

STRATEGIES FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF CITIES

Poland and the Czech Republic



CENTRUM
STOSUNKÓW
MIĘDZYNARODOWYCH

RELACJE

12/2016

www.csm.org.pl

The project was co-financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland.

This publication presents the views of its authors. It does not reflect the official position of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland.



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1. The public space. How to strategically plan a city and include the residents in the process?

In Poland, as well as in the Czech Republic, the function and management of public spaces is an important element of local politics. In both countries the problems associated with the management of land owned by the city have their roots in their communist past: if a space is owned by the collective, then it belongs to no one – nobody is responsible for the creative use of undeveloped land. However, a quarter century after immense political change in Eastern Europe, the way people think about and approach this issue is also shifting. Local residents are becoming more engaged - they wish to have input in the design and development of their areas as well as to play a role in the decision making processes in planning new investments.

In Poland this is possible thanks to a citizen's budget (participatory budget). Thanks to it the residents of a community, suburb or a housing estate may participate in allocating local expenditure. In contrast to public consultations, decisions made

by the residents regarding the citizen's budget are legally binding. The prime example of this initiative's success is Łódź, where in 2016 local residents initiated 87 projects with a combined value of 40 million złoty. The citizen's budget not only makes it easier to identify the most pressing needs of residents, but above all else it facilitates the integration of the local community and increases trust in local government.

In the Czech Republic citizen's budgets are still a rare occurrence. Local authorities do not ask the residents what their needs are, instead imposing top down solutions. However, this approach is slowly changing. This shift towards the Polish model is most readily seen in the Institute of Planning and Development in the city of Prague, which has recently released a handbook for revitalising public spaces. Its main goal is to make local residents aware that they have direct influence on the decisions of local authorities, either through organising town hall meetings for a specific street, or public consultations, or the direct exchange of ideas.

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W Czechach budżety partycypacyjne to jeszcze wciąż marginalne zjawisko. Władze lokalne nie pytają się mieszkańców o ich potrzeby, tylko narzucają im z góry określone rozwiązania. Jednak to podejście powoli zaczyna się zmieniać. Świadczy o tym między innymi powołanie Instytutu Planowania i Rozwoju w Urzędzie Miasta Pragi, który wydał właśnie podręcznik dotyczący ożywiania przestrzeni publicznej. Jego głównym celem jest uświadomienie mieszkańcom, że mają rzeczywisty wpływ na decyzje władz miasta, choćby poprzez organizowanie happeningów związanych z daną ulicą, konsultacje społeczne czy wzajemną wymianę pomysłów.

Recommendations:

The most important factors for the successful implementation of a citizen's budget are:

- the appointment of a team, which can coordinate the preparation of the budget,
- engaging the local population by organising meetings in each neighbourhood and determining the needs of the residents,

- planning online information campaigns and voting for available projects,

- communication between institutions which are engaged in the projects (online and in local media).

2. Revitalising cities – why is it important and how to plan revitalisation initiatives?

Urban development must be directed at improving the quality of life for the local population. Cities should be desirable places to live, which its residents identify with and want to inhabit. Revitalisation is the process of bringing underdeveloped areas out of a state of crisis (where they have lost their initial functions e.g. industry, manufacturing) by finding a new role for them alongside a complete renovation. For this process to be successful, it needs to be strongly aligned with the city's development strategy.

A Polish city of Łódź can be treated as a beacon for the success of revitalisation policies. In 2012 the city implemented the "Local revitalisation program for Łódź 2020+", which was centred on the renewal of the historic city centre contain-

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ing over 10,000 residential buildings, the railway station Łódź Fabryczna, and the century old power plant (which will house the new centre for cinematic arts, planetarium, cinema, library, gallery and conference studios).

Whereas in Poland most revitalisation initiatives are focused on residential areas, in the Czech Republic they aim to repurpose post-industrial spaces (mines, factories) into business-cultural developments. An example of such a successful initiative is the DOV – Dolni Oblast Vitkovice. This former industrial zone in the centre of Ostrava, where there used to be ironworks, coking plant, mine and power station. Today the area is home to art galleries, the Museum of Technology, playgrounds for children, restaurants and conference rooms.

An important factor in successfully implementing revitalisation initiatives is developing partnerships with local groups – NGOs that focus on the impact of a revitalisation project in the social sphere. In the Czech Republic local government authorities play a minor role, because there is an already large engagement on the part of private capital, and the practice

of public-private partnerships (PPPs) is far more prominent than in Poland. Alongside this, selected revitalisation projects have been financed through crowdfunding. In Poland this method of financing, which is characteristic of cultural, academic, and social ventures, has to this time not been harnessed for the purposes of urban development.

Recommendations:

- making revitalisation a key tenet of a city's development strategy,
- far reaching civic participation – the views of the residents of areas targeted for revitalisation must be considered in decision making processes during the development stage,
- to promote the concept of public-private partnerships as a method for effectively financing revitalisation projects,
- to develop and promote good practices in preparing and initiating PPPs,
- to create an effective dialogue between public institutions and private investors,

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- monitoring how investments evolve in response to PPPs, and on this basis preparing proposals for adjustments to regulations.

3. Financing the investment. What are the available means for funding new projects in cities?

Financing investments through the private sector is a relatively new phenomenon in Poland, and considerably less prevalent than in the Czech Republic. The dominant school of thought continues to be that the main funding of city investments should come from the state. In the Czech Republic there nevertheless exists a degree of financing revitalisation investments using the public purse, but on a considerably smaller scale than in Poland. This is due to the fact that Czech cities have sizeable debt burdens and do not wish to increase them. They also tend to keep an arm's length away from financing large investments, as they are concerned about being saddled with the costs of future management and upkeep of city developments. It is for this reason that it is so easy to create aggregable terms and conditions for private investors, who have

the required capital and wish to participate in the evolution of the city. The best example of this type of partnership is Ostrava, which is undergoing an economic boom in real estate development. After the successful completion of the construction of new economic zones in the city, sizeable national and international investments were brought there. Ostrava became the permanent base for several large firms, namely CTP Invest, PEGATRON Czech, Tieto, SungWoo Hitech, ArcelorMittal, Siemens and many others.

Recommendations:

- creating aggregable regulatory conditions and tax frameworks for private investors,
- increasing the role of the PPP model in subsequent investments.

4. Intelligent agglomeration. How can smart technologies can be harnessed for city growth?

The concept of smart cities is about attempting to harness current technological innovations to improve their functionality. A city should strive to become more efficient, more comfortable and cheaper

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to maintain. In Poland this mainly concerns infrastructure: the systems controlling traffic flow, energy saving LED streetlamps, and wireless, city-wide internet connectivity. These solutions have been successful across Poland, in Szczecin, Gdańsk and Wrocław. The situation is somewhat less positive when considering the implementation of technology at the user level. There is a clear lack of mobile applications that have the capacity to inform inhabitants of crises within a city, possible power outages, or even about roadworks and subsequent diversions. This is due to municipal officials lacking the knowledge and awareness of the possibilities and cost-effective solutions that mobile technologies offer that could optimise their very own work.

The report from THINKTANK shows that the various barriers that inhibit the realisation of “smart cities” are: a lack of a comprehensive and systematic approach (53%), a lack of records concerning these issues in official documents concerning the strategic development of cities (52%), assigning necessary resources to the individual units of local governance to implement their agendas, and a lack of integration and communication between the

individual units within local authorities (indicated by 51%).

For this very reason, Poland should take example from solution used by the Czech local governments, where such communication exchange platforms are a fact of everyday life. The concept of smart cities not only entails the optimisation of traffic flow, but most of all the communication between local government offices and those that use the city’s infrastructure. Effective communication and information policy even in the most trivial of circumstances, such as diversions due to roadworks or the construction of new docking stations for city bicycles, leads to a more effective relationship between residents and the local authority.

Recommendations:

- to educate the current cohorts of middle management and the higher rungs of local government on the availability of technological solutions,
- to create a good legal framework – regulations that encourage public and private cooperation, especially those in the realms of new communication technology, should be encouraged,

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- to digitise and integrate local government offices by creating apps and internet-based tools that facilitate or enable local residents to communicate with authorities about current political initiatives.

5. The sharing economy and urban development. New services and economic initiatives.

The sharing economy offers plentiful opportunities to further the development of smart cities and building a sense of local community. However, this relies on the condition that local governments know how to take advantage of these initiatives. Excellent examples of this can be found across the Atlantic, where the Boston city government came to an agreement with Uber, where they shared information with the local authority on the most prevalent routes across this city. This supports the work of local government in assigning new routes for public transportation in accordance with the current needs of the local population.

In Poland, as well as in the Czech Republic, little thought is given to legal regulations regarding the sharing economy. In the Czech Republic government offices

play the role of spectator, preferring to observe how the sharing economy will evolve, and are unwilling to regulate the new models governing the services industry. In Poland the Ministry of Development is analysing in which sectors Polish services would be able to specialise, as the digital revolution is the first economic revolution that Poland is taking active part in (the Czech's as part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire took part in the first industrial revolution, as seen through their highly development rail infrastructure).

In Poland an interesting innovation is the service NaprawmyTo.pl, created on the basis of the English Fix-MyStreet.org. Local residents who discern a fault in their neighbourhood infrastructure (e.g. faulty streetlamps, potholes, a damaged bus stop) can immediately register the damage with their smartphones, and follow how long it takes the local authority to repair the damage online. Eleven smaller cities currently use the service, and in the two years the service has been running there have been over 19,000 notifications.

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Recommendation:

- developing relationships based on trust and eliminating unnecessary barriers is the key tenet that must be adopted by local government officials, in order to fully harness the potential of the sharing economy.

6. Mobility in cities. How can one optimise the use of different transport means?

Every city and region in Europe has this goal in mind, to move the burden of transport away from personal cars to communal transport. This is a difficult task, particularly in countries like Poland and the Czech Republic where personal cars are still seen as tools of self-liberation, and define one's place in society. In both countries the city governments are enacting policies that limit the availability of park spaces and are increasing their costs, which is the cause of intense grievances between local authorities and the populous – it is seen as an attempt to take away the individual's freedom and choice.

Recommendation:

- rewards, not punishments – not by im-

plementing punishments, but rather by incentivising certain behaviour, the local government would have an easier time of changing perceptions and leading people to choosing alternative methods of transportation,

- building new parking lots both in city centres, and on the outskirts, in order to encourage drivers to spend their free time in cities, rather than outside them, leading to a reinvigoration of the services sectors,

- increasing the number of city bicycles and docking stations,

- conducting research amongst residents to determine their needs with regards to public transport,

- spatial planning – by integrating regional investment strategies, one can create incentives to move further out of cities when designing new transport infrastructure.

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