

A picnic for winos¹? On institutionalized culture and social exclusion in a post-industrial city

The presentation is going to deal with a relation between the field of cultural production and consumption and social exclusion in the city of Łódź. By analyzing strategies and events undertaken in the recent years, especially in relation to the application for the “European Capital of Culture”, we would like to explore the question of identification and responding to social problems typical for a deindustrializing, pauperized city. Our main concern will be the possibility to bridge the gap between institutions and the citizens, which has been emerging in the public sphere on the local level.

Citizen versus consumer: who the culture serves in the age of cognitive capitalism

Cultural participation is one of the most important dimensions of social distinctions (see: Bourdieu 2006). At the same time, access to culture-such as to education or healthcare- is perceived as one of the civil rights. Consequently, this sphere can be seen as a field for social inclusion of those who are at risk “dropping out” from the mainstream society. Social and political engagement of culture usually takes two forms: artistic projects being a voice in the discussion on social problems and activities aimed at increasing cultural participation of excluded individuals and groups. Both instruments seem to have critical potential², but can also bring about petrification of existing hierarchies and power relations.

The importance of “soft” mechanisms of social inclusion grows in postindustrial societies. Thus, in the debate on inequalities, the culture has been treated analogically to the education. The review of EU documents reveals the tendency-accompanied by the lack of clear definition of „culture”³ – towards linking this term with the notions of creativity and innovation which are crucial for EU economic development⁴.

As result of “commodification of social relations” (Ziółkowski 2004) or “colonization of the lifeworld by the market”, the concept of citizen has been replaced with the idea of consumer. Not only in Poland, consequences of this shift are noticeable in all spheres of life. In cultural policies it means the expansion of its marketized version. At the local level it means focusing on marketing and infrastructure⁵ aimed at attracting tourists, investors and the middle class inhabitants. Gentrification and growing segregation of urban areas is one of clearest effect of such strategies.

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This title recalls literary one of the opinions expressed on the Facebook forum in the discussion on the application for the title of European Capital of Culture.

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These ideas can obviously be criticized. For example Rebecca Gordon Nesbitt (2009) indicated ideological ambiguity of such public programmes in Scotland. However, the situation in Poland seems entirely different.

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It follows from the analyses conducted within KATARSIS project (<http://katarsis.ncl.ac.uk/wp.html>), that culture is understood as art, normative systems, creativity, innovation etc., see also: KEA European Affairs, 2006, *The Economy of Culture in Europe*, Report to the European Commission; http://ec.europa.eu/culture/eac/sources_info/studies/economy_en.html.; *Creative Europe Report. On Governance and Management of Artistic Creativity in Europe*, www.creativeeurope.info/home.html

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The estimation of socio-political potential of culture by the administration -even as stimuli for “innovation”- leads to inclusion of cultural activities into social policies. The reflection of these tendencies is growing number of EU grant competitions, recently motivated additionally by European Year for Combating Poverty and Social exclusion. Bearing in mind all objections to European social agenda, grant system etc., it is still interesting how it influences *modus operandi* at the local and regional level, especially in deprived areas.

These processes have been accompanied by the development of bottom-up activities and non-governmental organizations which are supposed to counterbalance bureaucratic practices of public institutions and-by the occasion-to implement the idea of “civil society”. Nevertheless, the existence of the third sector seems to harmonise perfectly the idea of the state retrenchment under the banners of building social capital and decentralization-not only in the field of culture.

Łódź: the charm of neoliberal transformation and „patchwork policies”

Łódź is a specific case on the map of socio-economic transition in Poland. As a city of textile monoculture, it can be a symbol both of fast and brutal industrialization in the nineteenth century and deindustrialization at the end of twentieth century. Moreover, as a city of industrial workers, lacking “old” academic and cultural traditions, it still has difficulties to fit the requirements of cognitive capitalism.

Even if poverty rates in Łódź stopped increasing, the average income and living standards there are still relatively low if compare to other largest cities in Poland (see: Czapiński, Panek 2007). The growing problem is deepening of social inequalities, their intergenerational reproduction and spatial concentration in social hotspots or poverty enclaves (Jankowski, Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 2010, Golczyńska-Grondas, Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 2009), which are unlikely to turn into hypergettos (por. Wacquant 2008), but are characterized by poor quality of infrastructure, such as housing and low supply and quality of institutions, including educational and cultural ones. In Łódź, many of the latter are located in such zones or in near them. Yet, the neighbourhood remains “silent” and the attempts to break it are rare⁶.

Łódź can serve as a good case study to analyse the processes occurring in the public sphere in Poland, which resulted in incoherence social and cultural policies, as well as in neglecting the points where these could meet. Both fields are characterized by short-term, project activities and inclination to delegate responsibilities to NGOs. Both spheres remain “invisible” to each other. The research on poverty in Łódź region, conducted systematically in last twenty years, did not reveal the participation of cultural institutions in the inclusive practices. Even if the authors of the Strategy for the Development of Łódź Voivodeship for years 2007-2020 have noticed the lack of social cohesion, citizens’ mistrust to public institutions, as well as the decline of cultural participation, social policy and culture stay entirely separate fields of authorities’ activity.

Institutional environment and administrative strategies: culture a’la Łódź

The problem of social exclusion is not raised in the institutional discourse at municipal and regional level. Neither Marshall’s Office nor the City Hall, put relevant obligations on the supervised cultural institutions, give any instructions, pay bonuses for activities in this area and require reporting about them.

In most cases actions aimed at equalizing citizens’ opportunities for cultural participation are additive, being a part of marketing strategy (gaining clients through non-standard promotion and encouraging to buy regular tickets, or modeling a future consumer of culture product- Lodz Philharmonic and Baby bum bum, Art Museum and workshops “4-year-olds allowed”), being a creative implementation of grants (“regional scenes” of Jaracz Theatre) or a fusion of the two previously mentioned functions (Powszechny Theatre and its “actions aimed at the excluded and the disabled”)⁷.

This direction is not a surprise, as it follows the objectives of the *Programme of Cooperation*

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Culture can be „used” by local authorities for marketing, job creation (as a sector of economy) and social revitalization (see: <http://katarsis.ncl.ac.uk/wp/wp2/papers.html>).

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Just to mention some of them: private theatre „Szwalsnia” which used to be located near social assistance centre, closed because of unfulfilling requirements concerning fire protection; actions organized by the foundation Białe Gawrony (The White Crows) at Wchodnia street or picnic organized by Stefan Jaracz Theatre, aimed at encouraging the “neighbours” to enter the institution- the administration of the theatre however, was not interested in a long-term dialog with the guests. This kind of approach corresponds with the lack of offer and mechanisms of breaking financial, spatial and educational barriers.

between Łódź Voivodship and Non-governmental Organizations, which to a large delegates various forms of activities in the region to the third sector –from school sport to health promotion. In the field of culture and the preservation of the cultural heritage only three priorities are proposed: organization of large promotional campaigns, cultivating Polish heritage and education. Among ten tasks to realize in the current year, also “participation of the poorest in cultural events” was placed⁸. It seems optimistic in comparison to documents produced by the Municipality of Łódź. It’s strategic priorities were defined by the McKinsey strategy for the city, based on three pillars: Łódź as city of festivals, films and multicultural Łódź. Consecutive documents, this time-related to the competition of the title „European City of Culture 2016, also do not bring to much hope of “egalitarian Łódź”⁹.

Manufaktura, New Centre of Łódź and Creative District¹⁰: the future Łódź not for a wino

There are three symbols of modernization *à’la* Łódź. The first is Manufaktura – a centre of commerce and entertainment opened in 2006 in a former textile factory. It was granted several awards, for example for urban planning (Urban Land Institute, 2007) and frequently serves as a proof for Łódź as investment-friendly, open for challenges and creativity. The complex hosts the branch of public Art Museum (MS2) and a couple of commercial cultural establishments, is located next to the Museum of the City of Łódź, but also to the poverty enclave consisting of tenant houses along Ogrodowa street, the inhabitants of which are descendants of workers dismissed from the textile factory at the beginning of nineties. They make neither “proper” clients of the commercial centre, nor the visitors of MS2. As far as Manufaktura tries to create it’s image as “socially responsible”¹¹, public cultural institutions located within/near it, seem to ignore their surroundings.

Another emblematical project is the crucial concept of the Łódź- European Capital of Culture application. Creative District Księży Młyn 2016 was described in the document “Revolution in process. 2010-2015”¹² as “a bottom-up initiative”, consisting in creative and complex revitalization. The first step

The unemployed are entitled to get 2 tickets /1 PLN for special performances once a month. Such initiatives undertaken by the chain of institutions all over the city could be a starting point for a long-term programme, such as Austrian „Hunger auf Kunst und Kultur”.

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The Office raised a competition for coordinators of specific objectives. Only one among 19 beneficiaries implemented the idea of inclusion through culture (Theatre Society “Chorea”).

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While new analyses and strategies are produced, the role of coordinator for cultural initiatives in Łódź was taken by Łódź Art Center, which won the competition for preparing the application for ECC title. Despite the failure, the application became a strategic document (http://www.lodz2016.com/articles.php?a_id=484&page=2) and the implementation of it’s objectives is postulated-among others-by the most probable winner in city mayor’s elections-Hanna Zdanowska. The application is full of EU-vocabulary. Creative industries are to be the main instrument for the urban development. The question of counteracting marginality is raised just once, on the page 189 Young people at risk of social exclusion are one of the specific target groups-apart from elderly (p. 189), disabled (p. 175-179), children and their parents (p. 181) and the young in general (182-188); http://www.lodz2016.com/aplikacja_pl.pdf

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See: Florida 2002

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See the document „Łódź. The revolution in process 2010-2015”, p. 77

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See: http://lodz2016.com/rewolucje_pl.pdf. This document was a supplement to the application.

is the transformation of free communal flats in this former worker's district into places for the creative branch. As we can read in the application, it is supposed to enliven the quarter, create new jobs and „opportunities for the inhabitants to spend time creatively” (p. 311). It is unclear, what will be the rules for granting such places and how the project will be consulted with the local community, especially in a city which lacks communal flats. So far, doubts and critical opinions are expressed mostly in the internet.

Key project of foundation Łódź Art Center (the coordinator of application) was developed, to some extent, in ideological opposition to the New Centre of Łódź, “the largest and the most brave infrastructural investment in Poland” (p. 346). It is undoubtedly brave, as it assumes building the architectural complex comprising public spaces on 90 ha around Fabryczny railway station. The Centre is supposed to be a place for culture, art and services, not to mention the multimodal communication hub. The project restarted the discussion (repeated claims for moving those who have difficulties with paying the rent out from the centre) on who should be an inhabitant of “new” Łódź. The “local” people probably would not be very welcome.

Łódź, European Capital of Culture of Poverty?

The state of affairs, which was pictured here only briefly, results from a number of reasons, but we would like to argue that the general rules of discourse on inequalities, citizenship and deservingness play here an important role. The decision-makers, but also those who implement social policies at the local level perceive the problem mainly in the context of economic shortages or educational deficits. This approach is accompanied by the assumption that the needs for cultural consumption are limited among the people being at the bottom of social ladder. Low aspirations and insufficient sensibility would be an element of “culture of poverty”- a syndrome being almost biologically inherited and spreading like a virus within poverty enclaves (por. Woźniak 2010).

Both the participation of cultural institutions in the welfare discourse and the attempts to incorporate the issue of social inequality, inclusion and citizenship into cultural policy quite frequently result in reductionist understanding of to “social integration through cultural participation” of those who are identified as representing the *goût barbare*. *As result, many actions aimed at people being at risk of social exclusion are picnics, feasts and other forms of entertainment.*

It seems meaningful that the coordinator of (unsuccessful) application for ECC title chose this form to engage the inhabitants into activities which would directly influence their quality of life. The idea had its followers and opponents and if the first picnic at Księży Młyn gained a big attendance, consecutive editions at Bałuty, Dolna Market and Księży Młyn once again, were not such a big success. The concept realized by the Łódź Art Center was discussed mostly in the Internet. Some of the critics pointed out the apparently inclusive character of picnics, which made the impression of the invasion of middle class tourists who came to observe the simple life of barbarians in their natural environment¹³. On the other hand there were also voices of disapproval for “picnic for winos”, undeserving such a “reward”¹⁴.

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Discourse dealing with marginalized groups can be also analyzed using the notion of orientalism by Edward Said (see: Buchowski 2008)

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The mechanism of stigmatizing with the *underclass* label can be also observed. The inhabitants of deprived areas are characterized by such terms as demanding attitude, learned helplessness, demoralization, low aspirations, criminal behaviour etc. (see. Bauman 1998, Wacquant 2008, 2009).

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