

SOCIOLOGY OF NEIGHBORHOOD

LUKASZ SKOCZYŁAS
Adam Mickiewicz University

An Estate as Perceived by Its Inhabitants: A Suburb in the City Center

Abstract: This article presents the results of research into the sense of connection felt by the inhabitants of the Abisynia housing estate in Poznań for their place of residence. In the interwar period, Abisynia represented a typical affluent suburb of a large city. Today it is surrounded by apartment buildings. The research was conducted using a modification of Florian Znaniecki's methodology, which was first applied in 1928. The methodology and results are presented in comparison with Znaniecki's classical research. New methodological elements were employed, and the text indicates how they affected interpretation of the social processes taking place in a contemporary city. The inhabitants of Abisynia exhibited a very positive self-stereotype in their nearly enthusiastic appraisal of themselves and their neighbors. They were less tolerant of other city dwellers and of the city authorities. The contemporary inhabitants of Abisynia believe themselves to be a part of a more local social organization, of a type promoted by Znaniecki nearly one hundred years ago.

Keywords: urban sociology, housing estate, suburbs, Florian Znaniecki, humanistic sociology

Introduction

This text concerns research into in Poznań's Abisynia Estate, which consists of detached and semi-detached houses. The research was inspired by Florian Znaniecki's classical analyses from the 1920s. Below, I present my sources and compare my research with other works inspired by Znaniecki, while indicating the new methodological elements in my own study. Consequently, I establish the usefulness of the identity-related perspective in research on urban communities. Next, I summarize my findings from the project.

To Znaniecki, a city could only be explored by analyzing human experience. In his research, he touched upon feelings of connection and obligation to the local community. His findings provided a picture of an individual's social functioning in an urban space, defined as both a place of living (in a practical and urban-planning sense) and, symbolically, as an abstract whole laying foundations for a community's identity. This perception of the city was used in Znaniecki's (1938) subsequent theoretical considerations, where the city is defined as a human community realizing itself in human activity. In this view, which is known as the culturalist or humanistic approach, space has the properties that a specific human community gives it. Znaniecki is a pioneer of this viewpoint in sociology and, more narrowly, in urban sociology.

For the humanities in the broad sense, Znaniecki (1938: 91–92) presented a model of understanding space. In his opinion, it is possible to speak of an objectified space in only

in a few situations (technical activities or research in the exact or natural sciences). For the most part, the users of a space relate to it through their current experience, which is variable, diverse, and subject to individual evaluation. Therefore, to avoid misunderstandings, Znaniecki proposed the concept of a “spatial value” instead of simply “space.” Such a “spatial value” was for Znaniecki an element of a broader social system in which groups of people feel that they have power over a given space in a very general sense. Such power means they can stay in the space and perform certain activities. The idea of a spatial value is particularly important for this article because Abisynia’s inhabitants are indeed a group of people who consider one particular estate to be their own. On the other hand, the sense of power is transitive to some extent: just being in a given space is connected with the question of having rights to that space. Hence, the assessment of a given space by some may be generally perceived as more factual or adequate than the assessment of the same space by others. In the case I analyzed, the assessment made by the residents is considered more significant than the assessment made by city officials, while the evaluation of the officials is more significant than the evaluation of tourists, and so forth. This approach also explains why some people may encounter adverse reactions while in a given space. For example, unfamiliar passers-by may be watched or even harassed by estate residents who think they are protecting their neighbors against possible theft. As Znaniecki (1938: 94) claims, people who are denied participation in a particular community can even be punished for staying in a space under the authority of that community, because their presence is tantamount to profaning a shared value, in this case, the spatial value.

In regard to urban sociology, Znaniecki (1931) distinguished three research approaches. The first deals with different aspects of a given city’s social life and then compares it with similar elements of the social life of various other cities. This is how cultural life, crime, the income of inhabitants, and so forth, can be studied. For Znaniecki, however, it is wiser to reflect on such topics on a broader level than that of a single city or even a group of cities. Another approach was that of the Chicago Ecological School, which was concerned with the spatial distribution of social phenomena. In opposition to these two approaches, Znaniecki proposed a humanistic approach. From his point of view, urban space is always co-created by its users, mainly city inhabitants. They form numerous communities and groups, which together constitute one city community. This community contributes to the city and influences the directions of its development but is also influenced by the city in return. National, religious, political, and other groups simultaneously influence each other and the city. In order to discover and understand the multiplicity of these interrelationships and influences, it is necessary to study how inhabitants experience their city.

Two groups seemed to be most important for Znaniecki’s (1931) considerations: the commune (*gmina*) and the public (*publiczność*). Both cover the entire population of the city. The commune is systematically organized and aims at deliberate social and cultural change. The commune, therefore, comprises all the city’s inhabitants together with numerous city offices, authorities, social activists, and so forth. The public, on the other hand, is a less orderly entity. It manifests itself through the local media, which informs the population about what is happening in the city, enabling those events to be evaluated, criticized, or praised. The classical research conducted in Poznań in 1928 translated Znaniecki’s theoretical reflections into research methodology.

Znaniński engaged in research into the social awareness of city dwellers while he was head of the Department of Sociology and Philosophy of Culture at Poznań University (1920–1939), and thus he was working with the inhabitants of Poznań. Znaniński's goal was to study Poznań in detail, making the city an example of the practical use of sociological research in order to enhance the quality of the inhabitants' lives (Nowakowski 1975: 117). In 1928, Znaniński examined the connection between the inhabitants of Poznań and their city as part of a research project accompanying the Polish General Exhibition (Wystawa Krajowa). The results were published in 1931 by the Polish Institute of Sociology in a work entitled *A City in Its Citizens' Awareness (Miasto w świadomości jego obywateli)* (Znaniński 1931). The analysis encompassed written statements by the city's inhabitants submitted as part of a competition. These statements included brief autobiographies of their authors, and thus from a methodological point of view these were personal documents, accompanying replies to Znaniński's questions. Interestingly, in his description of the results, Znaniński often referred to the research tool as a "questionnaire." Perhaps he perceived the questionnaire as something between a survey tool and personal documents, which he had so much lauded. This issue calls for a separate study based on the source material. However, I acknowledge that the Znaniński's research described in this text was conducted using personal documents similar to those that Znaniński previously used with William Thomas in their canonical research on migration (Thomas, Znaniński 1920). The method of analyzing personal documents corresponds to Znaniński's theoretical assumptions related to sociology and makes it possible to deal with the category of value, which was crucial to Znaniński (cf. Cucu-Oancea 2012: 8). Thus, it also enables research on spatial value.

In his comment on the research, Znaniński (1931) stated that city dwellers were less aware of their city than of the nation or state, even if their daily operations were much more affected by the city. Moreover, the respondents expressed their need for a better social organization which—according to Znaniński—could not be satisfied by the state because the state is too large and its power relies, to a large extent, on coercion. However, this need could easily be satisfied by enhancing the functions of the city as a community.

In Znaniński's research, the respondents evaluated Poznań as a whole very positively, specifically in comparison with other cities they knew. However, they no longer had such high opinions when they commented on specific areas of urban life. Drawbacks in medical care (HMOs and hospitals), the operations of city offices, and the city authorities' attitude toward "regular" inhabitants and veterans of the Greater Poland Uprising (Powstanie Wielkopolskie) were mentioned spontaneously, along with the expression of negative emotions and scathing criticism. This dual experiencing of the city can be attributed to the fact that in evaluating Poznań as a whole, the respondents focused on the tangible assets (parks, buildings, etc.) while they adopted a more detailed approach to evaluating the city's social aspects.

In the research, how people understood their connection with the city was an important element of the city's presence in their awareness. Znaniński believed that the respondents did not reflect enough on the mutual commitments and obligations between the city and its inhabitants. Attempts at defining that commitment were limited to economizing it: calculating a dweller's pecuniary or tangible contribution (typically taxes) and what was

received in return (benefits, a place of residence, etc.). Znaniecki thought that if the city were viewed as being the result of the collective effort of many generations then eventually an average inhabitant received much more from the city than he/she offered it. When people treat their commitment in a solely pecuniary way, they are not willing to get involved in actions for the benefit of the city and feel that they are “even” with the city. Therefore, an average respondent did not feel like a member of a larger urban community, did not see his/her role in shaping the city, and perceived the local institutions as downright alien. The respondents saw themselves not as co-participants but as subjects of city institutions’ actions, which were sometimes even hostile.

Znaniecki’s pioneering research was repeated twice: in 1964 by Janusz Ziółkowski (1984a) and in 1994 by Ryszard Cichocki and Krzysztof Podemski (1999). While they remained faithful to Znaniecki’s general idea, they slightly updated the technical aspects of the research and added elements related to collective memory and the trends of urban sociology at the time. Notably, Ziółkowski had a different outlook on the city than Znaniecki, perceiving it mainly as a social and spatial structure rather than a humanistic and subjective one (Lisiecki 2015: 20).

Abisynia Estate as a Suburb and a City Center: Research Goal and Methodology

The primary goal of the research presented below was to see how effective an approach inspired by Znaniecki would be in studying a relatively small community of estate residents.

An estate is defined here as a coherent urban-planning unit which has a similar type of building construction and is part of a larger whole (a district and a city). This understanding is convergent with at least some of the definitions used by other researchers (Wallis 1971; Jałowiecki, Szczepański 2006: 389). Although I do not refer directly to systems theory, my proposed definition is consistent with its general postulates in urban sociology. I recognize a district as a subsystem of a larger system (city) (cf. Bartłomiejski 2015) and an estate as a subsystem of a district. It should also be emphasized that my understanding of an estate differs from the colloquial understanding of this term in Poland (also in Poznań) as an auxiliary unit of a municipal self-government. In this sense, a district and an estate are often units distinguished for administrative reasons without considering the urban context. For this reason, I consider this colloquial definition inconsistent with the subject of my research and use my own definition in my analysis.

My research subject is Abisynia Estate in Poznań, with its homogenous housing development (detached and semi-detached urban houses), built in the interwar period and shortly after the Second World War. Abisynia is part of an auxiliary self-government unit of the city of Poznań called Grunwald South, and of an area unit (a category created for the benefit of a metropolitan identification system) called Kasztelanów. The area of Abisynia within those units is limited by the triangle of Grunwaldzka, Bułgarska, and Cześniowska streets.

The history of Abisynia Estate goes back to the 1930s. In a project promoting private investment in building construction, Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego (National Holding Bank, BGK) started to sell plots of state-owned land in the west of Poznań. The new

district was designed by Miruta Słońska and Kazimierz Gawroński. The streets were demarcated, the land divided into lots, utilities and later even a tram line were provided. The project revolved around building the extra-residential infrastructure (a school, a church, shops, a sports field, etc.) and was open to possible future territorial growth. BGK financed the venture but the loan conditions were relatively hard to fulfil (e.g., 50% of own contribution was required). While the specific houses were designed by different architects, the development conditions were very strictly defined and allowed medium-sized single and two-family houses of a clearly modernist nature (Przybylski 2017: 37–136). As a result, the new estate hosted houses built by representatives of the upper middle class; in order to settle in Abisynia you had to enjoy above-average income. At the same time, the local buildings stood out from the large, historicizing residences of the most affluent new districts (Sołacz, Ostroróg). In the interwar period, Florian Znaniecki and his family lived in Abisynia. In the 1950s, the estate was extended with two new parts: Kuszewo, with semi-detached houses (one part of the construction was earmarked for the intelligentsia, the other for blue-collar shock workers) and Mądralin (where academics built new houses) (Przybylski 2017: 293–328). The post-war architecture continued the modernist traditions, albeit in simplified forms. Over time, Abisynia was surrounded by higher, multi-family buildings and public-utility structures (kindergartens, schools, playgrounds, sports fields, shops, a church). The name of the estate, which was commonly used by the interwar press, was a reference to the Second Italo-Ethiopian War (1935–1936). As Polish society strongly supported Abyssinia (Ethiopia) in defending its independence, new estates were named in honor of that country in several Polish cities. Abyssinia/Ethiopia is also famous for its deserts, and in the Poznań-based Abisynia, sand prevailed (Przybylski 2017: 60).

Starting in the early 1960s, the relatively homogenous development of Abisynia, which was typical of an affluent suburb of a large city, was surrounded by apartment buildings. In addition to numerous other several-story buildings, the most characteristic example of such development is a housing estate named after Copernicus (Osiedle Kopernika), which was built in the 1970s for 12,000 people and consists of several dozen multi-story, pre-fabricated apartment buildings. As a result of intensive local development, Abisynia is today an oasis of single-family houses and very different from the contemporary suburbs. The inhabitants have also changed in a natural way: the estate has attracted the descendants of the first owners and individuals appreciating the district's actual or symbolic beauty. As a suburb, Abisynia has matured and become the seat of many companies and educational institutions, changing its clear-cut image as a residential district to a more diverse one (Phelps 2015: 47–49).

The research was conducted in cooperation with the Abisynia Association of Inhabitants. In June 2019, its members and their helpers put notification letters in all the mailboxes on the estate. In September, a call for participation and questionnaires were distributed to households by members of the research team in person, so they could remind the inhabitants what the research was about, answer their questions, and, in the case of the elderly and handicapped, provide assistance in writing their contribution. The replies were collected until October 19, 2019; they could be left at the Association's headquarters, in the mailbox of one of the members, or in a local kindergarten during an event co-organized by the As-

sociation. All these venues are located on the estate. It was also possible to send a file by email.

The Abisynia project differed from Znaniecki's classical research. First, it involved volunteers as the researcher's assistants. They informed the inhabitants about the project (in 1928, information about the competition was disseminated by means of posters and ads in the press). The recent project was anonymous, whereas the project of the interwar period was in the form of a competition (with prizes) and thus, naturally, the submitted works needed to be signed. Finally, in the new research, the estate inhabitants could submit their replies free of charge in several locations near their place of residence, while in Znaniecki's research, they had to send their submissions by post or, I surmise, they could bring them to the university, which was located in the city center. These were the differences in the collecting of the data. However, there were also significant differences in the questions the inhabitants were asked. The modifications stemmed primarily from the subject matter, that is, the connection between the estate and its inhabitants. Unlike the city of Poznań, Abisynia does not have its own self-government, does not have a legal personality, does not collect taxes, and consequently its ability to affect social reality is much more limited. The questions addressed issues related to the most promising modifications of Znaniecki's approach introduced in Ziółkowski's (1984a) research in 1964 and in research conducted by Cichocki and Podemski (1999) in 1994. Stanisław Lisiecki and Jacek Kubera (2015) made similar suggestions for modifying Znaniecki's questions. New questions pertaining to social and demographic issues (personal data) replaced the original request in 1928 to provide 2–4 pages of life story; identity-related issues also changed. These matters are presented in [Table 1](#).

In summary, in the research on Abisynia Estate, an attempt was made to maintain the general idea of the research from 1928, while at the same time tailoring the questions to contemporary linguistic requirements, the modified subject of the research, and the experience gained in research projects conducted in 1964 and 1994. Therefore, my research is not a replication of Znaniecki's study. The research described in this article was inspired by the classic 1928 study but is not another edition of it.

Replies were provided by 71 people. The number of households was estimated at 359. Statistics Poland forecast that in 2020, the average number of people in an urban household was 2.34 (Potyra 2016: 19). It is therefore safe to assume that approximately 840 people live in Abisynia, which indicates that 8.5% of the estate took part in the research. 27 individuals submitted their entries to the contest organized by Znaniecki in 1931; the research conducted by Ziółkowski (1984b) involved 133 people, and 45 respondents took part in Cichocki's and Podemski's project (1999). Bearing in mind the fact that Znaniecki's research covered the whole of Poznań and comparing the above data with the city's population, it is possible to calculate that in 1928, 1 out of 9,000 inhabitants took part in the research; in 1964, 1 out of 3,240 (Ziółkowski 1984b: 10), and in 1994, 1 out of 12,400. In the research conducted in 2019, 1 out of 12 inhabitants of Abisynia participated. However, to some extent, these numbers are misleading. In Znaniecki's research, the average number of pages provided by the respondents was 37, in Ziółkowski's research it was 15, in Cichocki's and Podemski's—9 (Cichocki, Podemski 1999: 18). In the case of the Abisynia project, counting the number of pages seems inadequate. A large

Table 1

The questions asked to the research participants

The question asked in 2019	Reference to the research from 1928	Comments, additional information
1 How long have you lived in Abisynia? (e.g. since birth, I moved in XXXX, I have lived intermittently since XXXX)	The writer's short life story	The question is aimed at defining the actual biographical connection with the estate
2 When were you born (year)?	The writer's short life story	—
3 What is your education level?	The writer's short life story	—
4 What is your gender?	The writer's short life story	—
5 How many adult neighbours do you know by full name?	—	The question is aimed at defining the actual biographical connection with the estate
6 Do you feel Abissinian?	—	—
7 What do you call the estate of your residence?	—	There are many different names in use
8 What is the estate called by others?	—	There are many different names in use.
9 What or whom do you consider a symbol of Abisynia?	—	Reference to the research of 1964
10 In your opinion, what type of estate is Abisynia?	—	Reference to the research of 1964; examining a self-stereotype and the connection between the city and the estate
11 What is Abysinia's role in the city?	—	Examining a self-stereotype and the connection between the city and the estate
12 How do you rate Abisynia against the other Poznań estates?	—	Examining a self-stereotype and the connection between the city and the estate
13 What is a typical Abisynia dweller like?	The writer's opinion on the population of Poznań in general	Examining a self-stereotype and the connection between the city and the estate
14 What is a typical dweller of Poznań like?	The writer's opinion on the population of Poznań in general	Examining a self-stereotype and the connection between the city and the estate
15 What is your connection with Abisynia?	What entices the writer to stay in Poznań?	The question is aimed at defining the actual biographical connection with the estate
16 What do you like most about the estate?	—	Reference to the research of 1964
17 What do you dislike most about the estate?	—	Reference to the research of 1964
18 Would you like to move out from Abisynia one day? If you would, where to and why?	What discourages the writer from staying in Poznań?	—
19 What material, cultural and other needs do you satisfy in Abisynia?	—	The question is aimed at defining the actual connection with the estate
20 Where else (outside Abisynia) do you satisfy your material, cultural and other needs?	—	The question is aimed at defining the actual connection with the estate

Continued on next page

Table 1 (Continued)

The question asked in 2019	Reference to the research from 1928	Comments, additional information
21 What do you think about the cultural and other events taking place in Abisynia?	The writer's opinion on the businesses and events organised by the city	—
22 How has Abisynia changed in the past 30 years? Who has gained and who has lost following the changes?	How is contemporary Poznań different from pre-war Poznań?	The interval of 30 years was first used in the research from 1999
23 What have you done for the benefit of Abisynia and its inhabitants?	What the writer has done in his/her life for the city of Poznań?	—
24 In your opinion, how will Abisynia change in the years to come?	What are the most important and most urgent needs in Poznań and how to satisfy them?	—
25 Does Abisynia live up to your ideal of an estate? If not, what would need to happen?	What would Poznań need to be like to become an ideal of a city?	—
26 What do you think of the activity of Council of Grunwald South city's unit, which is in charge of Abisynia?	The writer's opinion on the city authorities (the mayor, the city council, the town hall, the offices)	—
27 What do you think about the activity of the "Abisynia" Association of Inhabitants?	—	The question was added at the Association's request
28 What do you think about the O!Plotek Gallery?	What does the writer think about the Poznań Fairs and the Polish General Exhibition?	—

Source: the author's compilation; data as in [Znaniński 1931](#); [Ziółkowski 1984a](#); [Cichoński, Podemski 1999](#).

majority of the replies were short: one word or a few words in response to the questions. Therefore, the research from 2019 involved a much wider share of the population but the data collected did not allow the in-depth analysis characteristic of the previous projects. On the one hand, this was a result of a general shortening of written replies and the predominance of a picture code over a literal code in contemporary communication. As [Znaniński \(1931\)](#) pointed out in his analysis, only in regard to a few questions did he require formal, descriptive answers, and yet his respondents wrote a lot. On the other hand, shorter answers were also a consequence of the methodological and technical choices made in the course of conducting the research (e.g., the decision not to request a life story). These differences in the research material are crucial. Analyzing multi-page personal documents is very important for understanding how a city or neighborhood is perceived by its inhabitants. The statements collected on Abisynia are of a different nature than the statements collected in the 1928 research, and this fact introduces considerable additional limitations in the interpretation of my findings and their possible comparison with [Znaniński's](#) research.

It is worth adding that Abisynia has recently also been the subject of quantitative research focused on households ([Skoczyła 2021](#)).

The respondents' major social and demographic features are presented in [Table 2](#).

Table 2
The respondents' major social and demographic features

Feature		1928	1964	1994	2019	
					N	percentage
Number of participants		27	133	43	71	100%
Gender	Female	44%	29%	48%	40	56%
	Male	51%	71%	52%	30	42%
	No data	4%	0%	0%	1	1%
Actual connection with the place of research	Since birth	30%	42%	56%	16	23%
	Since moving in	70%	58%	44%	55	77%
Education	Elementary and vocational	—	19%	2%	0	0%
	Secondary	—	35%	14%	10	14%
	Tertiary	—	42%	60%	61	86%
	No data	—	5%	24%	0	0%
Age	25 and below	—	11%	12%	5	7%
	26–50	—	50%	30%	17	24%
	Above 50	—	38%	30%	49	69%
	No data	—	1%	28%	0	0%

Source: the author's compilation; data as in Znaniecki 1931; Ziółkowski 1984a; Cichocki, Podemski 1999.

Results of the Research

I will present the results by referring to several major thematic areas, in following the analytical standard established by Znaniecki (1931). Znaniecki divided his presentation of the results into three parts: the respondents' attitudes to the city; relations between city citizens; and relations between citizens and city officials. Thus, I will start my analysis with the replies to the questions about identity and the sense of connection with the estate. I will also describe the actual connection between the respondents and the place of residence. Then I will write about how the people of Abisynia perceive each other and their community. Finally, by referring to Znaniecki's work, I will analyze the evaluations of local activists and city officials.

In an analysis of the respondents' identity-related connection with Abisynia, attention should be drawn to the clearly positive self-stereotype of the estate's inhabitants, which was reflected in the words used by the respondents: "friendly," "well-educated," "with broad horizons," "up-and-coming," "nice," "open-minded," "intelligent," "reasonable," "normal," "ambitious," "considerate," "discreet," "pragmatic," "shrewd," "thrifty," "well-mannered," "super," "positive," "helpful," "involved," "affluent," "taking care of his/her house and garden," "modest." There were also utterances in contrast to this image, denying the existence of a "typical Abisynian," or suggesting that a typical set of features of estate inhabitants has yet to emerge. There were also few neutral statements: "an introvert," "silent," "modest," "a representative of the intelligentsia." In one reply, a respondent said he/she hoped a set of positive features was typical of Abisynians, but he/she was not sure that that was the case. The only negative reply was related to the alleged social passivity of the Abisynians—that they were not interested in anything except their personal lives.

The positive self-stereotype of Abisynians corresponds with the way the estate and its role in the city is perceived. In their replies, the respondents typically pointed to certain objective urban-planning features of the estate (the proximity of the city center, allotments and other forms of greenery, the estate as a bedroom community in contrast to the city center) or issues related to the quality of life: a quiet neighborhood; too narrow roads; every time a football match is organized at a nearby stadium, the district is overcrowded. The replies were very diverse and the facts were differently perceived. Interestingly, while Abisynia's drawbacks related to transport problems, and decrepit public infrastructure was named, the inhabitants (rather than the city and its institutions) were indicated as the initiators of ameliorating the situation.

However, the responses in which the respondents referred to Abisynia as a social fact seem to be of greater importance. For some of the respondents, Abisynia is a part of the city that is significant for historical reasons and hence worth protecting. For others, it is a predominantly safe and welcoming space ("friendly," "social," etc.). For many, it is an ideal estate or "the best in the world" and equivalent (or, possibly second best) to Sołacz, the most famous high-class estate in the city. Despite the clear drawbacks of Abisynia, this reference to Sołacz and an ideal estate suggests that the inhabitants of Abisynia occupy one of the highest positions in the social stratification. One of the respondents wrote openly that Abisynia was a "quiet, venerable estate, a bit elitist" (respondent 41). Other respondents defined the role of Abisynia in the city as follows: "It is a place where well-educated people live, members of a specific intellectual elite" (5); "In my opinion, Abisynia is a symbol of the good taste and refinement of the architects and owners"; "Abisynia is evidence of the city's affluence, the city's pride." The uniqueness is reinforced by the sense of being an efficient community which, through informal social acts or the activity of members of the inhabitants' association, may affect the district. In summary, as a physical entity, Abisynia has its benefits, but also its drawbacks, which were pointed out. As a social entity, Abisynia is a territorial community of members of the urban elite, who take care of their place of residence, which is essentially devoid of flaws.

It would be good to compare a "typical Abisynian" and a "typical Poznanian." While the traits the respondents used to describe a typical Abisynian were nearly all positive, their image of a typical inhabitant of Poznań was much more nuanced. While many positive opinions on Poznanians were expressed in my study, they primarily repeated the positive stereotypes and self-stereotypes that have been known for years and were quite prominent in Znaniecki's research (1931). The inhabitants of Poznań are accordingly diligent, thrifty, resourceful, and in general handle finances well; they are orderly, ambitious, patriotic, and conservative. They make reasonable decisions, and in relations with other people are liberal, agreeable, and hospitable. While they keep a distance from people they have just met, they are loyal friends. This image, in line with the positive self-stereotype recorded in the entire city and repeated for years, including in journalism, is hardly surprising. However, the negative features of a typical Poznanian, as indicated by the respondents, are much more interesting. Some of the respondents think that the above-mentioned positive characteristics belong to the past, whereas younger generations lack them because they are a "globalized mass" (61) "littering the streets" (48). There were also respondents who did not refer to any positive features of Poznanians. To them, a typical inhabitant of the city is a person

without a sense of humor, gloomy, parochial, busy, with no time for anything, narrow-minded, smug, convinced of his/her tidiness (but in fact untidy), only seemingly open to others, dissatisfied, and sad. The frequently presented positive features of Poznanians are only a smoke screen. As one respondent put it: “A Poznanian (...) prefers driving in circles to spending one zloty in the paid parking zone and prefers getting cold in his/her own home to switching on the heating when (according to him/her) it is too early for that; a car is more important than a wife; he/she judges the book by its cover and makes sure he/she is dressed for an occasion like a Sunday outing or a grandmother’s birthday; he/she is more concerned about what others would think than the actual or ethical aspect of his/her actions; he/she is skeptical and even feels superior to people who live different lives; he/she feels best with a regular, full-time job with a clear corporate hierarchy, like in a bank or office; he/she is ecstatic about his/her thriftiness—even if an item costs more than it is really worth, but is on sale, he/she is happy about the ‘savings’” (65). Many respondents praised the typical Poznanian, but others were scathingly critical or lamented the fact that the inhabitants of the city no longer had the attributes of their forefathers. In summary, the picture of a typical Poznanian as painted by the respondents was much more complicated and less positive than the image of a typical Abisynian.

An analysis of replies to the question about what could be a symbol of Abisynia brought fascinating results. Interestingly, it was mostly people who were considered a symbol of the estate: the well-known university professors who once lived there, who were sometimes referred to by name (Florian Znaniecki, Gerard Labuda, Ludwik Zabrocki, Zbigniew Zakrzewski), and sometimes treated collectively as “the professors”; other inhabitants who made a name for themselves because of their professions, who were also referred to by name (physicians, architects, artists); the collective “inhabitants of the old, pre-war houses”; the previous chairman of the local association; the respondents’ neighbors or even family members (e.g., a grandfather, a wife). There was also a plethora of other replies to the question about the symbol of the estate, including both specific objects (e.g., pumps, trees, a statue in a nursery’s garden), architectural and urban-planning elements (the clinker-brick finishing of fences, free-standing houses, the development’s modernistic style), and things related to the inhabitants’ association (the association itself or its logo). The diverse replies are evidence that the set of the symbols associated with the estate is neither coherent nor convincing. Notably, despite the prevalence of answers referring to people as symbols, the only former inhabitant commemorated in the name of a street located in the estate’s borders (Conrad Drzewiecki, a dancer and ballet choreographer), was not mentioned even once. There are several possible reasons for this. To some extent, a physical and large-scale commemoration (Drzewiecki Street is also the name of the tram stop closest to the estate) absolves people from the responsibility of remembrance. People who are honored in an official way, for instance, in a street name, can disappear from social memory, because an institution (in this case, the city) has taken responsibility for remembering them. Another reason could be the fact that on the estate, Conrad Drzewiecki made a name for himself for his open homosexuality, atypical sense of style, and for telling untrue stories about his family’s past; all this contributed to his neighbors’ stereotypical and negative opinions about him (Przybylski 2017: 344–346) which may have contributed to his being overlooked as a possible symbol of the estate. The act of commemorating Drzewiecki by naming a street

and a tram stop after him is typical and assimilating (Krutzsich 2019: 6) and has been done for many other artists. This, in turn, may have been conducive to obliterating this flamboyant figure from the social memory of the estate's inhabitants by making him like many others (e.g., like the above-mentioned professors, who have streets named after them in other parts of the city). It is worth emphasizing, however, that the community considers them as symbols, and him—not.

Among the names of the estate given by the inhabitants (and known to them), "Abisynia" definitely prevails (15 replies). Some of the respondents noted that the name had been given to the estate at its beginning and then slipped into oblivion, only to resurface lately on a large scale. The revival of the name can be attributed to the publication in 2017 of a book on the estate's history by Aleksander Przybylski and is evidence of the considerable influence local leaders have on the identity processes. Among other names, references to Grunwald prevailed (the name of the district of Poznań where Abisynia is located). "Grunwald" was mentioned by 7 people, "Old Grunwald" by 3; single respondents also mentioned "Grunwald near the football stadium," "on Grunwaldzka St." and "Grunwald South." The name "Mądralin" was mentioned twice but in fact only refers to a fragment of the estate. There were also references to the nearby City Stadium. In addition to the above-mentioned "Grunwald near the football stadium," the respondents also mentioned "near the Lech stadium" (Lech is one of the city's sports teams) and "the estate near the football stadium." "Kasztelanów estate" was mentioned three times—it is the name of the unit in the metropolitan information system. In two cases, the respondents mentioned "Pogodno" (which is a nearby estate).

Finally, I should ponder the replies to the arguably most important identity-related question that the inhabitants of Abisynia were asked—the straightforward question of whether they feel they are Abisynians. 69% of the respondents ($n=49$) replied in the affirmative, 17% ($n=12$) could not provide a straight answer, 10% ($n=7$) replied in the negative, whereas 4% ($n=3$) disregarded the issue altogether.

In a summary of the replies to the identity-related questions (the name of the estate, its symbol and typical inhabitant, an evaluation of the estate and its role in the city, etc.), attention should be drawn to their diverse yet approving nature. In their statements, the respondents presented the positive features of a typical Abisynian; according to them, the symbols of the estate were people of merit, or interesting architecture. Frequently, they displayed enthusiasm in regard to their place of residence. As was the case with the research conducted in Poznań in 1928 by Znaniecki, the general picture of Abisynia is positive, although, interestingly, very heterogeneous. The picture becomes much more distinct when compared with the image of the entire city. Against the background of Poznań, Abisynia seems to be an ideal community: full of wonderful, wise, and well-educated people, performing the role of the city's elite, who help to tackle the estate's problems.

As for the respondents' actual connection with the estate, several aspects were considered in the research. First and foremost, the questions pertained to the number of adult neighbors the respondents knew by full name. The numbers ranged between 0 and 150. On average, they knew 20 neighbors and, after eliminating the extreme results, the number went down to 17. Nearly all the respondents knew at least a dozen or so of their neighbors. This is evidence of a fairly strong social bond, even if its nature cannot be specified.

Notably, the individuals participating in the research into Abisynia were predominantly elderly people with a tertiary education. While this group's over-representation among the respondents may stem from the subject matter, it also reflects the nature of Abisynia as an estate: a place of residence of the upper middle class and one of the residential districts closest to the city center. The issue of choice is significant—barely 23% of the respondents have lived in Abisynia since birth. Most of them moved there as children or as young adults with upwardly-mobile parents or as a result of their own social mobility. Despite the historical changes, including expulsions during the Second World War and the settling of shock workers in the early communist era, the estate remains predominantly a place of residence for people with the same social and demographic features as during its early days. The urban-planning features (the type of development, proximity to the city center) regularly attract new residents with the “desired” social and demographic features to settle in Abisynia. The age of the respondents who moved to Abisynia (rather than living there since birth) is presented in [Table 3](#).

Table 3

The age of the respondents who moved to Abisynia and who have not lived there since birth

Age	N	Share
Total	55	100%
25 and below	24	44%
26–50	26	47%
Above 50	5	9%

Source: the author's compilation.

As for the needs satisfied by the inhabitants of Abisynia directly on the estate, it is mostly daily purchases of staple foods (indicated by almost half of the respondents), followed by broadly defined social needs (meeting friends, neighbors, family members—22 indications), recreation and relaxation (13 indications), enjoying nature and work in one's garden (7 indications), cultural needs (e.g., in the small local art gallery or a temporary unroofed summer cinema—6 indications). Five respondents declared they could not satisfy any of their needs in Abisynia; one said they rarely could. Five other respondents stated that they simply lived there. Four respondents work in Abisynia; only one goes to a local school. Three people mentioned using local service providers (a hairdresser, a beautician). Two claimed that all or nearly all their needs were satisfied locally.

Where do the inhabitants of Abisynia satisfy their needs outside the estate? In fact, everywhere, although in the replies, Poznań prevailed (as a whole—12 indications; the city center—23 indications, its specific parts and districts—in total 31 indications; the immediate vicinity of Abisynia—18 indications) or the surrounds (green areas or the satellite towns—5 indications). In addition, other large Polish cities were indicated twice, all of Poland once, places abroad twice, the entire world once; three respondents wrote “wherever I can.” As for going beyond Abisynia, the major reasons were cultural needs (the theater, the cinema, an exhibition, meetings with interesting people), large shopping expeditions, relaxation in the open air, and travelling. In general, this reflects quite a characteristic and, it seems, harmonious lifestyle where the inhabitants make use of the

closest offerings and go elsewhere when it is not enough. Aside from single requests for another café and the organization of a larger number of cultural events, the respondents were not critical about the activities taking place on the estate. On the one hand, this is evidence of the estate's rather good infrastructural development, the proximity of venues satisfying inhabitants' most urgent needs, and easy access to the other parts of the city. On the other hand, this is also proof of a realistic evaluation of the possible development of the estate and its immediate surroundings (it is a completely developed area, it would be hard to imagine construction of, e.g., a large store there). To many respondents, Abisynia is just a residential area near the city center, which may explain their acceptance of the relatively limited cultural offerings on the estate, despite their high ambitions—as people who consider themselves the city's elite—of participating in culture.

Four respondents did not answer the question about the possibility of their moving out of Abisynia; four others were planning to move out (due to the noise and smog). 63 people excluded this possibility for as long as it was up to them. There were many emotionally charged replies: "Never!" (14, 31, 39); "No, this is my home" (32); "No, I feel very good here and I highly appreciate it" (69); "One day, to the cemetery" (42); "Yes, to the nearest cemetery" (68). The unwillingness to move out and the emotional attitude toward the very idea of it is in accord with the respondents' previously described high opinion of Abisynia. The respondents do not want to move out because they consider the place ideal or almost ideal.

In the research conducted by Znaniecki, opinions on the activity of the city authorities were of great importance. In the recent research, the inhabitants of Abisynia had an opportunity to express their opinions on the auxiliary self-government unit—the Council of Grunwald South—which is responsible for their place of residence. 11 individuals did not reply to the question about their opinion of the council's activity; 28 people declared lack of interest in its activity or had problems in referring to it. Only 14 respondents had a positive opinion about the council or supported it. 8 people used the question as an opportunity to write down their ideas of how to improve things or to indicate the estate's problems (poorly adjusted traffic lights, too heavy local traffic, etc.). 10 people had negative opinions about the council's work (the council does nothing for the population of Abisynia, does not communicate with the inhabitants and does not take their opinions into consideration). Among these 10 people, 4 indicated the reason for the situation, namely (in their opinion) the geographic merger of Abisynia, a district of standalone houses, and the Copernicus Estate (Osiedle Kopernika) comprising apartment buildings, into a single administrative unit. The councilors come from the apartment buildings and are only interested in that part of the unit. This subject seems of special importance in light of the social and urban-planning differences between Abisynia and the surrounding estates. On the one hand, the needs of people living in apartment buildings and standalone houses may be dramatically different. On the other hand, it is hard to ignore the fact that the inhabitants of Abisynia are so critical about the local authorities because they have a very positive self-stereotype. In the estate's difficult infrastructural conditions (poor roads and pavements, problems with parking when football matches take place in the nearby stadium), it is relatively easy to put the blame on the councilors, who are outsiders. A supposition that the elitist population of Abisynia could organize itself effectively enough to solve its problems single-handedly, or force the city authorities to act, was strongly dismissed by the respondents. From their

point of view, it is impossible for the Abisynians to act on those issues due to the specific administrative structure. At the same time, their responses are devoid of the economization of relations between the city and its inhabitants that was typical in Znaniecki's research. In 2019, the respondents did not boast of their financial contribution to the city's operations nor did they feel that they were therefore "even" in regard to the authorities and support for the district. Of course, this is a sign of the times (a better economic situation, significant changes in the social security system) as well as the result of the different profile of inhabitants in Abisynia as compared with the entire city. The district is relatively affluent and thus the inhabitants do not expect personal allowances, benefits or the provision of leisure activities from the city (the inhabitants take care of these issues themselves) but want better organization of the traffic and support of the infrastructure.

At the request of the Abisynia Association of Inhabitants, which helped me with the data collecting, I added a question about the organization's operations. Only 4 respondents abstained from replying to it, 8 knew nothing on the subject, 4 people provided specific examples of the Association's activities, 4 other respondents expressed their support, and 1 person shared an idea for a new activity. As many as 50 people (70%) rated the Association positively, especially the outdoor "O!Płotek" art gallery managed by the Association. Two things are worth mentioning: first, the organization's volunteers helped to conduct the research and this could have influenced the replies; and second, the positive image of the Association (a bottom-up initiative of the inhabitants) corresponds to the enthusiastic evaluation of the "typical Abisynian."

Discussion of the Results and Summary

Among the most characteristic principles of Znaniecki's research was his treatment of the city as a humanist whole, co-created but also appraised by the inhabitants. Despite the holistic approach, the results of the research revealed diverse opinions depending on the area of the city's operations that was analyzed (Znaniecki 1931). The research conducted in Abisynia was also of a two-faceted nature: on the one hand, I treated the estate as a whole, co-created by the physicality of material objects and the inhabitants' activity but, on the other hand, I evaluated it in regard to its different aspects.

The results of the research conducted in Abisynia are difficult to compare with Znaniecki's results, mainly due to the above-mentioned differences in methodology and research object. However, I will point out some of the fundamental differences and similarities between the results of these two research projects in order to provide a better understanding of how the estate is perceived by its residents.

Unlike in the research conducted by Znaniecki, the inhabitants of Abisynia spoke highly about the social relations in their place of residence and were critical about the municipal solutions and the other physical elements of the urban space. This is in contrast to 1928, when residents generally spoke generously about the city but criticized more specific issues related to its functioning.

In his analyses, Znaniecki (1931) drew attention to the respondents' strongly critical opinions about their social environment: predominantly all the categories to which the

respondents did not belong were criticized, but so were those they had co-created. To some extent, the inhabitants of Abisynia fit this description (negative opinions on younger people, the other inhabitants of Poznań, etc.) but a large majority of them are enthusiastic about the members of their own Abisynian group and their activities, the association of inhabitants, the local art gallery, and so forth. Znaniecki mentioned the respondents' need for more regulated organization of the social relations in the city; the inhabitants of Abisynia believe that they are part of a local social organization. This is fascinating because the inhabitants of Abisynia can hardly be considered a commune (*gmina*) in the sense that Znaniecki (1931) gave that word. Abisynia does not have an organized power structure. All social services for the estate and power are in the hands of higher territorial units. Given the essential groups formed by the inhabitants (Znaniecki 1931), the Abisynians can at most constitute a public (*publiczność*)—by observing and judging the actions of city officials. They do so through the profile of the local association on Facebook. Interestingly, in spite of Znaniecki's conclusions in 1928, ninety years later the community-related needs of the city dwellers are not satisfied by the municipality, as suggested by Znaniecki, but by a smaller social and spatial unit without its own authorities or administration. The Abisynians work to tidy their housing estate: they pick up litter, plant flowers along the streets, and renovate the historical elements of small architectural structures (pumps, fences). They seek financial support from the city but do not expect the city authorities to do these things for them or on their behalf.

Contrary to the inhabitants of Poznań in 1928, the Abisynians do not display any manifestations of a hero cult. In 1928, the then president of the city, Cyryl Ratajski, was such a hero. He was assessed very positively, even given the negative assessments of the city or municipal authorities. The inhabitants of Abisynia consider many people to be symbols of their estate, but it would not be easy to point to one individual hero in their statements. Perhaps these very positive feelings, which were channeled into one person in 1928, are rather manifested in the Abisynians' above-mentioned enthusiastic assessment of their own community.

Abisynia is an interesting example of an affluent district with a relatively long history which, over time, has been surrounded by younger estates with a different type of development, inhabited by other categories of inhabitants. This type of unit is typically described in the context of subsequent urban-planning processes (chiefly occurring after the Second World War). The affiliation between the Abisynians' self-stereotype and the stereotype of a suburban district is striking. This positive stereotype has been questioned since at least the 1960s (cf. Gans 2017). The idea that these "good" districts are home to conformism, misogyny (Kenyon 2004: 69–94), crime, and the most sophisticated forms of discrimination (Stevenson 2013), while the inhabitants lead sad and empty lives, are today a regular element of analyses, as well as a common cultural motif, at least in the Western world (Jurca 2011). Meanwhile, in the eyes of the locals, Abisynia is a beautiful and elitist place populated by the urban high society. This nearly idyllic interpretation is accompanied by a much less favorable opinion of the entire city and the inhabitants of the nearby estates, which consist predominantly of large apartment buildings. Such an interpretation of a specific district located close to the city center is not entirely atypical: positive interpretations of life beyond the city center are generally connected with higher

financial status, which translates into a higher quality of living (Clark 1966: 229). The Abisynians do not focus on their income or assets; to describe themselves, they use a wide scope of symbolic rather than material values. This may stem from their unwillingness to share information about their wealth, a conviction that assets-related arguments are superficial, a lack of reflection on their own status, or the respondents' belief that their status was inherited rather than achieved.

Ninety years ago, Abisynia was a typical suburb where the locals could enjoy nature on a regular basis; representatives of the middle and upper-middle class were attracted to a neighborhood with modern infrastructure and avant-garde architecture. However, the district could hardly be referred to as a suburb today; bearing in mind the urban expansion of Poznań, Abisynia is now among the estates closest to the city center. Despite the historical changes, it has remained relatively homogenous, as evidenced by the large share of people with a tertiary education and their conviction of the elitist nature of this place of residence. At the same time, the elitist nature is undermined by infrastructural problems and difficult surroundings.

I believe that the research conducted in Abisynia proves that the methods Znaniecki (1931) proposed almost a hundred years ago are still attractive for contemporary sociology of the city. By understanding urban space and focusing on the specific topics characteristic of Znaniecki's research, it is possible explain urban processes today. Of course, the research presented in this text has limitations and differs methodologically from Znaniecki's. However, it also proves that Znaniecki's work is not solely a ready-made model for reuse but can also be an inspiration for new solutions.

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Biographical Note: Łukasz Skoczyłas (Ph.D.) is an Assistant Professor at Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland, Faculty of Sociology. His main research interests are social memory, the legacy of Florian Znaniecki, and the sociology of law.

ORCID iD: [0000-0002-5946-2731](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5946-2731)

E-mail: lukasz.skoczyłas@amu.edu.pl