carefully implemented in new design solutions. Its natural role influences the uniqueness of each interior, but also brings order to urban arrangements, improves the quality of life and aesthetics of courtyards, while at the same time improving the health and climatic qualities of the entire city. Appropriately delimited green areas and their subsequent maintenance should result from the involvement, already at the initial planning stage, of all the residents as much as possible. A sense of community and responsibility for one's own piece of space, creates social bonds among the residents and an attachment to their place of residence.

The historic areas of the interiors of city-centre townhouses and their development are also an alternative to the inhabitants of the unified, created from repetitive designs and materials of and materials, contemporary housing developments, mainly in blocks of flats. The same urban and visual composition solutions, often used there, without reference to individually shaped housing complexes, results in a sense of monotony and lack of participation by residents in the

creation of their immediate surroundings. The accidentally placed benches or impersonal playgrounds in these areas in no way resemble historic, urban courtyards and frequently amount to empty and no-man's land.

In this context, the city centre courtyards of Bydgoszcz are the areas where traditional XIXth century forms have been preserved, and the revitalisation with public participation carried out in some of them, ensures the maintenance or restoration of social spaces, which are an element of the cultural heritage and individual identity of the city and its inhabitants. Despite the fact that, in the overwhelming majority, these areas are still mistakenly transformed or waiting for their proper development, Community funds such as the Municipal Revitalisation Programme 2023+, the Cohesion Fund under the Technical Assistance Operational Programme for the years 2014-2020, give hope for taking the right initiatives in this regard and for subsequent actions in the degraded areas of the city.

Because courtyard spaces are often the places where the spirit of urban life from decades ago lives on, unadulterated by the official image of renovated façades. The identity image of the city from the "inside out", a kind of the reverse of the city. This is why it is worth taking care of this heritage, which is disappearing right before our eyes. As noted by Monika Zawadzka (Autoportret, 2007, p. 43), "People pass away objects and cities go on - in the irregular strip of Central Europe this is not a very strict rule. Here, only a faint trace of the absent and the permanent abandonment...".

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