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## **SOCIO-SPATIAL DIMENSIONS OF DIGITAL DIVIDE**

The development of the network has irreversibly changed people's lives and non-users from the network is considered to be digitally excluded. The term digital divide is defined as: inequalities in an access to the Internet, the intensity of its use, knowledge of how to search for information, the quality of connection and social support to help in using the Internet, as well as inequalities in the ability to assess the quality of information and the diversity of the use of the network. The authors of this article will present the results of a sociological survey, the issues of which concerned the availability of Internet in homes. The analysis focuses on two dimensions of the lack of access to the network: social and spatial. The study was conducted in 2009 on a random sample of 727 adult residents of Rzeszów and municipalities bordering the city. The sample was successfully selected thanks to the help of employees of the Podkarpackie Voivodship Office in Rzeszów. In order to obtain the most reliable results during the sampling, the respondents were subjected to the place of residence, so that the research would cover the residents of all Rzeszów settlements and towns bordering the city administratively to neighboring municipalities.

**Keywords:** digital divide, Rzeszów, information society, digital migrants, digital natives, social space.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The change of the paradigm of everyday functioning in a post-modern society (described at the beginning of the 90s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>3</sup> as well as the increased number of information and communication solutions designed for the users with little IT experience, have altered the way the demand and the use of both computers and software is perceived. This social change has also led to the division of the society into, so called, online and offline society<sup>4</sup>. In the process of the development of the Internet society there were many types

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<sup>3</sup> A. Jawłowska, *Kierunki zmiany kulturowej i jej konsekwencje społeczne* [In:] A. Rychard, M. Federowicz (ed.) *Spółczesność w transformacji: ekspertyzy i studia*, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw 1993, s. 186–200.

<sup>4</sup> W. Gogołek, *Ulotne swobody informacyjne społeczeństwa informacyjnego*, „Studia Medioznawcze” nr 4 (31) 2007.

and categories of the Internet users distinguished: from Castells' division into hackers, virtual communitarians, entrepreneurs and typical users<sup>5</sup> through Leslaw Haber's digitariat and digital proletariat, to Marek Prenski's virtual autochthons and emigrants<sup>6</sup>. Initially, the net was only used to publish and share the information about the research on nuclear physics. Its development was, however, inevitable as already in 1995 there were 18,000 websites which did not treat about physics. In November 2006, the number of websites exceeded the astronomical number of 100 million and the number of users reached the level of 1,114 billion worldwide. Nowadays, 2,405,518,376 people use the Internet and they can visit 644,275,754 independent websites<sup>7</sup>. The figure presents the annual increase in the number of the Internet users in 2009 and 2013 period.

Asia has the highest number of the Internet users (44.8%), next there is Europe (21%), North America (11%), South America (10.4%), Africa (7%) and Middle East (3.7%). 1% of the Internet users live in Australia and Oceania. The fact that Asia has the highest number of the Internet users does not result from its technological possibilities but from its great demographic potential. There are over 4 billion people living in Asia and that means that only slightly over one quarter of Asians have access to the Internet. There are various reasons for that: from political prohibitions, e.g. in North Korea or Iran, to economic reasons, e.g. in China or India. Figure 1 presents the division of the Internet users by the continents.

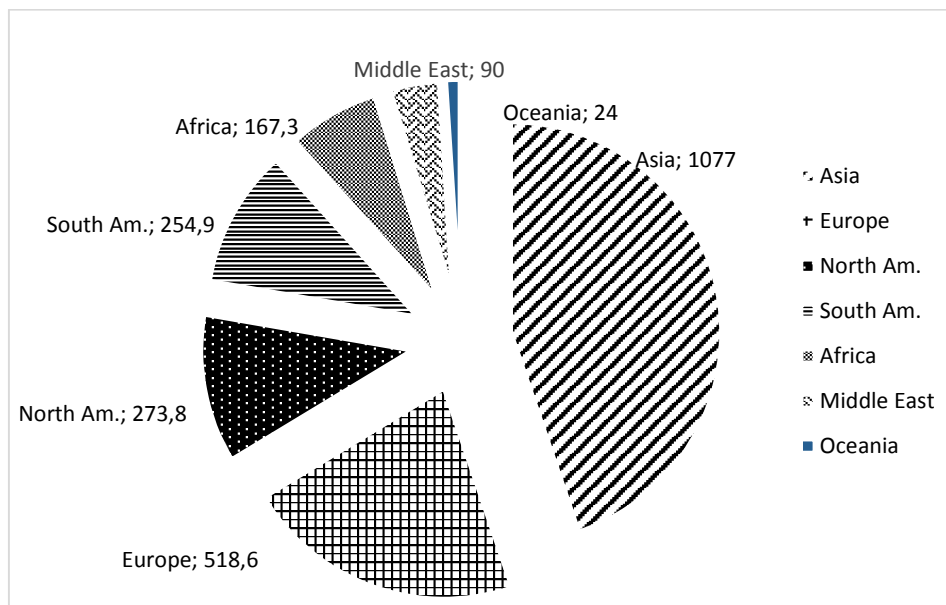


Figure 1. Internet users by the continents (in billions) – as of 31.12.2013

Source: own elaboration.

<sup>5</sup> M. Castells, *Communication Power*, University Press. Oxford 2009.

<sup>6</sup> M. Kinal, *Nowe media w pracy nauczyciela edukacji przedszkolnej i wczesnoszkolnej*, Stowarzyszenie Naukowe Przestrzeń Społeczna i Środowisko, Rzeszów 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Understood as Internet domains and subdomains, excluding individual and institutional accounts in social networks.

What is also worth analysing is the indicator related to the number of people with access to the Internet on a given continent expressed as a percentage. Figure 2 compares the data from 2009 and 2013 which point to the fair economic concentration in North America and a good chance for the development of the Internet on the remaining continents.

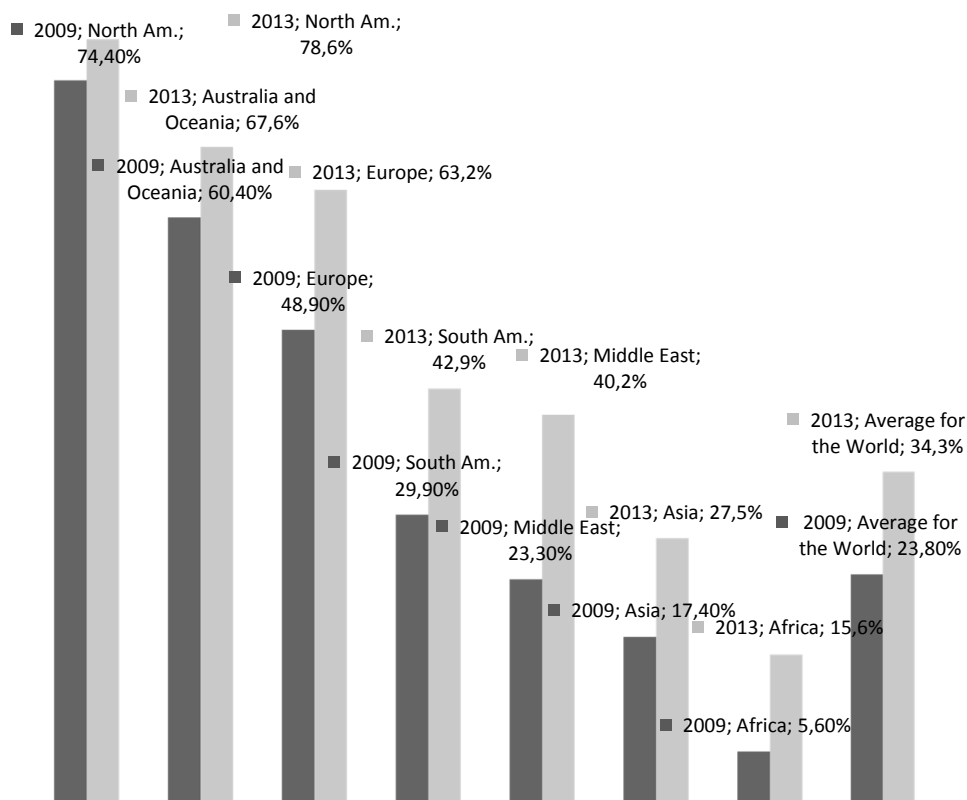


Figure 2. Access to the Internet by the continents in 2009 and 2013

Source: Own elaboration based on the Internet World Stats

An important factor which affects the popularization of the net is the language in which it is created and which is used by the Internet users. Nowadays, the most popular language is still English, however, in the next few years Chinese may become the most popular. Table 1 presents ten most popular languages of the Internet.

According to the Internet World Stats, 24,940,902 people use the Internet in Poland, which constitutes 64.9% of the entire population. Dominik Batorski<sup>8</sup> reports that computers are present in 70% of households out of which 66.9% have access to the Internet. This

<sup>8</sup> D. Batorski, *Polacy wobec technologii cyfrowych – uwarunkowania dostępności i sposobów korzystania. Diagnoza Społeczna 2013. Warunki i Jakość życia Polaków – Raport*. Contemporary Economics 7/2013, s. 317.

means that computers are used for online communication practically in every household in question. Table 2 presents the increase in the number of the Internet users in Poland.

Table 1. The most popular languages of the Internet

Language	Internet users	The increase in the number of users (2000–2011)	Percentage	Population classified according to the language used
English	565,004,126	301.4%	26.8%	1,302,275,670
Chinese	509,965,013	1478.7%	24.2%	1,372,226,042
Spanish	164,968,742	807.4%	7.8%	423,085,806
Japanese	99,182,000	110.7%	4.7%	126,475,664
Portugal	82,586,600	990.1%	3.9%	253,947,594
German	75,422,674	174.1%	3.6%	94,842,656
Arabic	65,365,400	2 501.2%	3.3%	347,002,991
French	59,779,525	398.2%	3.0%	347,932,305
Russian	59,700,000	1825.8%	3.0%	139,390,205
Korean	39,440,000	107.1%	2.0%	71,393,343

Source: Own elaboration based on the Internet World Stats.

Table 2. The number of the Internet users in Poland between 2000 and 2013

Year	The number of users	Population in total	Percentage of the population in the net
2000	3,700,000	38,181,844	9.7%
2005	10,600,000	38,133,691	27.8%
2007	11,400,000	38,109,499	29.9%
2009	15,800,000	38,482,919	44.4%
2013	24,940,902	38,415,284	64.9%

Source: Own elaboration based on the Internet World Stats and Gemius.pl.

Batorski<sup>9</sup> also presents interesting data on the types of computers used by Poles. Among the households equipped with computers, the number of laptops is, for the first time, higher (49.3%) than the number of desktop computers (46.9%). Nowadays, 30% of households have two or more computers, which represents an increase by 3% when compared to 2009. In 15% of households every family member has got their own computer.

- As in previous years, computers are more often present in shared households and least present in single households. The number of people who use LAN connection is decreasing (81%) which means that, nowadays, Wi-Fi is used more often than in previous years (18%). The diversification of the way computers are connected to the Internet can also be observed. Poles use both LAN as well as Wi-Fi connection. Table 3 shows that, nowadays, it is not possible to detect the presence of “information gap” between the voivodships of the Eastern Wall and the remaining voivodships, which

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., s. 317–341.

was the case in previous years. The gap is, however, visible between big cities (78.3% of people with the Internet access), villages (61,1%) and towns (66.1%).

Table 3. Accessibility of computers and the Internet in different types of households between 2007 and 2013

	Computer				Internet			
	2007	2009	2011	2013	2007	2009	2011	2013
Cities with the population over 500 thousand	67.4	70.8	77.1	79.8	57.6	65.4	73.3	78.3
Cities with the population 200–500 thousand	60.8	69.2	71.9	74.4	50.2	63.0	68.7	72.7
Cities with the population 100–200 thousand	55.9	61.8	67.1	74.9	44.3	55.8	64.6	72.8
Cities with the population 20–100 thousand	55.7	60.4	66.5	68.3	44.2	52.9	62.0	65.5
Cities with the population below 20 thousand	53.3	57.8	65.0	68.0	40.4	50.2	61.4	66.1
Villages	44.2	52.8	58.9	65.1	22.4	39.4	51.7	61.1
Voivodships of the Eastern Wall	48.2	55.2	63.0	67.2	30.7	43.9	56.8	63.4
The remaining voivodships	55.4	61.5	66.7	70.9	41.5	53.3	62.1	68.4

Source: Own elaboration based on D. Batorski, *Polacy wobec technologii cyfrowych – uwarunkowania dostępności i sposobów korzystania...*, s. 317.

Budek<sup>10</sup> points out that the biggest increase in the number of the Internet users in recent years has occurred in villages and, at present, amounts to 24% of all Internet users who live in villages. In big cities the ratio of people who use Wi-Fi connection amounts to 17%. Such situation results from the infrastructure factors.

When analysing the Polish voivodships, Pomorskie voivodship has the most advanced Internet infrastructure which provides the Internet to 75% of the population. Lubelskie and Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodships have the least advanced infrastructure, which is presented in figure 3. The presented data do not include Wi-Fi users who use different technical infrastructure.

It should be pointed that there is a differentiation in the structure of the population of people who use the Internet, which is presented in figure 4.

In the breakdown by material and professional status students comprise the largest group of the Internet users (98.6%), next there are private entrepreneurs (87.9%) and public sector workers (87.2%). The smallest percentage belongs to pensioners, (22.5%), disability pensioners (28.2%) and farmers (43.2%).

According to the data gathered in the NetTrack<sup>11</sup>, 50.1% of the respondents declare that they have had the Internet access for more than five years. Only 3.1% have had the Internet access less than a year. 70.3% of the respondents declare that they surf the net on a daily basis and 20.4% – a few times a week. Over 95% of the respondents use the Internet at home. On average, Polish Internet users spend 15 h and 40 minutes a week surfing the net. The average for the age group 15–19 is 23 hours, and for 60+ – 10 hours.

<sup>10</sup> K. Budek, *Polska wies stawia na internet mobilny*, 2012, <http://www.internetstandard.pl/news/381998/Polska.wies.stawia.na.Internet.mobilny.html>.

<sup>11</sup> M. Wawrzyn, *Polscy internauci policzeni i zmierzeni. Cyfrowe wykluczenie jest w naszym kraju faktem*, 2013, <http://internet.gadzetomania.pl/2013/11/06/polscy-internauci-policzeni-i-zmierzeni-cyfrowe-wykluczenie-jest-w-naszym-kraju-faktem>.

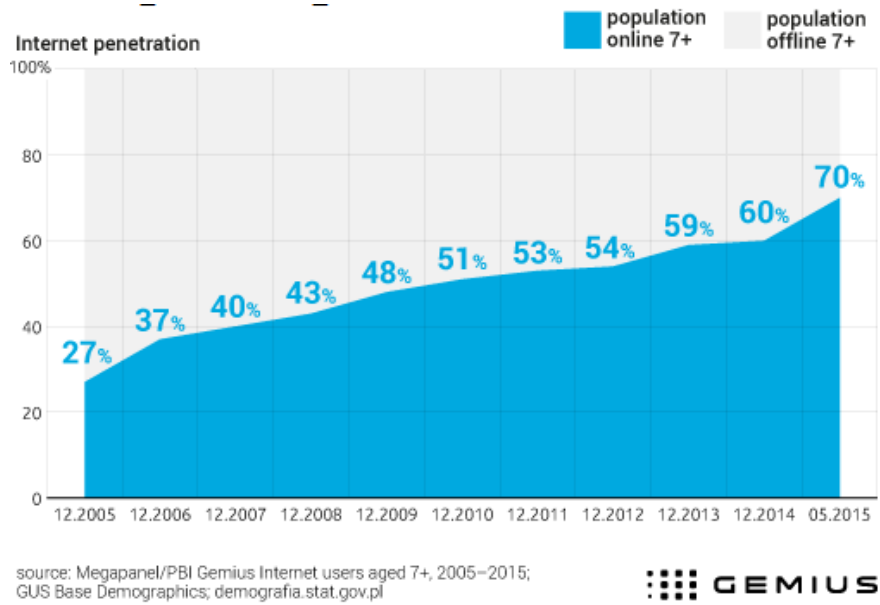


Figure 3. Member of internet users in Poland 2005–2015

Source: Megapanel PBI, demografia.stat.gov.pl.

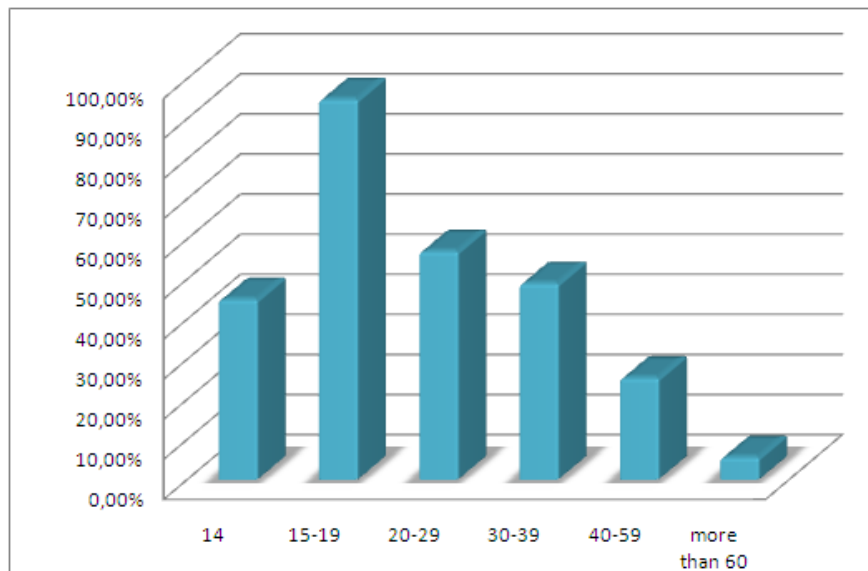


Figure 4. Population of the Internet users based on age

Source: <http://maxroy.com/blog/introduction-to-polish-search-engine-marketing-market/>.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The growing importance of the Internet in everyday life and the above mentioned polarisation into online and offline users led to the emergence of several sociological ideas. The most important are: digital divide, B-divide and information divide.

Digital divide has a number of meanings and it depends on the definition used. The basic definition present in the subject literature refers to the division into users with the Internet access and those deprived of it<sup>12</sup>. According to Piotr Gawrysiak "digital divide is the term which usually refers to social groups deprived of the access to modern IT infrastructure (especially the access to information and communication networks) and, therefore, excluded from the process of the development of civilization". Piotr Zakrzewski comes up with another definition: "the idea of digital divide refers to the differences between people who have a regular access to digital and information technologies and can effectively make use of them and those who do not have such access". In his definition, Piotr Szelfinski comes to the conclusion that digital divide is one of the threats related to social stratification and IT illiteracy. Lukasz Tomczyk suggests a number of synonyms of digital divide: digital or information gap, digital illiteracy, digital gap, digital marginalization. Digital divide is also related to the traditional division of the world into the rich North and poor South. In a global sense, the number of information and communication devices in North America and Europe is a few times higher than in Africa (except Maghreb and South Africa).

B-divide is another idea related to the stratification in the usage of information and communication devices. The term, suggested by Włodzimierz Gogolka<sup>13</sup>, means "the state in which there is a division of the Internet users who are placed on a more advantageous side of information divide. This division creates a group which, with full awareness and in a critical way, uses the Internet as one of the many sources of information and a group which, without any criticism, copies the information found on the Internet; the basic source of information".

The term information divide is suggested by Ryszard Tadeusiewicz<sup>14</sup> who defines it as a state in which there is a certain division of the global society into those who are able and want to make use of the IT potential and those (the majority) who (not all of them) are barely aware or unaware of their need to do so.

The presented theoretical definitions are constantly changing due to the uncontrollable development of social phenomena in a virtual space.

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

There are over 190 000 people living in Rzeszów. The city is located in the South-East Poland and it is the capital city of Podkarpackie voivodeship. When compared to other Polish cities, Rzeszów can be characterised by a dynamic spatial and population development. The spatial development results from the process which started over 10 years ago, i.e.

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<sup>12</sup> M. Kinal, *Nowe media w pracy nauczyciela edukacji przedszkolnej i wczesnoszkolnej*, Stowarzyszenie Naukowe Przestrzeń Społeczna i Środowisko, Rzeszów 2015.

<sup>13</sup> W. Gogolek, *Ulotne swobody informacyjne społeczeństwa informacyjnego*, „Studia Medioznawcze” nr 4 (31) 2007.

<sup>14</sup> R. Tadeusiewicz, *Spoleczność Internetu*, Akademicka Oficyna Wydawnicza EXIT, Warszawa 2002.

expanding the administrative borders of the city by incorporating suburban villages. Due to this initiative, the area of Rzeszow increased from 54 km<sup>2</sup> (in 2005) to 120 km<sup>2</sup> (in 2010). It is worth pointing out that, apart from the changes in the city borders, the population increase also resulted from the positive birth rate and balance of migration.

The article was based on two empirical studies conducted in Rzeszow in 2009 (n=602) and 2015 (n=800). In both cases random statistical sample was used. The sample was based on the addresses accessed in the City Hall of Rzeszow. The studies were multifaceted and one of the topics was the digital divide of the residents of Rzeszow.

The main analysed variable was access to the Internet at home (two values: yes, no). The authors were interested in access to the Internet only, not the use of it. The studies analysed how access to the Internet at home depended on the following variables: age, education, subjective evaluation of one's own financial situation and the place of living.

The variable age was measured by how old a person was at the time of the research. For the analysis the variable was reduced to six values: 18-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46-55, 56-65, over 65.

The values of the variable education were types of school which respondents graduated from. Six types of school were distinguished: primary, vocational, secondary and post-secondary schools and undergraduate and postgraduate studies. For the analysis, the values of the variable were reduced to three. Low level of education included primary and vocational school, average level of education – secondary and post-secondary school and higher level of education – undergraduate and postgraduate studies.

The variable financial situation was measured with five values: I live in poverty, I live in modesty, my standard of living is average, my standard of living is good, my standard of living is very good. For the analysis, the variables were reduced to three values: low standard of living, average standard of living, high standard of living.

At the time of the research there were 29 residential areas in the city. Therefore, the variable place of living had 29 values. For the analysis, 29 residential areas were divided into three zones on the basis of their location towards the city centre, type of housing and the year of the incorporation to the city. The first type was the city centre and the oldest residential areas, the second type was the areas located on the outside of the first type, the last type was the youngest residential areas incorporated into the city after 2005.

#### 4. STUDY

In this part of the article the authors focus on the description of the changes in the access to the Internet in Rzeszow between 2009 and 2015. The grounds for the presented analyses of digital divide are two surveys carried out in Rzeszow in 2009 and 2015. A six year break between the surveys allowed to observe certain tendencies. Both surveys were carried out on random samples. In 2009, 602 people participated in the survey and in 2015 – 800 people. The first survey was the project of one of the authors of this article and the data gathered in 2015 come from "Rzeszowska Diagnoza Społeczna 2015" (Eng. Social Diagnosis 2015 of Rzeszow) by Hubert Kotarski, Krzysztof Malicki, Mariusz Palak and Krzysztof Pirog<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> H. Kotarski, K. Malicki, M. Palak, K. Piróg, *Rzeszowska Diagnoza Społeczna 2015*, Wyd. UR, Rzeszów 2016.



In the previous studies the authors agreed that two types of factors affect digital divide in Rzeszow: social and spatial factors<sup>16</sup>. The main aim of the discussion is the analysis of the social and spatial aspect of the lack of the Internet access in Rzeszow. To do so, the following features, which determine the Internet access, were analysed: age, level of education, financial situation (social feature) and the area of living of the respondents (spatial feature).

Between 2009 and 2015, access to the Internet among the residents of Rzeszow increased from 83.45% to nearly 90%. Therefore, in the case of the analysed city, the problem of digital divide concerns only about 10% of the residents. Despite a relatively small percentage of those deprived of the Internet access, the phenomenon cannot be regarded as marginal.

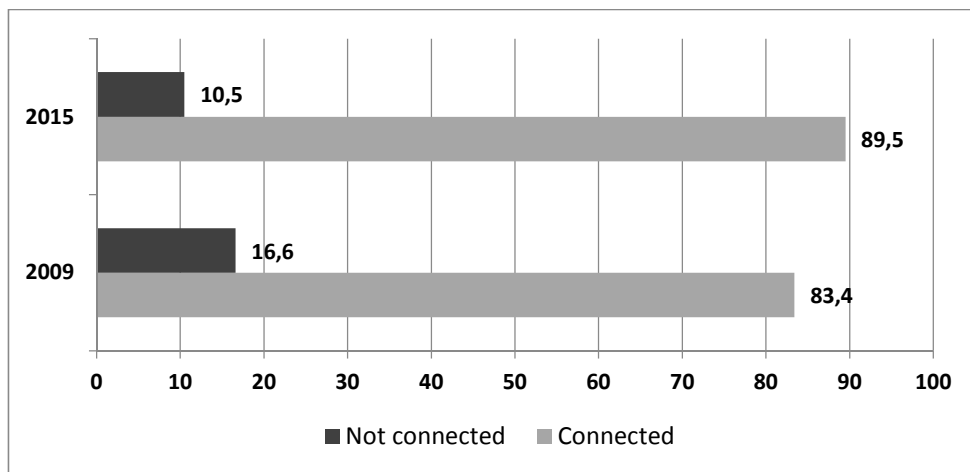


Figure 5. The declared access to the Internet at home in 2009 and 2015

Source: Own calculations

An important feature which affects access to the Internet is the age of the respondents. First, it is worth pointing out that there was an increase in the use of the Internet in all age categories. The smallest increase was observed among the respondents up to the age of 25 and the largest among the respondents between 56 and 65. The data point to nearly full access to the Internet among people in the age group up to 65. Despite a considerable increase in the Internet users among the oldest respondents (from 52.2% to 62.8%), people in the age group 65+ are digitally excluded to the largest extent. We may risk the statement that digital divide is related to a broader problem, i.e. social divide of seniors in Poland.

<sup>16</sup> M. Palak, J. Kinal, *Poza siecią. Problem społeczno i przestrzennego zróżnicowania dostępu do Internetu w polskim mieście* [in] M. Malikowski, M. Palak, J. Halik, (ed.), *Zmiany w przestrzeni współczesnych miast*, Rzeszów 2015, p. 146.

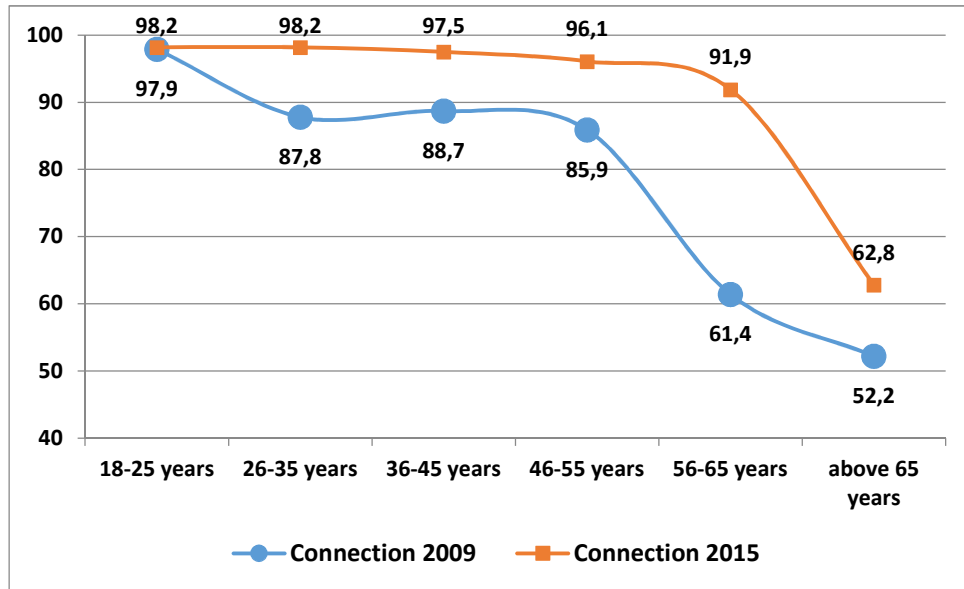


Figure 6. Declared access to the Internet at home in 2009 and 2015 vs the age

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

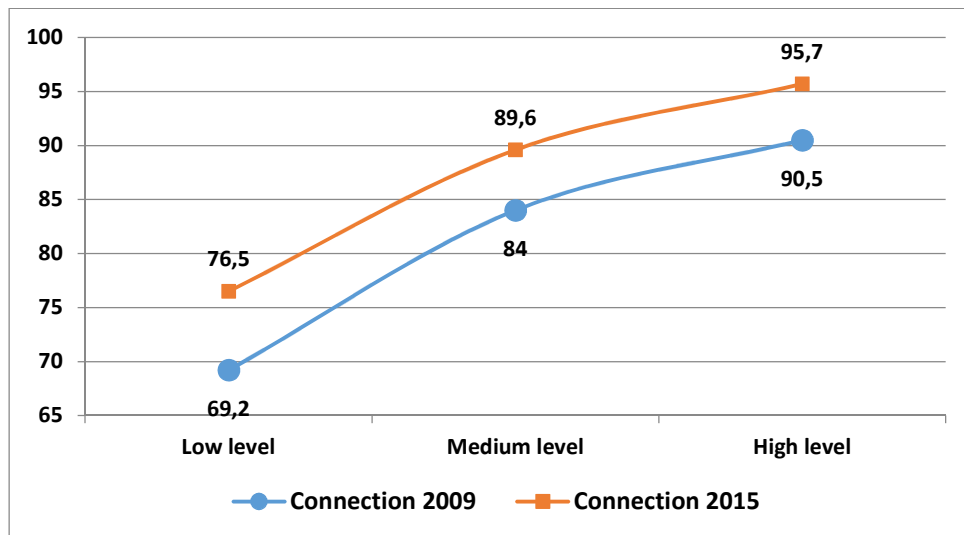


Figure 7. Declared access to the Internet at home in 2009 and 2015 vs the level of education

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

When it comes to the level of education of the respondents, the percentage of people with access to the Internet at home increased for all categories of the respondents between 2009 and 2015. However, access depends on the level of education of the respondents and the regularity that the higher level of education is related to the more frequent access to the net did not change during the analysed period of time. People with the lowest level of education are always digitally excluded to the greatest extent. In 2015, nearly 25% of the respondents did not have access to the net. We may assume that the level of education is related to the age of the respondents. Older, poorly educated residents of Rzeszow declared to have access to the Internet less often.

The declared living standard is another feature conditioning access to the Internet at home. The respondents who declared to enjoy decent and affluent life and those with the average level of life had the Internet access more often than people living in poverty or modestly. It is worth pointing out that between 2009 and 2015, the percent of the Internet users at home increased to nearly 80% among those who declared to have low living standards. This probably results from the need to lower the costs of the Internet and the use of free Wi-Fi in Rzeszow.

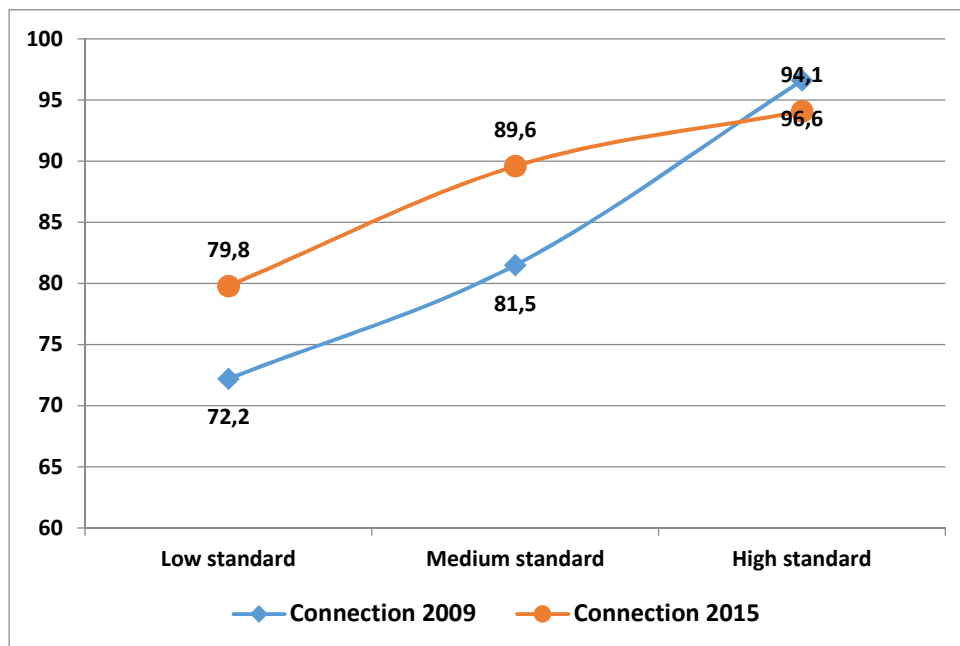


Figure 8. Declared access to the Internet at home in 2009 and 2015 vs living standard

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

The level of accessibility and the methods used to access the net at home also depends on the area of living of the respondents. In the analyses of the spatial distribution of digital divide, serious lack of the Internet access is visible in central parts of Rzeszow. In 2015, the residents of central parts of the city (79.8%) declared to have access to the Internet less

often than the residents of the suburbs (90.4%) and new residential areas (94%), incorporated into the city in previous years. Probably, it is related to the common phenomenon of the “aging” of the residential districts located in the centre of the city. The above analyses indicate that the most excluded category are the oldest residents of Rzeszow. The comparison with the studies conducted in 2009 showed, however, that the distance between the residents of respective districts narrowed.

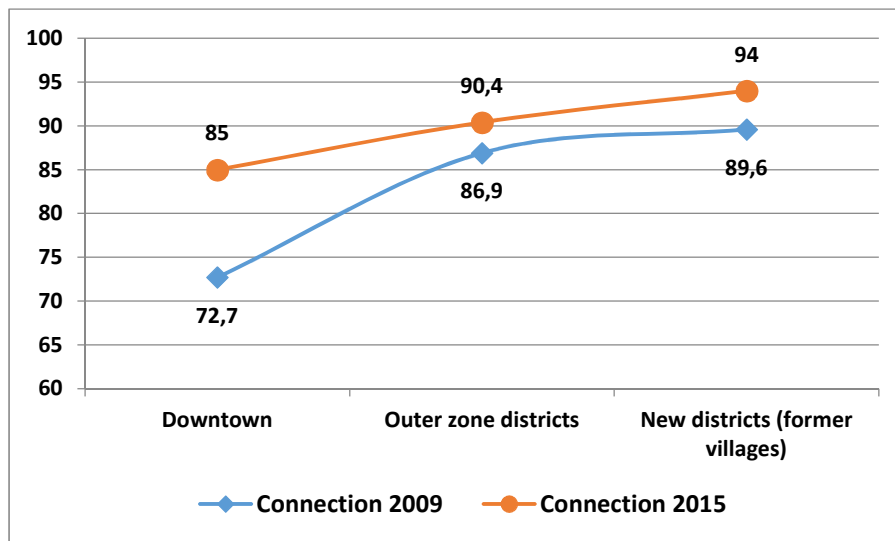


Figure 9. Declared access to the Internet at home in 2009 and 2015 vs the area of living

Source: own calculations.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The presented analyses allow to formulate two statements. Firstly, despite the increase in the number of the Internet users in Rzeszow between 2009 and 2015, the level of digital divide is still fairly high (about 10%). Secondly, digital divide is still related to social and spatial issues. In the case of the analysis of socio-spatial aspects, the problem of digital divide touches people in the age group 65+ who live in central parts of the city, are poorly educated and declare low living standards. If we conduct deeper analysis of the above mentioned issues, we can assume that the main reasons for digital divide in Rzeszow are financial issues. Digital divide in the analysed city results from psychological features of the respondents (the lack of the need to use this type of medium, fear to use the Internet), which leads to, so called, *auto digital divide*. Such situation arises in the case of the oldest residents of the city. Such type of digital divide may be observed in the majority of the cities in Poland and Europe<sup>17</sup>. An interesting conclusion drawn from the conducted studies is a different

<sup>17</sup> K. Budek, *Polska wieś stawia na Internet mobilny*, 2012, <http://www.internetstandard.pl/news/381998/Polska.wies.stawia.na.Internet.mobilny.html>

spatial distribution of digital divide when compared to the majority of the cities. The majority of the researchers of this phenomenon point to the centres of cities as the least digitally divided, contrasting a *technocratic city* with *technologically conservative suburbs*<sup>18</sup>.

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## SPOŁECZNO-PRZESTRZENNE WYMIARY WYKLUCZENIA CYFROWEGO

W ostatnich dekadach można zaobserwować coraz większy wpływ technologii na życie społeczne. Technologie teleinformatyczne stają się coraz bardziej obecne w każdym aspekcie życia społecznego. W związku z powyższym wykluczenie cyfrowe w ostatnich latach stało się poważnym problemem społecznym. Badacze tego zagadnienia wręcz określają relację

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M. Drewis, *Cyfrowe wykluczenie – czym jest i kto kogo wyklucza?*, 2013, <http://antyweb.pl/cyfrowe-wykluczenie-czym-jest-i-kto-kogo-wyklucza/>

<sup>18</sup> C.S. Watkins, *Digital Divide: Navigating the Digital Edge*, 2012, [https://moody.utexas.edu/sites/default/files/watkins\\_1.pdf](https://moody.utexas.edu/sites/default/files/watkins_1.pdf).

użytkowników do nie-użytkowników jako nową stratyfikację społeczną. Najnowsze badania wskazują, że coraz mniejsze znaczenie w przypadku częstotliwości dostępu do Internetu i jego wykorzystania przez członków społeczeństwa mają czynniki demograficzne i przestrzenne, a coraz większe czynniki psychologiczne. W niniejszym artykule przedstawiono wyniki badania dotyczącego dostępu do Internetu w domu wśród mieszkańców Rzeszowa i jego strefy podmiejskiej. Badanie wykazało, że dostęp do Internetu w mieszkaniu w dużym stopniu zależy od cech związanych z pozycją społeczną respondentów. Również cechy demograficzne mieszkańców badanego obszaru decydują o podłączeniu do sieci. W tym przypadku gorsza sytuacja dotyczy osób starszych, posiadających dużo dzieci oraz owdowiałych lub rozwiedzionych. O dostępności Internetu w domu decyduje również miejsce zamieszkania badanych. Rezydenci osiedli śródmiejskich deklarują dostępność Internetu w domu o wiele rzadziej od badanych z osiedli zewnętrznych Rzeszowa oraz mieszkańców miejscowości podmiejskich. Fakt ten prawdopodobnie ma związek z postępującymi procesami suburbanizacji. Mieszkańcy o wyższym statusie społecznym migrują na obrzeża miasta lub do miejscowości podmiejskich. Potwierdza to analiza zmiennej „miejsce zamieszkania i pochodzenia”. Dostęp do Internetu w domu najczęściej deklarowali badani mieszkający na wsi, ale pochodzący z miasta, a najrzadziej mieszkający w mieście, ale pochodzący ze wsi.

**Słowa kluczowe:** przepaść cyfrowa, Rzeszów, społeczeństwo informacyjne, migranci cyfrowi, cyfrowi tubylcy.

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