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The Centre and Periphery: The Role of City Embankments and Youth Practices

Natalya L. Antonova

Ural Federal University, Yekaterinburg, Russia

Anna D. Gurarii

Ural Federal University, Yekaterinburg, Russia

ABSTRACT

The article focuses on city embankments as social and spatial developments, which are an essential attribute of the city and an integral element in the lifestyle of citizens. As a contact point between the city and the water, embankments act as public spaces that exercise a wide range of functions. They also become points of attraction for various social groups, including young people. In the study conducted in autumn of 2021, we focused on the embankments of a large industrial city (Yekaterinburg, Russia). The “centre-periphery” vector was used as the basis for the typology of embankments, and the value young people attach to embankments has been determined. Using the methods of observation and interviews ($n = 16$), it was found that the leading functions of the central embankments in the views of city youth are communicative, aesthetic, integrative, leisure, including *flânerie*, cognitive, transit, self-awareness, security, and identity assertion. Peripheral embankments structure the city space, develop neighbourhood identity and support the function of spending free time. At the same time, undeveloped areas of the periphery are being marginalised and become dangerous. The article argues for the need to develop peripheral embankments through well-maintained footpaths, access to water, leisure and recreational infrastructure, creating comfortable living conditions for the “appropriation” of embankments and their social production through the actions and interactions of different groups of citizens, including young people.

KEYWORDS

city, city embankment, centre and periphery, youth, social practices

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Introduction

In urban planning, there has been a transition to the “city for people” model, the foundation of which can be sought in the works of the American researcher Jane Jacobs (1961), who formulated the tenets in defence of urban planning based on the daily life of citizens. Public spaces play one of the critical roles in the urban environment. Their multitude of functions is reflected in their use by citizens: for walking, travelling for work, doing sports, enjoying street entertainment, playing games also with children, and others. According to Ray Oldenburg (2000), these spaces become “the third place” where individuals and groups spend their time between work, study and home. The “third place” becomes a key factor in developing urban identity, a condition for emotional attachment to the city and a sense of belonging to the community of citizens. As urban infrastructure objects, river embankments are public spaces with frontiers. On the one hand, there is a river line, and on the other, there is an area where residential and industrial facilities, parks, squares and other green zones are located. Everyday use of public spaces has changed; there has been a transformation in the perceptions of public spaces from an integral part of the city to a recreational space (Gehl & Matan, 2009).

For young people, open and accessible public spaces offer ample opportunities for constructing social and communicative experiences in contrast to rigid institutional places—structures (Emmenegger, 1995).

Our research focused on the functional content of central and peripheral city embankments as public spaces and the analysis of practices of young people who “appropriate” city embankments by performing a variety of activities.

Theoretical Framework

As a complex polyfunctional formation, the city consists of such subsystems as demographic, technical and environmental. The latter includes the natural environment—green areas (parks, gardens, and squares) and water space (reservoirs) (Zelenov, 2000, p. 94). Embankments are an essential attribute of the city and historically fit into the lifestyle of citizens by “responding” to the challenges of economic restructuring and political will. According to Brian Hoyle (2001), waterfronts, being a contact point between city and water, is a public space that connects the old historical heritage of the settlement with a new vision of functionality and significance for the city as a whole.

Since the middle of the XX century, the interest of authorities and urban researchers in embankments has been growing. It is associated with their new perception of embankments as the leading spaces which attract people and capital (Smith & Garcia Ferrari, 2012). As a result, embankments began to turn into recognisable public spaces. Examples include the waterfronts in Sydney, Toronto, Cape Town, London and Barcelona. According to Porfyriou and Sepe (2017), transformations in the perception of

embankments are due to the transition to a post-industrial economy, which has changed the types and forms of production and employment. According to Robert F. Goodwin (1999), efficient embankment design enhances the city's image, modernises infrastructure, increases economic revenues and enhances tourism opportunities. However, the complexity of the structure and fragmentation of river lines and the clash of interests of different social groups become barriers to the design and planning of embankments (Wrenn, 1983); decades can pass from an idea to its implementation.

The city waterfront gives the city individuality. Betsy Otto et al. (2004) stress the value of physical and visual access to water in developing a sense of community with nature. Observation corridors allow people to “embrace” the city and provide an opportunity to see the city from different angles and areas. Embankments and water aestheticise urban space; people should be able to touch the water and interact with it (Wood & Handley, 1999).

Paumier (2004) posits that city embankments, or rather the proximity of water, are a natural magnet for city residents and visitors and act as a valuable recreational resource. The development of retail, entertainment and cultural events attract people of different ages and status groups to the embankments (Brown et al., 2009). Various individual and collective practices are developing on the embankments: from group walks to protest behaviour. Attracting people to embankments can reproduce the connection between the city as a social and architectural development and the water as the basis for developing the city shape.

Researchers of urban space frame their ideas and observations in the concept of “centre-periphery”, in which the periphery is, first of all, the area remote from the centre (Sawyer et al., 2021). This geographical division should also be complemented by social attributes. Zhelnina (2019) argues that peripherality may also be characterised by limited incoming resources such as financial, administrative, and a resource of attention (media, political, and public). The author concludes that peripherality is characterised by social characteristics and specific temporality.

In line with the “centre-periphery” concept, we draw attention to the nature and intensity of social practices implemented on the city's embankments and the level of emotional appropriation of embankments by citizens and visitors of the city. However, the research also looks at the periphery as a marginalised area, and peripherality (Danson & De Souza, 2012) can be viewed as a result of impotence since peripheral actors are excluded from decision-making networks (Kühn et al., 2017). Thus, the social and spatial polarisation of the city (Badyina & Golubchikov, 2005) reinforces inequality and exaggerates the dependence of the periphery from the centre. In this case, inconsistent integration of peripheral embankments into the structure of the city is suggested; unlike the central embankments, they are stigmatised; it creates conditions for the replication of informal practices and the reproduction of deviant behaviour. In addition, based on the ideas of Chernysheva (2019), we suggest that the description of peripheral embankments in the terminology of marginalisation entails the risks of creating marginal (alienated from the citizens) areas since this category changes reality.

However, Friedmann (1966) argues that the development of the periphery both depends on the centre and supports the centre's development. At the same time,

in the context of the Gutnov's (1984) "framework-fabric" model, the development of peripheral embankments (refurbishment of the area, development of infrastructure with the involvement of businesses, and transport accessibility) has the potential of becoming a factor that blurs the boundaries between the centre and the periphery. Moreover, the increase in "fabric" may contribute to the "appropriation" of the area not only by residents of nearby houses but also by other citizens and visitors.

Van Aalst and Brands (2021) argue that being together with other people, particularly in city parks, even without extensive communication, is an essential element of the attractiveness of public space. Social groups and communities participate in the production of central and peripheral embankments by appropriating and consuming public areas through social actions and interactions, transforming their functions, and endowing them with specific values and emotional load.

Flânerie as a social practice is worth special attention. French verb *flâner* is the root of the words *flâneur* and *flânerie* and has a meaning "to take a stroll, to wander around". Initially, this verb described wasteful "doing nothing" and had a negative connotation (Ferguson, 1994). The transformation of ideas about the *flâneur* as a lazy wanderer through the city streets occurred after the appearance of Baudelaire's essay *The Poet of Modern Life* (1965). In the essay, the author speaks of the *flâneur* as an artist—an "ideal flaneur"—a connoisseur of the details of the daily life of the city, who is able to interpret through art his observations about the life of the city and its residents. The concept of *flânerie* thus became a significant tool for theorising city observations. Negative associations faded into the background and placed *flânerie* in a positive context that is "walking around the city for the purpose of research and observation" (Barker, 2014).

With the growth of cities, the diversification of life within the city, and the expansion of the palette of social and cultural practices, the discussion of the phenomenon of *flânerie* again became relevant in the 1990s. According to K. Kramer and J. R. Short (2011), the revival of discussions about *flânerie* as a social phenomenon was mainly due to the increase in the number of translations and, thus, the dissemination of the texts of Simmel, de Certeau and Lefebvre in the late 1980s. *Flânerie* becomes a focus of study for historians (T. McDonough, 2002), anthropologists (J. S. Kahn, 2003), and sociologists (M. Featherstone, 1998; K. Keohane, 2002) (as cited in Kramer & Short, 2011). The result of attention to *flânerie* from various sciences is the allocation of two approaches to understanding the very figure of *flâneur*. The first approach considers the *flâneur* as a methodological actor for explaining research methods, while the second approach sees the *flâneur* as a social category (Coates, 2017). It is essential to draw a distinction between *flânerie* and walking around the city. According to several studies, *flânerie* is a way of exploring the city, which brings to the fore the sensory abilities of the individual (Coates, 2017). According to Barker (2014), *flânerie* is distinguished by its cosmopolitan and global nature; *flânerie* implies not only a balance between observation and reflection but also an understanding of the diversity of social reality and the intention for heterogeneity. Chaudhury and Lundberg (2018) note the increased attention to the phenomenon of *flânerie* and its revival in the 21st century due to the transition of cities to creative economies and industries.

Methods

Our empirical sociological study was conducted in September–November 2021. The main focus of the research was to analyse the functions of city embankments and study youth practices in these public spaces. To achieve the goal, we put forward the following research tasks: first, to determine perceptions of young people about the functions of the city embankments in Yekaterinburg; second, to characterise the types of youth practices on the embankments of Yekaterinburg and highlight the fears and concerns of young people associated with the city embankments.

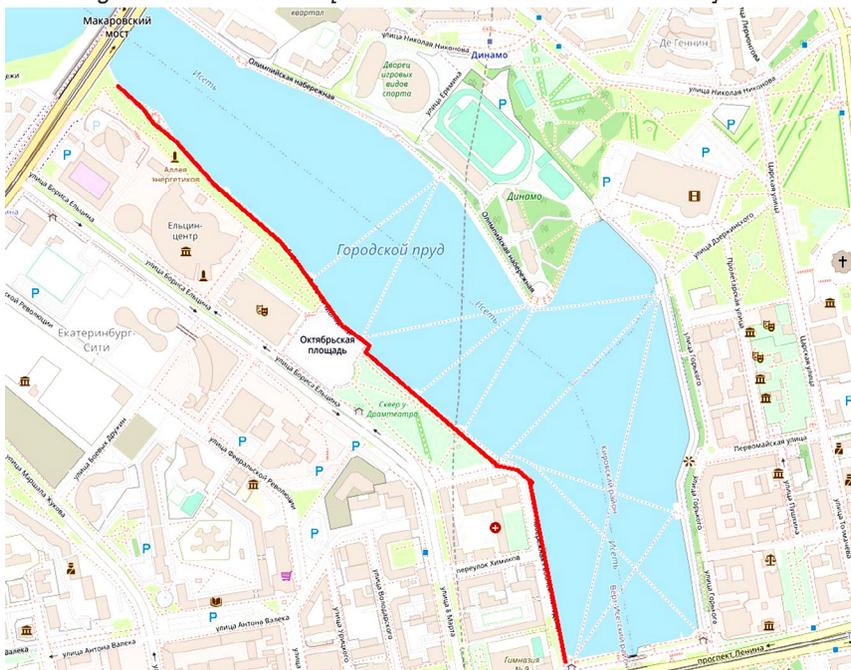
The embankments located within Yekaterinburg, which we designated as central and peripheral, were selected as cases for our analysis. We selected two central and two peripheral city embankments. We excluded embankments adjoined with industrial areas from the analysis since this restriction has become a barrier to observation.

Central embankments:

1. The Working Youth Embankment [Naberezhnaia Rabochei Molodezhi] is located along the bank of the city pond from Lenina Prospect to Cheliuskintsev Street (Figure 1);

Figure 1

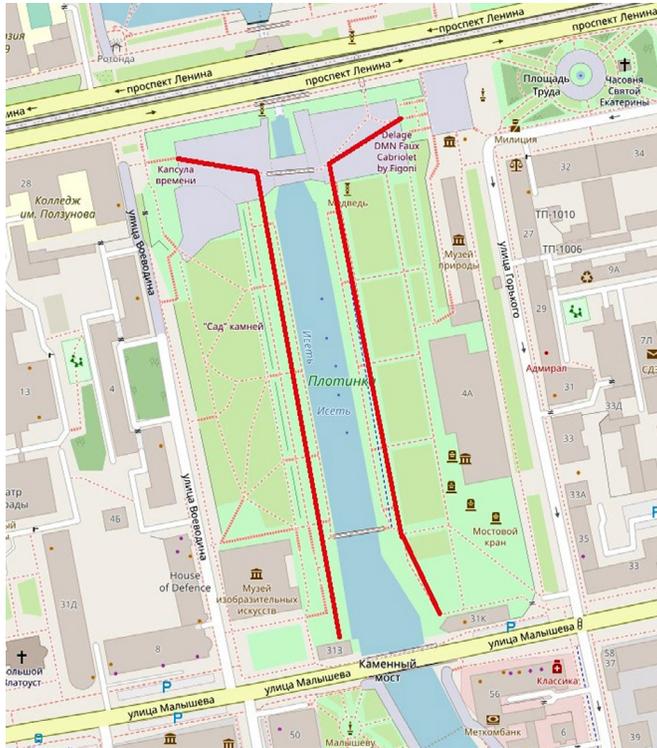
The Working Youth Embankment [Naberezhnaia Rabochei Molodezhi]



Note. Source: www.openstreetmap.org

2. The Plotinka [Dam] Embankment is located in the Historical Public Garden and runs along the banks of the Iset River (Figure 2).

Figure 2
The Plotinka Embankment

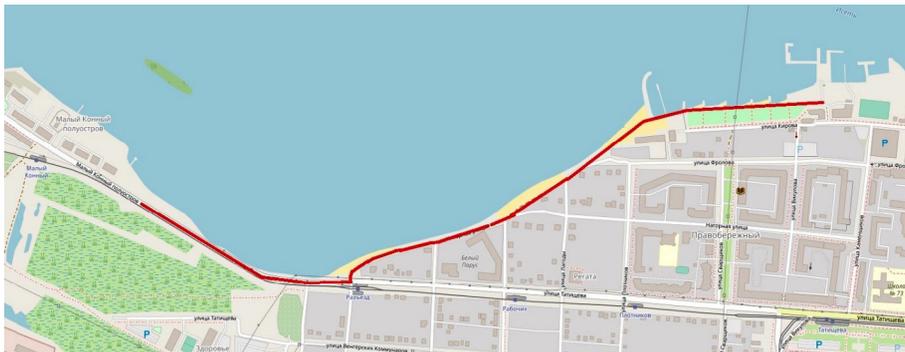


Note. Source: www.openstreetmap.org

Peripheral embankments:

1. The Verkh-Isetskii Pond Embankment is located in the Verkh-Isetskii district stretching from the Malyi Konnyi Peninsula to the Yacht Club (Figure 3);

Figure 3
The Verkh-Isetskii Pond Embankment

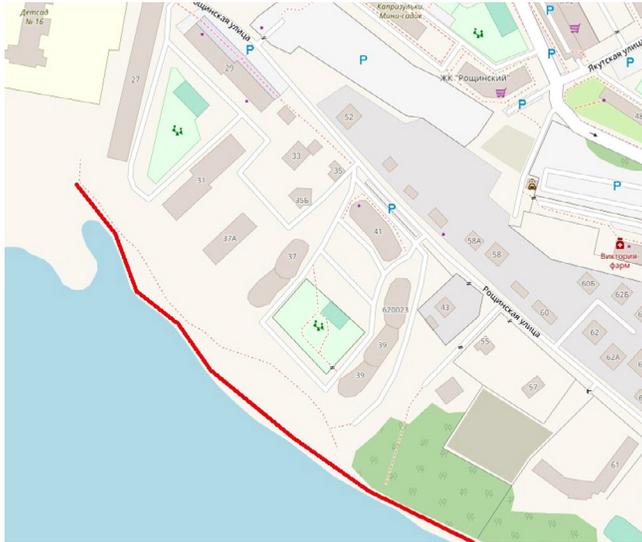


Note. Source: www.openstreetmap.org

2. The Nizhne-Isetskii Pond Embankment is located in the Chkalovskii district of the city and runs along Roshchinskaia Street and Ordenonostsev Street (Figures 4 and 5).

Figure 4

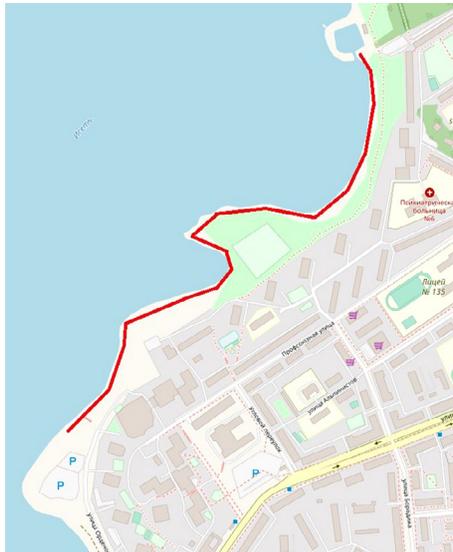
Embankment along Roshchinskaia Street



Note. Source: www.openstreetmap.org

Figure 5

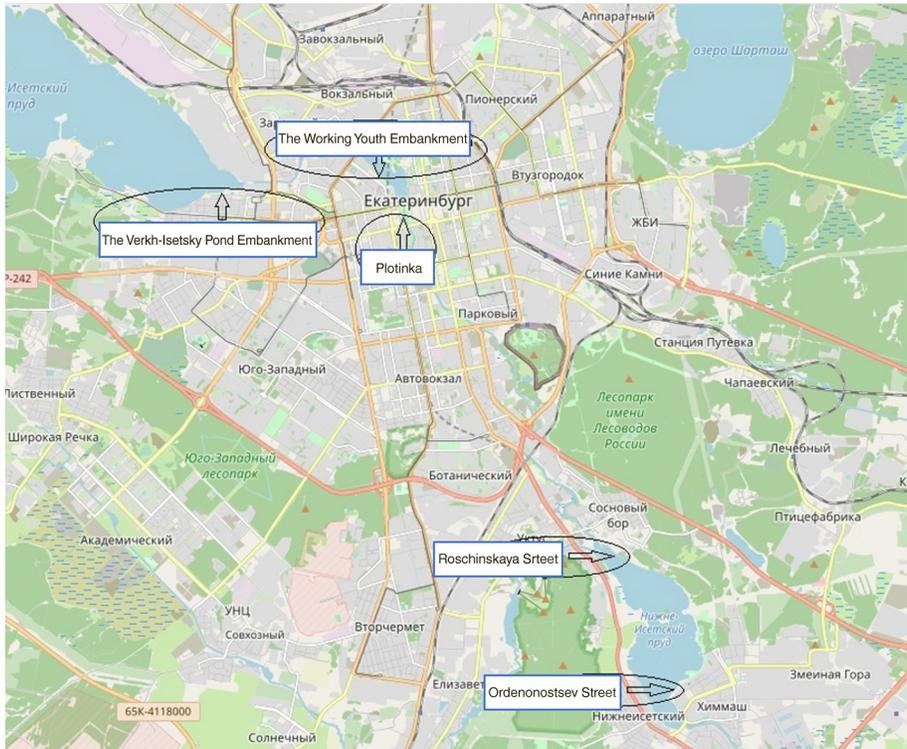
Embankment along Ordenonostsev Street



Note. Source: www.openstreetmap.org

An overall view of the studied embankments is shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6
An Overall View of the Studied Embankments



Note. Source: www.openstreetmap.org

The main methods for collecting information were a series of unstructured observations and semi-structured interviews with young residents of the city. Observations were carried out on working days from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. In total, we conducted eight observations: two observations for each selected case. The observation was carried out by two researchers using a video camera. In addition, 16 respondents, eight males and eight females, aged from 18 to 25, took part in the interviews. All respondents are residents of the city of Yekaterinburg. The respondents were interviewed during the observation on the city's embankments; four interviews were conducted on each embankment. The distribution of respondents is presented in Table 1.

The interview guide consisted of 10 open-ended questions. The average duration of the interview was 25 minutes. The interviews were transcribed and analysed following the research objectives. We also used some methodological principles of theory to identify the structural elements of the phenomenon under study based on the empirical data.

Table 1
The Main Characteristics of the Respondents (n = 16)

Embankments	Characteristics
Working Youth Embankment	female, 23 years old, student female, 25 years old, working male, 21 years old, student male, 24 years old, working
Plotinka	female, 20 years old, student female, 22 years old, student male, 20 years old, student male, 23 years old, working
Verkh-Isetskii Pond	female, 18 years old, student female, 19 years old, student male, 18 years old, student male, 25 years old, working
Nizhne-Isetskii Pond	female, 24 years old, working male, 19 years old, student female, 21 years old, student male, 22 years old, student

The results are not representative and cannot be generalised to all Russian city youth and may also not coincide with the experience of studying embankments in other types of cities. Our study is exploratory and demonstrates the social and functional orientation of a large industrial city’s central and peripheral embankments.

Results and Discussion

The study findings show that young people follow an extensive array of urban embankment practices. All respondents noted primarily the communicative function of the central city embankments as public spaces. The ability to freely communicate “face to face” for the central city embankments was emphasised by young people during the interviews:

I meet with my school friends at Plotinka to chat and exchange information (female, 20 years old).

Of particular importance is the emotional aspect of interpersonal interaction:

We always hug, laugh and rejoice at the meeting (female, 20 years old).

This testifies to the emotional and sensual “appropriation” of the embankment, which becomes a semantic point in the respondents’ communication. In addition, public places are viewed as public spaces for “familiar strangers” to communicate with each other and to expand the circle of acquaintances, “a place where strangers meet” (Lofland, 1989; Sennett, 1977):

Plotinka is where I constantly communicate with friends, classmates, and new people. I am often approached on the Plotinka and asked how to get to some place in the centre. Sometimes people want to introduce themselves (female, 22 years old).

According to Erving Goffman (1963), respondents follow situational etiquette, typical for youth communication in conditions of direct co-presence. Our study shows that the central city embankments act as a place for the reproduction of ritual behavioural scenarios that confirm the identity of the respondents and their belonging to the youth as a socio-demographic group and prevent conflict situations. During observation, we witnessed a meeting of teenagers on the Working Youth Embankment, who greeted each other with friendly claps on their shoulders, performed certain rituals using their hands, and demonstrated the symbolic significance of the meeting as an event in everyday life.

As for the peripheral city embankments, it should be noted that these places can be characterised as areas that are not included in the zone of interests of young people to meet their need for communication:

I live on Roshchinskaya Street, and I never meet friends on the embankment. It is unkempt, I would say even dirty. However, in the centre, everything is beautiful, light, and clean. It's nice to meet friends and hang out there (female, 21 years old).

Therefore, unlike the peripheral ones, the central city embankments perform an aesthetic function. Landscape design, well-kept area, historic buildings adjacent to modern architecture—all this, according to respondents, *creates beauty and harmony, gives positive energy, creates a good mood* (male, 24 years old); *allows enjoying the charm of the river, its fluidity, and, at the same time, the aesthetics of the embankment, its clear and distinct shapes* (female, 25 years old); *allows to relieve fatigue and see how beautiful and powerful our city is* (male, 23 years old).

The aesthetic function of the city central embankments serves as a driver for the assertion and development of urban identity. Young respondents show their engagement with the city through symbolic markers such as the central embankments as a whole:

Plotinka is my favourite place in the city, it is very beautiful there (female, 19 years old).

And architectural structures located nearby:

I consider The Yeltsin Centre a symbolic place, it is located on the embankment (male, 21 years old).

Of course, The Sevastyanov's House, no one will pass by it, it is on the Plotinka (female, 21 years old).

By developing urban identity, the embankments also fulfil an integrative function:

You can meet just about anyone on the Plotinka: men and women, children and the elderly, Russians and other nationals; there are also non-mainstream people, a wide variety of them (male, 21 years old).

The central embankments are open to different social groups and unite them into the community of citizens. As the Russian researcher Glazychev (2017) rightly notes, the creation and development of the city belong to the urban community. Each city has its variations of urban communities (Park, 1952), but the foundation is the possibility of equal use of embankments by each citizen. The respondents specified that the city embankments in the centre are *the areas for everyone* (female, 20 years old); however, as the observation showed, both central and peripheral embankments are not adapted for people with disabilities. They cannot go down the stairs to the Plotinka embankment, and unequipped peripheral embankments make it difficult for them to move. Perhaps the only exception is a small section of the Verkh-Isetskii Pond Embankment, which has access to water and has been renovated by city activists with the support of local businesses. One of the respondents pointed out the limited accessibility of the embankments:

It is a pity that there are elements on the embankments, such as staircases, that impede the movement of wheelchair users; it turns out that they cannot enjoy a walk near the water (female, 24 years old).

Unlike the central ones, peripheral embankments can be viewed as a tool for developing neighbourhood identity. During observation, we found that these embankments are “appropriated” by children for active games. Children use the water space since access to water is not limited by barriers. Without adult control, peripheral embankments unsuitable for children’s play activities may become a source of danger.

The respondents posed the question of free time through the prism of *flânerie*. Following the ideas of Benjamin (2009, as cited in Trubina, 2011), Trubina (2011) notes that *flânerie* assumed such a form of contemplation of urban life, in which detachment and immersion in the rhythms of the city were inseparable. Furthermore, the respondents note that the central embankments act as semantic points in the leisure travel of young people:

I am going to the centre for Plotinka: to see people and show myself. I dress appropriately, and make-up is a must (female, 18 years old).

I can just come to the centre, take a walk along Plotinka, sit on a bench, look at people (female, 24 years old).

Sometimes I go for a walk with a friend to the Plotinka, we chat and watch others (female, 20 years old).

The respondents noted that the central embankments are suitable for *flânerie*: comfortable sidewalks, the presence of benches and parklets, the opportunity to buy coffee and tea both at fixed and mobile catering booths. In motivation for including the central embankments in the semantic map of mobility, the young people noted the opportunity to get new experiences that can be included in their narratives and demonstrated to their subscribers via social networks. Through self-presentation in the information space, young people tell us about themselves and demand recognition. The peripheral embankments (except for a small section on the banks of the Verkh-lsetskii Pond, but it is too small for *flânerie*) are deprived of infrastructure. *Flânerie* as a phenomenon of urban life is an exclusive characteristic of the centre.

Flânerie is a way of exploring the city (Coates, 2017). According to Barker (2014), *flânerie* is distinguished by cosmopolitanism and globality; it implies not only a balance between observation and reflection but also an understanding of the diversity of social reality, the intention for heterogeneity. Free time—*flânerie*—becomes a condition for the implementation of a cognitive function that cannot be fully implemented in the public space of peripheral embankments:

When I walk along Plotinka, I relax and look around at people and buildings (female, 22 years old).

At the same time, not only *flânerie* as a leisure pastime and cognitive function is woven into the functional field of the city's embankments. Embankments also perform a transit function. Castells (1998) rightly raises the question about the space of flows. Thinking about definitions of “placeless”, “other-directed places”, and “non-places”, Pachenkov (2012) concludes that the latter is not only classical transit zones (airport, train station), “it is also the streets and squares of cities, wastelands, transit areas and global shopping places, these are spaces, whose number and role in the life of city residents has been steadily growing over the past five to six decades” (p. 425; our translation—N. A., A. G.).

Our findings show that city embankments are also becoming transit areas that connect points in the coordinate system of everyday mobility of urban youth:

Before the pandemic, I walked along Plotinka every day: from the subway to the university; it is faster than using public transport during rush hour (female, 23 years old).

Subway-Plotinka-University: this is my route in the centre (male, 19 years old).

The central embankments are places of movement and flows; young people “include” them as meaningful points in everyday movements. At the same time, when planning routes, young people often on purpose “sew” embankments into their schedule:

Sometimes I go near the Drama Theater along the embankment on purpose. The road takes 15 minutes longer, but I want to look at the city, the water, the people (male, 21 years old).

However, the extent of exercising the transit function of peripheral embankments is not certain. For instance, the Verkh-Isetskii Pond Embankment has a beach and a path not equipped for pedestrian traffic that runs along the coast. Therefore, transit cannot be a primary function of this embankment. We observed the same situation on the embankment located along Roshchinskaia Street (Nizhne-Isetskii Pond). A different situation was observed on the embankment stretching along Ordenonostsev Street. A distinctive feature of this embankment is its landscaping, namely, an asphalted pedestrian road that runs along the embankment:

We rent an apartment in Khimnash; the windows look out to the pond. When the weather is good, I go out to the embankment and walk along it to the bus stop. It takes longer, but I like it. I walk, dream about something, and immerse myself in my thoughts (female, 24 years old).

The question of self-awareness during *flânerie* and transit movements was raised by 2/3 of the respondents. At the same time, the attention of young citizens is focused on the water area:

I like to look at the water; it pacifies, different thoughts arise: Who am I? What am I? (male, 20 years old)

The water surface calms me and makes me think. Am I doing everything right? Can I change something? How to build relationships with my parents and my loved ones? (female, 23 years old).

The interview findings show that the water becomes a trigger for reflection: self-awareness as awareness and awareness of oneself (Leont'ev, 1975), as the ability to understand one's attitude to oneself and the world (Rubinshtein, 1957). During observations, we also recorded that some young people are "immersed in their inner world".

Our findings show that embankments are not only a place for self-discovery but are also "filled" with various youth activities. The central embankments are the stage of urban activism and subcultural practices. Omel'chenko and Poliakov (2017) argue that the distinctive feature of the stage is "the presence of common meanings of cultural practices shared by all participants" (p. 126). In this sense, the central embankments of the city have become the "third place" in which youth subcultural identities are reproduced. For example, in our study, the central embankments, both the Plotinka and the Working Youth, became a place of attraction for skaters.

The central embankments also serve as venues for significant public events: the City Day, the Music Night, and others. On the one hand, such city events are designed to unite citizens and contribute to developing urban identity. However, on the other hand, as a third of the respondents noted, they reflect the deviational heterotopia of the central embankments:

There are too many people at Plotinka on the City Day; people bring alcohol, they are swearing, and after the celebration, there is rubbish all around; it's unpleasant (female, 24 years old).

Unlike the central embankments, the peripheral ones can be a place for local collective practices of celebrating both personal events and those of social significance. According to the respondents, such practices are used by young people who *cannot afford going to cafes* (female, 20 years old). These practices are distinguished by drinking alcoholic beverages, loud laughter and talking, as well as *garbage after gatherings, plastic bottles floating in the water and dirty bushes around* (female, 20 years old). The respondents believe that such groups destroy the natural landscape and can be a source of environmental degradation:

On Verkh-Isetskii Pond, a site with a beach was recently renovated, but if you go further, there is garbage. People are not used to cleaning up after themselves: they eat, rest and leave everything behind (male, 25 years old).

Therefore, unequipped embankments on the periphery become points of attraction for such practices. The lack of public control due to the small number of people, insecurity and unattractiveness of the place determine the nature of such practices.

The findings from the interviews and observations show that the city embankments are used to meet the needs of young people for physical activity:

You can meet runners on Plotinka, but I do not know if they come to run on purpose or live nearby (female, 20 years old).

The proximity of residential buildings to places that can satisfy the need for physical activity on the peripheral embankments becomes a factor in their attractiveness:

I often watch old women with Nordic walking sticks and young runners on the embankment of the Nizhne-Isetskii Pond (female, 24 years old).

In addition to keeping the body in a healthy physical condition, the respondents also pointed to such individual actions implemented on the peripheral embankments as:

- (a) young women walking with their children—*mothers with strollers walk, sometimes in pairs* (female, 24 years old);
- (b) fishing—*I watched fishermen on the Verkh-Isetskii Pond, these were not young people, but older men, it seems that this is their hobby* (female, 19 years old);
- (c) waterfowl feeding (ducks)—*ducks are fed with bread, families with children bring it from home, I would also feed them, but I forget* (female, 21 years old);
- (d) pet walking—*I think that on the periphery, on the commuter belt, it is very convenient to walk dogs, there is a place where a dog can run* (male, 20 years old).

In general, the research findings show that the collective types of youth activities are typical for the central city embankments, and individual activities aimed at meeting a wide range of needs are replicated both in the city centre and on the periphery.

The importance of embankments in the everyday practices of citizens of different ages is also confirmed by the willingness to “defend” their preservation in the urban space. Thus, in May 2019, active citizens of Yekaterinburg, including young people, came out to defend their “right to the city”. The construction of the Church of St. Catherine was planned on the embankment near the Drama Theatre. The result of the protest behaviour was a mass survey and, as an outcome, a change in the location of the construction site. One of the respondents noted:

The embankment should belong to everyone (male, 22 years old).

To what extent do city embankments become a source of fear and anxiety for young citizens? The interview findings show that, unlike, for example, abandoned houses, garages, tunnels and underground passages, city embankments look safe. However, almost half of the respondents noted that the peripheral embankments cause anxiety:

I would not go for a walk late in the evening along the non-central embankment: the lighting is bad, and the water is too close (female, 20 years old).

At the same time, respondents point to the causelessness and diffuseness of their fears:

I cannot explain it, but I do not want to be on the embankment next to the water on a dark night (male, 22 years old).

The respondents also fear marginalised citizens:

Homeless people are taken care of in the centre, which makes it clean and pleasant to walk along the Plotinka. In contrast, on other embankments, you can meet drunk and homeless people and groups of swearing teenagers (female, 22 years old).

In young people’s statements, four interrelated reasons for anxiety about peripheral city embankments are observed: darkness, water, lack or a small number of other people, and the threat of violence and illegal actions. In addition, young people place more emphasis on the issue of personal safety while on the peripheral embankments. It should be noted that in this aspect, the security function inherent in public places is transformed into a dysfunction.

Jacobs (1961) rightly raises the question of safety of the city streets, or rather, the probability of committing crimes. Concerning peripheral city embankments, this issue remains unresolved. The observation has shown that the unorganised space

of embankments, including the natural environment (trees, bushes, and stones), develop a sense of anxiety. This anxiety is associated with a sense of danger of illegal actions on the part of third parties and the fear of possible injuries that can be received during travelling.

Conclusion

The study findings allowed us to come to the following conclusions. First, city embankments are polyfunctional formations with, as the empirical data show, distinct differences between the functions of central and peripheral embankments. Young people attribute the following functions to the central embankments: communicative, aesthetic, integrative, leisure, including flanking, cognitive, transit, self-awareness, security and identity affirmation. Peripheral embankments structure the city space, contribute to developing a neighbourhood identity, and support the function of spending free time. At the same time, other functions typical for the central embankments are implemented poorly, and the safety function is transformed into a risky one. This is connected, in our opinion, both with the improvement of embankments as public spaces and with the basic direction of movement of young people in the city space: from the periphery to the centre.

Regardless of the location, young people use embankments to maintain physical fitness. Young people “appropriate” central embankments through collective social practices and the peripheral embankments through individual consumption practices, including marginal ones. Central embankments are included in young people’s narratives, which indicates the need to saturate their own lives with events and impressions. Standardised activities such as transit, walking pets, fishing, and bird feeding are routinised on peripheral embankments.

In general, the study findings indicate the need for the development of peripheral embankments and their harmonious integration in everyday life of young people. Developing well-maintained footpaths, organising access to water, developing leisure and recreational infrastructure, creating comfortable living conditions for the “appropriation” of embankments (toilets, trash cans, benches, shelters from rain and wind) can determine the future of peripheral embankments as centres of attraction for young people and reduce the marginal nature of the area.

In our opinion, a promising direction for further research on city embankments is to determine their role for different social groups of citizens (children, adolescents, middle-aged people, the elderly) and to study the practices of interaction between citizens, government and businesses aimed at creating comfortable public spaces, where a wide repertoire of needs and interests can be met.

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