

Report on the IGU Gender Commission Workshop 2014: “The Gendering of New Realities: Unequal Challenges and Responsibilities”, 16-17 August 2014

The IGU Pre-conference Workshop on “The Gendering of New Realities: Unequal Challenges and Responsibilities” was held at the Faculty of Geography and Regional Studies, at the University of Warsaw on 16 and 17 of August 2014. The Department of Geography at the University of Warsaw was established as part of the Faculty of Philosophy in 1918. Currently the Faculty of Geography and Regional Studies employs 100 academic staff working in three institutes: the Institute of Physical Geography, the Institute of Socio-Economic Geography and Spatial Management, and the Institute of Regional and Global Studies and two independent departments: the Department of Geoinformatics and Remote Sensing and the Department of Cartography. At the Faculty there are nearly 1000 students enrolled in two programs: Geography and Spatial Management. The institution offers also both doctoral and postgraduate programs.

The Workshop was organized thanks to the initiative of the IGU Gender and Geography Commission. Bogumiła Lisocka-Jaegermann from the Institute of Regional and Global Studies and Mirosław Grochowski from the Institute of Socio-Economic Geography and Spatial Management were in charge of it on behalf of the Faculty of Geography and Regional Studies. About 20 researchers responded to the workshop call representing academic institutions from Brazil (Universidade Estadual da Ponta Grossa; Universidade Federal da Rondônia), Czech Republic (Charles University in Prague), Israel (Tel Aviv University), Italy (University of Milan-Bicocca), Japan (Doshisha University; Sugiyama Jogakuen University; Nara University; Osaka Prefecture University; Ochanomizu University), Norway (Norwegian University of Science and Technology), Singapore (National University of Singapore), United States of America (University of Arizona; University of Florida, Tampa) and Poland (University of Warsaw; Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning of the Polish Academy of Sciences). Among the co-authors of papers there were also researchers from Macquarie University, Sydney.

The Chair of the IGU Gender and Geography Commission, Shirlena Huang (National University of Singapore) and the Dean of the Faculty of Geography and Regional Studies, University of Warsaw, Andrzej Lisowski opened the workshop. During the two days of the workshop, 15 papers were presented within 4 thematic sessions.

- I. Gendered/Feminist Perspectives on Knowledge Production
- II. Women, Work and the Market
- III. Negotiating Gendered Spaces and Representations,
- IV. Gendered Participation and Public Policy

Discussions on the papers and on the problems emerging were an important part of the workshop. Among the leading issues debated were the following:

1. the presence of women among academics in geography and conditions of their research activities in different national contexts (including Japan, Brazil and Poland);
2. methodological and ethical problems related to feminist geographical research, and more generally social research conducted in ‘othered’ cultural settings (such as among indigenous women in Mexico, aboriginal groups in Australia, and Japanese academics studied by a Spaniard);

3. the strength of gendered stereotypes shaping everyday practices and male and female behavior in public space and the role of the media in their propagation and perpetuation;
4. the diversity of patterns in men and women's public involvement and activities (for instance, among the Korean minority in Japan, and among inhabitants of urban neighborhoods in Israel); and
5. women's position in the job market in times of economic crisis and/or economic and political transformations.

Among the conclusions of the workshop was the idea compiling a set of articles describing diversity of conditions that shape gender /feminist geography research in different national, regional and institutional contexts.

The workshop was the first academic meeting devoted to gender dimension of geographical research held in Poland, and it offered the opportunity of meeting prominent scholars representing the field including many of the Gender Commission's current and past Steering Committee members, such as Janice Monk, Tovi Fenster, Ragnhild Lund and Marcella Schmidt Muller di Friedberg. The visible presence of researchers coming from Japan, where the previous IGU pre-conference took place shows the importance of meetings that bring the Gender Commission's research perspectives to the countries and institutions where the interest in gender oriented geographical studies is only emerging. The Polish participants of the workshop coming from the Faculty of Economy and the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology presented results of gender and spatially focused research within their corresponding disciplines.

Of particular significance was the discussion of the reasons for the absence of gender geography in Poland and the prospects of its development in future, presented by Bogumiła Lisocka-Jaegermann. The organization of the workshop at the Faculty of Geography and Regional Studies has made Gender and Geography studies visible to a wider academic community of geographers, as well as decision makers, in Warsaw. We do expect that this will contribute to better perspectives for gender-oriented research and teaching among women/feminist geographers in Poland. Being part of the IGU Gender and Geography Commission network should be helpful as well, although we are aware of the financial and institutional constraints.

Apart from academic discussions, the workshop participants took part in a dinner party offered by the Center of Social Communication of the Warsaw City Authorities, in the City Hall as well as a "walking study tour" of the city. The tour introduced the participants to the history of the city, changes within its social and economic space taking place before and after the II WW till today.

Program of the "Walking Study Tour"

The idea for the "walking study tour" was to use Warsaw's downtown and surrounding areas to show and talk about changes in urban space under specific conditions of transformation period from the communist regime to democracy. The changes started exactly 25 years ago, in 1989, and this period has brought enormous changes to Warsaw, that have found their

footprint in physical, social and economic space of the city. New rules of urban development management were introduced and new concepts of the city development were developed. They have played crucial role in the new urban environment creation. Since the time for the “walking study tour” was limited careful selection of places to visit was made.

1. The tour started at Krakowskie Przedmieście Street, where the University of Warsaw main campus is located. University of Warsaw is one of the biggest and most important universities in the Poland. It was created in 1816 as the Royal Warsaw University, with a combined Law/ Administration School and Medical School. In 1831, after the November Uprising, the University was closed by the Russian authorities. When it re-opened, it functioned as the Medical-Surgical Academy, then as the Main School (1862-1869), but after the January Uprising, it was closed again. As a tool of the ‘Russification’ of Poland, the Tsarist Warsaw University was created with Russian as the language of instruction, and with most of the professors coming from Russia. The present incarnation of University of Warsaw has been in existence since 1915, although in the times of the German occupation the University was transformed into the barracks of the military police, and the library into a German library. The first classes took place right after the war, as soon as 1945.
2. Krakowskie Przedmieście Street is a part of the Royal Route – one of the most representative streets of the city, as it combines a series of old royal residences. It starts at Zamkowy Square, goes through Łazienki Królewskie, and then on to Wilanów – the Residence of Polish Kings. Krakowskie Przedmieście after a complete rebuilding was changed into a wide promenade with a narrow street in the middle. Along the sidewalks, glass-covered placards with reproductions of Canaletto’s paintings of 18th century Warsaw have been placed. During summer weekends, the street is closed for traffic. We walked Krakowskie Przedmieście to Piłsudskiego Square.
3. Piłsudskiego Square is the place where the most important state ceremonies connected with Polish history take place. The Square was built in 1791 and served as the publicly accessible courtyard of the Saxon Palace (which was destroyed in 1944). Between 1894 and 1912, it was called Saski Square, and the Russian authorities built the monumental Orthodox Cathedral (the Orthodox church of St. Alexander Nevsky). The church was demolished in 1924-1926 when Poland regained its independence. During World War II, Saxon Palace was the headquarters for Hitler’s staff. In 1979, the Square was called Victory Square, and it was where Pope John Paul II celebrated his famous mass during his first pilgrimage to Poland; the mass gathered 500,000 people. To commemorate this event in the 1980s – despite the opposition of the communist authorities, a cross with flowers was arranged in the exact place the Pope’s altar stood. Today, a monument of a cross stands in this place.
4. The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier – a symbolic tomb commemorating the nameless who fell in battle while fighting for Poland’s freedom. The tomb is situated under the arched arcade of the Saski Palace destroyed during World War II. An eternal flame burns by the tomb, watched over by a military honour guard. The Tomb is located next to the park where the statue of “Geography” is located and where participants of the “walking study tour” commemorated their visit with photos 😊 .



5. Europejski Hotel – one of the best hotels in Warsaw currently under renovation served as an example of complicated situation concerning ownership rights. After the war all properties were taken away from their owners. When the system changed former owners started to claim their properties back. There is no re-privatization legislation implemented which makes planning and urban management very difficult. Re-privatization is among the most needed regulations that are crucial for urban development facilitation.
6. Grzybowski Square and Próźna Street – served as an example of urban renewal program implemented in Warsaw from 2005. Assumptions and practice of the urban renewal program were presented and supplemented by stories on Jewish population in Warsaw and on Warsaw Uprising. This area belongs to the part of Warsaw inhabited before the war by Jewish population. Próźna Street is one of the few places where Jews lived before the war, in which the vibe of the old Warsaw has survived. The Jewish atmosphere of the area is evoked by the “Singer’s Warsaw” festival, which is held every year in late August and early September, and on the façades of the buildings you can see the open-air exhibition “And I Still See Their Faces” – presenting pictures of the pre-war Jewish population.
7. The Warsaw Uprising broke out on August 1, 1944. It was one of the most fundamental yet dramatic events in the city’s history. Anticipated for a few days, it lasted over 2 months. The Insurgents wanted to liberate the capital city from the Hitler’s occupation before the entry of the Soviet Army and thus ensure Poland’s sovereignty after the end of the war. Although numerous, the insurgent forces had to face a regular, fully militarized German army without relevant weaponry. Sadly, being denied any assistance from the allies, they were doomed to fail. The support they hoped for never came. Clashed between two mighty armies, the Soviets and the Germans, the Uprising slowly bled out. Every year,

Warsaw pays tribute to the Insurgents. The national flags are hung on the street of Warsaw and candles are lit in places sacred with the blood of the murdered residents of the city. In the Powiązki Military Cemetery, under the Gloria Victis monument, the representatives of the highest state authorities, combatants and residents of the capital lay flowers. At 5:00 PM, for one minute the whole traffic freezes and the sirens are sounded. Our preconference meeting took place in August, the first month of the Uprising. Thus, while walking participants of the tour could see flowers and candles placed in different locations in the city to commemorate the Insurgents.

8. From Grzybowski Square we walked to The Nożyk Synagogue. The Synagogue is located in the neo-Romanesque building built in 1898–1902 on the initiative of Zalman and Rivka Nożyk. During the war the Germans converted it into stables. Despite the damage, shortly after the war it regained its original function. In addition to church services, various cultural events such as concerts, exhibitions, and meetings are also held in the synagogue. In the vicinity of the synagogue, there is the seat of the Jewish commune.
9. From the Nożyk Synagogue we walked to the Palace of Culture and Science. Completed in 1955 as a ‘gift from the Soviet people’, the building is the embodiment of Socialist Realist architecture. The building still fulfils the role of a cultural centre accommodating theatres, museums, a cinema and a concert hall. This is also the highest viewing platform in Warsaw, on the 30th floor. The palace is one of the largest conference facilities in Warsaw, accommodating more than 4,500 participants at a time, at dozens of meetings and training conferences annually. The Congress Hall (Sala Kongresowa) and Concert Hall (Sala Koncertowa) are the most important concert halls in Poland. The Palace was built on the area of pre-war Warsaw’s downtown. It changed the landscape of Warsaw and its urban layout. The signs of pre-war history are only markers in the sidewalks showing location of streets and their intersections.
10. Złota, Twarda, Towarowa, Chłodna, Grzybowska, Prosta street – post industrial areas in Warsaw and location of the Jewish Ghetto. In the 1930s, the Jewish population was about 30% of the city’s population, actively participating in its life. The outbreak of war marked the end of the world known so far to the Warsaw Jews. Occupation authorities ordered them to wear the Star of David, and outlined the area where they could live. In October 1940, the Germans established a ghetto and locked 350,000 people identified as Jews behind its walls. Jews deported from other Polish cities and Europe were also placed in the ghetto. The area of the ghetto was continuously reduced by dividing it in early 1942 into the so-called “large” and “small” ghetto. These individual parts were connected only by a footbridge over Chłodna Street. Deportations of Jews from the ghetto to concentration camps started in 1942. Still thousands of people remained in the ghetto and they decided to struggle with Germans. The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising broke out on April 19, 1943. Jewish fighters were not adequately equipped or trained, but still they put up prolonged resistance. The Ghetto Uprising ended after several weeks. We walked through the streets located in the area of the ghetto; could see examples of architecture, marked in the sidewalk delineation of the ghetto wall.

The “walking study tour” was about the history and contemporary Warsaw. It was good opportunity to see changes and evolution of the city fabric, yet to listen to stories that make the city understandable to inhabitants and visitors.

Bogumiła Lisocka-Jaegermann, Mirosław Grochowski