



ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The attractiveness of polar regions as the zones of silence

Hanna Mamzer\*

Faculty of Social Sciences, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland

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**Summary** Post-modern societies are characterized by information-based functions that generate the anthropogenic stimuli (as opposed to the industrial society of energy processing and the traditional society whose activities are related to the production of natural crops). Hence, life in the information overload becomes a tiresome daily reality, from which only a very few may escape. These escapers might be regarded as consumers of the new type of ‘luxury goods’ such as: silence experiencing and positively valorized solitude allowing deeper insight into oneself. The polar regions provide an opportunity to withdraw from the anthropogenic noise of the civilization. I do believe that it is one of the most significant drivers of the increasing popularity of traveling to these regions of the world.

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## 1. Research background: stimuli abundant postmodernity

Post-modern societies are characterized by information-based functions (as opposed to the industrial society of

energy processing and the traditional society whose activities are related to the production of natural crops), which in practice means generating, modifying and selecting creative applications and many other processes related to operations on information. The processes of generating and transforming information are evidently accelerated by the technological development. This triggers a very rapid growth and knowledge transfer. It obviously has numerous positive effects (mainly in the form of the accelerated development of civilization), but it also generates the negative effects. Among them is the excess of informational stimuli that people are exposed to. This particularly alarming issue attracts increased attention from psychologists and sociologists, who report a number of cognitive and social functioning disorders such as: behavioral addictions, hyperactivity and difficulties in concentration as well as many other disorders (e.g. Bühler et al., 2005).

\* Corresponding author at: Adam Mickiewicz University, Szmarzewskiego 89c, 60–568 Poznań, Poland. Tel.: + 48 61 829 22 59.

E-mail address: [mamzer@amu.edu.pl](mailto:mamzer@amu.edu.pl)

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The socio-cultural functioning of a man is embedded in the biological and physiological limits of the human body. Psychology has already described the mechanisms of cognitive functioning, which translate into social relations and include these biological limitations. An example is the process of stereotyping as a mechanism for selecting information and simplifying the perception in order to increase the behavioral effectiveness. Social impact of stereotypes has many minor functions but the most important is the right selection of information (Hinton, 2017). The amount of information needs to be reduced in situations where there is an abundance of incoming cognitive stimuli and at the same time there is a need to decide immediately on the application of specific behavioral strategies. Judgments are made quickly then. They can be wrong, of course. However, in the game of survival, where life is at stake, it is better to make decisions that are both too cautious and quick than decisions based on a long-term analysis of the specific data that require a valuable amount of time. In the postmodern world, 'psychological' survival is at stake – today a man basically does not experience a threat to his physical integrity. Despite the fact that the theoretical potential of the human brain is not fully exploited, at the empirical level, it is more often said that the cultural and civilizational development of a man precedes his biological evolution (Pilli and Mazzon, 2016). This means that the processes of cultural change that have been occurring in the last two hundred years go beyond the biological adaptation of humans to live in such conditions (for example, the increasing life expectancy of humans does not correspond to the biological potential of the human body). As a result, despite the application of advanced medical technologies for treatments and life prolongation, it is not possible to ensure its high quality, due to the somatic limitations of a man.

A counterbalance to the context of life of a man of the 21st century outlined above, is to be formed by lifestyles connected with the 'slow life' current, for which the basis is a return to close ties between a man and his natural environment, which unambiguously imposes a restriction in social contacts. In the field of social sciences, there is more in-depth reflection aimed at enhancing the value of building relations between a man and the nature (Giusti, 2019; Schweitzer et al., 2018; Seymour 2016). It is already clear today that this kind of reflection is a turning point in treating nature as a set of resources whose rational and sustainable use is of tremendous importance to the welfare of a mankind. The value of the natural environment is an autotelic value but it can also be understood using other approaches – one of them is the concept of ecosystem services (Norgaard 2009; Schaefer et al., 2015). This way of thinking is associated with the concepts of the natural capital and the so-called ecological economics. Ecosystem services are understood here as the contribution of the natural ecosystems to the broadly defined human welfare. Ecosystem services are the income generated by the natural capital. It proposes an approach to ecosystems in the broad sense of the term, in which attempts are made even to quantify the resources offered by ecosystems in the form of 'services'. They have a biological dimension (creating ecological niches, fostering biodiversity, generating products valuable for other living organisms, e.g. oxygen); production services – direct production of goods useful for the

human being (e.g. food); regulating services – e.g. regulation of hydrological changes and cycles, climate regulation, mitigating the effects of extreme weather events and cultural services: aesthetic, tourist, recreational, historical, etc. Pointing to such a positively valorized offers generated by the natural environment aims to show that for a normally functioning human being it is necessary to have a relationship with the nature. Moreover, the aim to have a relationship with the nature is a natural tendency of a man as a specie – according to Edward O. Wilson, following Erich Fromm, this need is called biophilia (Lumber, 2017; Wilson, 1984).

The proposal to define ecosystems in service categories attempts to translate the high value of the environment as an important resource into the language of economics used by mercantile-oriented decision-makers. The subtext for this concept is the appreciation of the value of the natural environment and the striving to preserve it as a set of resources essential for the man, due to the functions it performs. In the anthropogenic era, these postulates are gaining strength today. However, the value of the environment should be seen as an autotelic value in itself, as I mentioned. This kind of approach is embedded in the pioneering works of the most important authors in the field of deep ecology: Arne Naess (2010) or Aldo Leopold (1968) and Henry David Thoreau (1980, 2018), the author that the previously mentioned researchers often referred to.

Thinking in terms of a deep ecology restores reflection on appreciating the value of the natural environment (Dean, 2018; Wu et al., 2015). The growing popularity of such an approach should be interpreted sociologically as an indicator of deficits, of certain needs felt at the individual level, which, however, after exceeding a certain critical mass, leads to the formation of social trends. In the previously outlined context of societies based on the generation and processing of information, the excess of anthropogenic stimuli overwhelming the contemporary man of Western culture becomes a serious psychosocial problem. The invasively emitted information overloads are omnipresent: they take the form of visual messages (advertisements in the media, outdoor advertisings, television broadcasts), audio messages (advertisements on the radio, but also the noise resulting from everyday life of people, especially urban agglomerations) and those affecting other senses (effects of smells, modification of space, which influences the social behavior).

In such a dynamic world, man has to make more or less conscious attempts to select the incoming stimuli or even to eliminate them, because, as I have indicated before, the human brain is biologically incapable of analyzing and processing all of these stimuli. Paradoxically, the search for peace and quiet becomes a kind of a psycho-biological environmental enrichment (this has been examined in animal shelters and zoological gardens, Coleman and Novak, 2017; Garvey et al., 2016). Silence is a resource and a resource in deficit. It can only be gained if social contacts are limited at the same time.

I observe the aspect of intentional disconnection from incoming stimuli in various human behaviors and at different levels of intensity: starting with the use of sound barriers (e.g. headphones – that are no longer just for listening to music, but also for not hearing the environment, used

by travelers on planes or trains and production workers in industrial plants); by insulating buildings with soundproofing materials or building houses away from the immediate vicinity of cities; to intentional spatial isolation, taking the form of peregrination to places that are inaccessible to the majority of people or accessible to a very limited extent (mountain climbing, solo sailing as well as living in areas with very low population density or holiday trips to such places). This last type of behavior is a good example of distancing one among five classical methods of soundproofing (Absorption, Damping, Decoupling, Distance and Mass – <https://hushsoundproof.com/soundproofing-101/>).

In such categories I also interpret the growing interest in traveling to the polar regions. This is, of course, one of the possible interpretations that draws attention to the search for broadly understood silence and isolation from the multitude of socially generated stimuli, but it seems to be an accurate one.

Based on the observations of the travelers, I propose to identify using the subjective judgments, four categories of people traveling to the polar regions. They are supporters of the post-Fordist ecological tourism (individual travelers, ‘backpackers’); people with a high financial status (either traveling alone or in very small groups on expensive trips) and tourists using the forms of mass tourism, arriving by large tourist boats for one to two days. The fourth category is made up of researchers, scientists and journalists who are looking for cognitive experiences of a special nature. While a group of mass tourists cannot in principle experience the positive aspects of isolation (including silence) – by being on board of the ships designed for several hundred to several thousand passengers, the other three groups seem to be strongly motivated to travel to polar regions, precisely because of the search for positively valued isolation. A positive valuation of isolation can arise from different human assumptions.

## 2. Research question: polar regions as silence regions?

Marinologists and oceanographers claim that arctic regions are not as silent as this is expected. These statements however refer to the level of noise created by anthropogenic activities that influence the marine mammals. Their perception in obvious ways is different from the human perception. What in the perception of sound-sensitive animals is meaningfully noisy, by humans is still perceived as silence (Haver et al., 2017). This is often reflected in somehow romanticized picture of polar expeditions presented in novels. Also, popular culture to polar regions as dominated by silence (Griffiths, 2010). Tourists asked about their expectations prior to the experience in the Canadian Arctic on cruises, indicated following expectations: to experience solitude – 3.2%, silence – 4.4%, lack of crowds – 3.9% (Hall and Saarinen, 2010).

Silence, emptiness and geographical isolation seem to be the first and foremost associated with deserts, as perceptually and empirically more accessible to people than polar areas, all the more so because the natural environment of a man is a savannah. This is an interesting regularity because in the spatial dimension it is the opposite: while the broadly

understood deserts in the world occupy about twenty million square kilometers, i.e. about twelve per cent of the area, the polar regions (Antarctic and Arctic as a whole), cover about twenty-eight million square kilometers. Deserts in fact increase their range, absorbing in a certain sense also the polar regions. Both terms (desert and polar area) are defined on the basis of different criteria. The deserts are distinguished by the type of vegetation of the flora and fauna that can be found there due to the altitude of the temperatures and the amount of precipitation. In turn, polar areas are defined by the type of Earth’s solar illumination. Deserts, however, due to their spatial proximity are more accessible to people, both in the form of physical peregrinations as well as in the sphere of cultural imaginations, descriptions and messages (in legends, literature, traditions and customs). Deserts are also visited by people as tourist attractions, which popularizes the experience of deserts, but also paradoxically increases the ‘crowd’ on them. In the context of the search for isolation, the deserts do not seem so attractive therefore.

The broadly understood polar regions are significantly less accessible to explorers, scientists and ordinary mortals. This is probably also due to the fact that staying there requires a more extensive infrastructure supporting the physical capabilities of people. Knowledge of the polar regions also seems to be less accessible in the common perception and is limited to a smaller number of messages (both in the education and in the pop culture). In this sense, one can risk the statement that deserts are much more accessible to human experience but they are also more exposed to the presence of anthropogenically generated noise stimuli.

As described by the alpinists, the Silence is also associated with the extreme expeditions particularly to the so called high mountains such as Himalayas (Cichy et al., 2019). Severe weather conditions in the mountains drastically limit the number of people present there and the sounds they produce. In their reminiscences and journals, the alpinists very often mention experiencing a remarkably striking silence: “Off, we go. Surrounded by the vast seemingly endless area, we feel very little and at the same time we are immersed in the sense of an incredible freedom” (Cichy et al., 2019). “We stop for a short while. (...) This is fabulous. It is quiet, windless and warm. We have set a new path and we award ourselves with the privilege of naming the crossed pass. As of today it is the Silent Pass” (Cichy et al., 2019).

It is an empirically researched that the tourist traffic in the Arctic regions is increasing and the attractiveness of this destination results from many factors. This area is interesting and unknown at the same time inaccessible and not universal (e.g. Baldacchino, 2006; Gyimóthy and Mykletun, 2004; Jaskólski and Pawłowski, 2017; Stewart et al., 2007). The type of available tourist attractions is specific: in principle, restricted to communing with nature (although some authors point to the presence of cultural monuments in the Arctic – for example Jaskólski and Pawłowski (2017) on the Spitsbergen). I also presume that precisely the isolation from civilization and a relatively low level of perceived anthropopressure as well as the possibility of experiencing the desolation and the silence are the factors influencing the sensation of attractiveness.

The sources of increased interest in the Arctic regions lie in the nineteenth century and the expeditions of then explorers, which undoubtedly contributed to the dissemination of the knowledge about this region: “The interest in the polar area as a potential area of tourism development was noticed as early as at the end of the 19th century. It was caused by the increase in popularity of Arctic expeditions, and above all by the travelers’ race to reach the pole. In the middle of the 19th century, the pioneers of tourism began to visit the island on private yachts. In the 1870s, the first passenger ships to Spitsbergen began to operate. The first hotel in Spitsbergen was built in 1890 in Longyearbyen.” (Jaskólski and Pawłowski, 2017). The development of tourism in this region of the world was also supported by economic changes (for example, the decline in coal mining in Spitsbergen led Norway to take measures to ensure the sources of income for its settlements – which resulted in the creation of national parks and nature reserves attracting (quite effectively) the tourists): “While by 2006 the number of tourists visiting Longyearbyen in the season did not exceed 30,000, in 2014 the city reported a record number of up to 50,000. This demonstrates that tourism has doubled in such a short period of time.” (Jaskólski and Pawłowski, 2017). Such a dramatic increase in the number of visitors can be attributed particularly to the form of tourism offered by the tourism companies that organize cruises in the Arctic Ocean that enable people to experience their presence in the High North. The specificity of invasive Fordist tourism consists of defining locations as tourist attractions and promoting them as well as their exploitation and later abandonment. This process has a devastating impact on local communities and the natural environment. As the interest in the place increases, there is a necessity to make infrastructure available for tourists, which entails a real interference in the natural environment (e.g. Karhu and Osipov, 2017; Maciejowski, 2007; Vistad et al., 2008). It also has social consequences like changes in the local employment structure and reorganization of social structures as well as changes in traditions and customs. The mass tourism has therefore a significantly destructive effect not only on the natural environment of a man, but also on the man himself. Those who participate in such organized travels, however, do not have the technical possibility to experience what seems to be very attractive in the polar regions: the isolation from human civilization.

Dyson’s SWOT analysis created to evaluate the tourism potential of Spitsbergen places on the Strengths side of the Spitsbergen ‘the possibility of peaceful sightseeing (no crowds)’ among other things (e.g. Dyson, 2004). The theme of the low intensity of human activity can also be found in other authors, indicating that it is attractive for tourists to visit the unexplored areas that no modern, civilized human has ever set foot on or at least rarely ‘explored’ (Maciejowski, 2007).

The restrictions in the number of social interactions and the number of stimuli seem to make the polar regions completely unique. This kind of isolation is not even considered as a tourist attraction anymore (according to Urry (2000, 2002) the attraction is the place and the object and here we are dealing with the extension of this catalogue with the status of mind) but as a desirable state of mind that is very difficult to achieve at the center of human civilization. The

polar regions, geographically, are in fact at the margin for locating people’s activity. The perception of isolation as a desirable good is, in a sense, a novelty in social processes and results from the specificity of the occurring changes.

### 3. Challenging aspects of solitude

For a long time, isolation has been, and for the vast majority of people still is, a sign of an oppressive, negative state, which is connected with the fact that there are high affiliation needs experienced by humans as species. Forced isolation of people in closed institutions (correctional institutions, prisons, camps) has always been treated as a form of an oppression. The additional factor of oppression is the fact that in such places, people are not able to decide for themselves. What is more – these isolating institutions always assume, that men under their supervision are exposed to a continuous surveillance by a special category of people (guards, educators), and that they are deprived of the possibility to decide whether they allow for this kind of surveillance or not. Here therefore we have a complex psychosocial phenomenon: forced isolation presupposes the impossibility of distancing from the people who are officers of the institutions. Obviously, imposing periods of isolation and social exposure becomes a punishment because it consists of limiting the choice.

Another example of negatively motivated and also negatively perceived isolation is the dispatchment of people to areas treated as unattractive and dangerous: Siberia (as an example of the polar regions) but also Australia and many other places, are examples of imposing isolation by transferring socially unadapted people to an area inaccessible to the average others (e.g. Bauman, 2003). Today, due to the impossibility of dispatching people to such geographically separated areas, in order to achieve spatial segregation, numerous, and deliberately constructed architectural barriers are used, allowing for the displacement of undesirable people outside the area of the direct contact (fences, intercoms, cameras or closed housing estates serve this purpose). In these phenomena and processes, isolation is either a rejection or even a punishment. It is driven by the reluctance of some people to interact with the others and it is executed by transferring these unwanted people to areas that are unattractive to the majority, on the basis of coercion and imposition of the will by force of top-down decisions. Such isolation processes concerned different locations, including polar regions, as well as (for example banishments).

Today, however, in the case of polar regions, the process is different. People who are not interested in interacting with the others in a quest for silence, among other things decide independently to withdraw to the areas unattractive to the human majority. It turns out that whatever they find in these areas and whatever kind of sensation is experienced it is highly rewarding while the isolation itself has a positive nature.

The social mechanisms of isolating people as a form of punishment are based on a psychological assumption regarding the averse nature of social deprivation. Separation from social and cognitive stimuli has been studied through various experiments, conducted by Harry Harlow (1959, 1965) among others, who, by separating young rhesus monkeys

from mothers, observed severe developmental disorders that led to death. The lack of stimuli generated in this way had to be felt as a negative type of stimulation. In the context of extreme and forced sensory and social deprivation, especially of herd animals, the negative interpretation of the procedures to which animals are subjected is evident (today there is no doubt that such practices are a source of suffering for animals). It is different, however, when it comes to making choices, while knowing the options available and while taking into account one's own preferences (or competences demonstrated by individuals). From a psychological point of view, the more conscious the choice is, the more cognitively and emotionally prepared a person is to make the selection, and the more action is taken in accordance with the preferences and motivations of the person, the less likely it is to feel discomfort or even interpret the situation as oppressive. The perception of the situation is also influenced by personality traits and the individual's own life experience.

In publications on spatial isolation in polar regions, Jan Terelak (1982a, 1982b) points out that particularly long-lasting stays in polar research stations (so-called wintering, covering the period of Arctic winter) were assessed by the participants as difficult experiences that carried negative emotions (e.g. Piepiórka, 2019). In the first place, however, the motivation of the participants should be taken into account, in the second place their personalities and competences, and in the third place their access to information on social and living conditions in the stations, which was very limited until the internet appeared. Terelak (1982b) confirms that the motivation to take certain actions was crucial for the evaluation of the quality of the experience of staying in the conditions of Arctic isolation. The research of Soviet expedition participants, recalled by Terelak (1982b), indicated mainly their financial and adventurous motivations. It is difficult to find in the publications mentioned above research threads devoted to motivations resulting from in-depth reflection on the level and type of one's own needs. It is also important to note that these works were created half a century ago, when anthropopressure was weaker. It is necessary to point out that Terelak, when presenting the results of his research, focused on the negative emotions accompanying the polar explorers during their trips to the polar regions. He disregarded the rewarding aspects and deep motivations that were not the subject of the research. The selection of participants for this type of expeditions should be based on a precise adjustment of the personality profile to the type of task. It should therefore result from an in-depth analysis of the motivation, level of needs and the type of personality of the candidates. The participation in the expedition itself should be undertaken very consciously, on the basis of the analysis of the arguments for and against, and taking into account the possible negative consequences (e.g. Węstawski, 2019). Terelak's research dates back to the historical period (the seventies and eighties of the twentieth century), when the participation in 'exotic' character expeditions (which included, and still includes, participation in polar expeditions) was determined by the level of classification and numerous informal and non-substantial factors, such as political functions. To consider such factors as sufficient for participating in the expedition, given the motivation of the participants, which was rather due

to mercantile motives and taking into account the competition as well as the desire to be distinguished, must have resulted in an inappropriate selection of participants. Negative emotions demonstrated by the inadequately selected people on polar expeditions are a natural reaction to stressful situations. It may appear, among other things, when it is necessary to confront difficult living conditions (e.g. cold or prolonged darkness). Failure to include the risk factors in the assessment of the circumstances may have resulted in an erroneous perception of the situation, reinforced by poor preparation for the journey (or lack of preparation at all) and by a 'culture shock'. I assume that the participants could have been experiencing such a culture shock in a very specific form. Traditionally, the culture shock is defined as a confrontation with new normative-directive orders, which causes the known behavioral strategies to become inadequate or insufficient. This may result in a depressed mood and lower self-esteem, as the existing knowledge and experience are not sufficient to effectively cope with the requirements set by the environment.

Today, when, following Rosi Braidotti (2013), we indicate the continuity of nature and culture and treat them as one continuum rather than two opposing states, it is legitimate to interpret the change in natural conditions as a change in cultural conditions.

In coping with the culture shock, the emphasis is specifically given to the role of preparing for the journey, the need to plan tasks to be performed on the site and the need to provide social support to those affected by the shock. In Terelak's work, the polar explorers are depicted as convicts, forced to separate from the desired social environment, rather than as conscious, autonomous individuals who decide to take upon the journey on the basis of deep reflection and in pursuit of satisfying their needs, including the need for solitude. As De Korte and Oosterveld (1978) points out in an extremely interesting report on wintering, the inappropriate selection of people chosen to participate in the expedition and the neglect of psychological and sociological evaluation, leads to numerous disturbances resulting in difficulties, emotional challenges and conflicts that jeopardize the success of the whole mission.

#### 4. Hypothesis: Solitude as a value

Effective selection of participants for projects requiring solitude increases not only the quality of the task performance, but also guarantees positive experiences for the participants. Reflection of this rule can be found in many opinions of those undertaking trips into challenging geographical regions where solitude is one of the unavoidable elements of the project: "Instead of 'sensory deprivation', I remember the most colorful, attractive and adventurous one and the other year, where every day was like a nature film unfolding before my eyes. Instead of the group stress, I remember the impression of solidarity, unconditional confidence in friends, the joy of overcoming risk and physical exhaustion. Please note – I'm talking about a small group of friendly young scientists who went to spend a year in the field research, next to us there were of course others – our colleagues who experienced it differently and their motivations were different." (Węstawski, 2019). Węstawski

argues further that difference in the ways of experiencing solitude derives from differences in motivations that participants of Arctic research demonstrated prior to the trips. For those whose main motivation was financial one, the trips appeared much more difficult, demanding and challenging than for those inspired by curiosity and willingness to discover. Węśławski as a participant and researcher also sees another difference in experiencing solitude in the Arctic. He claims that in order to experience positive emotions during the trip it is crucial to assign proper ‘scope of duties’ to participants. Subjects researched by Terelak were usually assigned simple tasks based on routinely performed duties, important, but usually very unattractive and monotonous (e.g. non-stop meteorological measurements every couple of hours). Those persons were lacking interest and motivation in discovering surrounding reality. As he claims members of this kind of groups would tend to stay in the base building, except for the necessary walks on duty against white bears. The main stresses and strains of this group of winterers concerned the diet, the amount of alcohol available and the fear of additional, unplanned activities. Most probably it was this group that was experiencing the ‘sensory deprivation’ described by physicians.

On the contrary, Węśławski’s research team consisted of completely different people, motivated by curiosity not by the financial reward and a desire to experience the polar expedition. These participants prepared themselves for the trip by winter hiking in the mountains, camping in the snow and sailing in a small boat on a rough sea. This group also possessed knowledge about specificity of the climate and realm of arctic regions. Mindset of its member was focused on the field work with as little as possible stays inside the base buildings. Factors mentioned by Węśławski are the key elements in building proper motivation, expectations and attitude towards the undertaken task, which changes emotional response of participants towards experiencing solitude and silence, as well as social isolation.

One of the travelers, who was visiting Spitsbergen for the first time, wrote: “I am alone, but I do not feel more or less lonely than in Poland or anywhere else. The difference is that it’s quieter here and you can focus more, and thus see things more clearly. This expedition is a journey into myself. Rather than walking to the pole I travel through my life. I march through various events. I meet people and step by step everything that occurred comes back. Even the shortest events or small gestures that emerge from memory unexpectedly out of nowhere. Despite the fact that I pull the sled, I feel at ease. I do what I really wanted to do. Alone in a white empty field. I am free and happy. Here, life returns to its original path. Existence consists of simple and repetitive, but not always obvious acts. The existence only to satisfy the primary needs.” (Cichy et al., 2019).

In the 21st century, the possibility of experiencing the silence becomes not only a quality commodity, but also a luxurious one. This is emphasized by the offer of upscale hotels, as well as tourist resorts such as agrotourism. (Thurlow and Jaworski, 2010). Offering the experience of silence resulting from the isolation takes the form of a dichotomously designed proposal. Either it is aimed at separation from the nature and from the sterile purity, maintaining abso-

lute control over what stimuli are acceptable (this kind of rhetoric is used by the upscale hotels, where the purity, silence and delicacy as well as a full control over the possibility of any external stimuli is emphasized, and the visual message uses light and subdued colors that create an impression of harmony and peace) or it is directed towards the proximity to the natural environment and the possibility of interacting with the chaos resulting from the specificity of this environment, which is, however, contrasted with the civilizational control of stimuli and space encountered in urban agglomerations (the perception of wind and presence of insects or falling leaves as well as a kind of the ‘roughness’ of natural circumstances – spaces that require physical fitness, mountains, waters, etc.). However, with the egalitarian consumption and the popularization of access to higher quality products, the concepts of new forms of luxury have emerged and they not only include goods that are expensive and inaccessible, but also the goods that satisfy the specific needs of respite from everyday struggle and the emotional needs as well as the goods that provide positive experiences (Veblen, 2004). In this context, what is becoming more and more visible is the tendency for affluent people to settle on large and isolated from the access of social masses plots, but still privileged in terms of natural attractiveness. (e.g. the encyclical letter *Laudato Si*, Francis (2015)). Traditionally, rare goods are considered to be the luxury goods (Veblen 1994). Access to nature and its natural dynamics, including the experience of sounds devoid of anthropogenic influences, is not common today and can clearly be considered as one of the very much sought higher quality goods.

It appears, however, that the isolation is attractive not only for a contemporary human but it was valued already in the past.

Positive appraisal of silence has always been associated with the in-depth reflection resulting from religious, mystical or at least deeply contemplative experiences. The practice of embedding the reflectiveness of the monks, shamans and priests in an environment of complete silence, with the possibility of focusing on ones thoughts, is still and was present in all religions, both polytheistic and monotheistic. The rituals of transition are accompanied by the social isolation, and consequently by the isolation from the acoustic stimuli, as indicated by van Gennep. In both cases, the isolation is intended to deepen the reflection and enable focusing on the essential matters as well as to allow the separation from the information overload and the inflow of stimuli as distractors. Remaining in silence (often associated or even identified with the social isolation) is, however, so difficult to experience that it has also become a kind of challenge: for example, in some of the scouting organisations members gaining further degrees of initiation (badges) are asked to attempt the behaviour in which silence and remaining in silence is ordered. It is a kind of task that diagnoses the ability to concentrate on oneself and one’s own experiences, the so-called inner life. As Thoreau (2018) indicates in *Walden*, only the isolation from the social environment that generates sounds, that Thoreau interprets as a noise and a hum, provides a real opportunity to reflect on the surrounding world and its phenomena. Moreover, this reflection

may only be exercised in a properly deepened manner, only in a close contact with the nature.

The needs to experience silence as well as to experience sounds are adjusted by not only the given culture and species, but also by the individual's need for this kind of stimulation or its limitation. A type of psychological regularity has already been thoroughly studied – it is also applied in a 'negative' manner, i.e. in torturing of the suspects of crimes. By the people imprisoned, for example, the experience of a constant noise, or even a background noise, is indicated as very oppressive. Therefore, the elements of meditation in the silence and darkness are introduced as part of certain kinds of group therapies conducted in prisons (the silence and darkness are the two very limited experiences in prisons).

The torturous use of a noise to exercise psychological pressure was used by the American armed forces not only in the attempted arrests of Manuel Noriega, the Panamanian ruler and dictator, but also in the fights against the Taliban in Afghanistan (see Michaels, 2010). This kind of over stimulation led not only to sleep deprivation, but also became so extremely difficult to endure that it was perceived and used as a torture to induce certain behaviours of people subjected to it.

The human natural need for affiliation assumes various levels of intensity in different people, which automatically indicates that the solitude and isolation from the inflow of stimuli will be felt differently by various people. The aforementioned authors wrote about the positive valorization of solitude and the experience of silence, whose works became the foundations for reflection undertaken within the framework of the deep ecology trend: Aldo Leopold and Arne Naess, but these motifs are also present in contemporary psychological research, in which the motivations to travel alone or in extremely difficult conditions are analyzed. These analyses indicate that such measures result from broadly understood personality needs (Kajtna et al., 2004). Therefore, the solitude is treated as a value by lonely travelers, Himalayan climbers or sailors, and certainly not as a threat. The solitude evaluated in such a manner became a creative inspiration for Henry David Thoreau's deliberations (Thoreau, 2018). With all his conviction, he stated that it is the solitude, silence and the possibility of staying 'in the forest', i.e. in contact with the natural environment, that determine the potential of human intellectual development. In *Walden Thoreau* (2018) also emphasizes that communing with nature and listening to the sounds of nature are a form of luxury: experiences inaccessible to the masses. This reflection is particularly interesting given the fact that Thoreau's works were created in the 19th century. Silence and a valuable opportunity to experience nature alone were also the basis for thinking about the man and his surroundings, presented by Aldo Leopold (Leopold, 1968).

The intensified desire for silence, which is directly linked to the social isolation, is currently reflected in the more and more successful trend called: The Mindfulness. The Mindfulness can be described as: a mental state achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting one's feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations, used as a therapeutic technique. In this sense, Mindfulness, means focusing on the here and now while consciously rejecting any stimuli that might disturb this state. Disturbing stimuli are interpreted in a broad

sense as a 'noise pollution' where 'pollution' are not just the typical sound stimuli, but also various distractors causing a lack of concentration and generating a sense of fear, anxiety or inability to experience the current mental state of an individual. Mindfulness can be described as the ability to create a state of isolation from the surrounding and stimulating world. This is intended to improve the comfort and well-being of life. The Mindfulness technique is deeply embedded in meditation practices and represents a response to the necessity of functioning in a world where silence and disconnection from the flow of stimuli is both difficult and impossible indeed.

It is precisely this desire to separate from the anthropogenically derived acoustics, social and visual stimuli that provokes people to seek isolation in the Arctic: "Spitsbergen stuns me. The blue, the white and the unbroken silence. Everything is so different from the riot of colours and sounds of tropical countries. I'm fine there." (Cichy et al., 2019).

The increasing presence of a man in the polar regions leads however to specific paradoxical situations in which the inversion of what is valuable and what is without value, what is desirable and what is unwanted, what is valuable and what is unnecessary occurs. In my opinion, today we can make a statement that the uniqueness of the polar regions, apart from their natural specificity, stems from the fact that they are isolated from the major population centers. Similar values based on the isolation from the stimuli typical for human civilization can be found in such regions as high mountains, jungle and desert. Anthropopressure in such places assumes an apparently innocent form of 'trekking' tourism. However, the tourism is a developed branch of commercial human activity which has its dark sides in the form of degradation of the areas which are the most touristically popular. Increasing popularity of arctic regions as travel destinations raises therefore a question, how long we'll be able to take part in following kind of experience: "I'm heading back, to the world of noise and hustle and bustle. The wind is getting stronger. I'm listening to its noise, just like for so many days. These are the last moments in a place where life is simple, where each thing and every action makes sense and serves the purpose of surviving and living, and enjoying life as it is." (Cichy et al., 2019).

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