

The Społecznie Zaangażowani (Socially Engaged) Project, Lodz, Poland

Lodz (Łódź) with the population of 685,285 (2018) is third Poland's most populous city after Warsaw (Warszawa) and Cracow (Kraków), centrally located within Poland. Once a thriving metropolis of textile and clothing production, it was confronted with the industry's decline when Poland launched its transition to a global market economy after the fall of communism in 1989. Consequently, Lodz experienced one of the most dramatic shake-ups of the time, with countless social, economic and spatial repercussions.¹ The city made some impressive achievements in terms of economic restructuring, physical regeneration and local identity awareness.

On the other hand, the focus on top-down (based mainly on EU public aid) economic restructuring resulted in social deficiencies which are still palpable. The focus on "big things" has resulted in a relative lack of interest in small but vital issues for the inhabitants at a boroughs' level. Many urban commons, such as greenery, the involvement of neighbouring communities, the accessibility of culture and other urban amenities within walking distance – especially outside the inner city – have been identified by the local authorities as relatively less critical needs. This created an impulse for many inhabitants. With the minor interest of the public authorities, they began to employ small, entrepreneurial forms of meeting the needs identified in the nearest urban neighbourhood.

One of the discernible cases is the more than 10 years old activity of Socially Engaged (pl. *Społecznie Zaangażowani*) – the non-profit organization to induce social engagement of and for local communities of the Stare Polesie borough in Lodz, Poland. The latter is, in fact, the main binding factor of entrepreneurial action. The desire to improve the life quality and strengthen the place attachment as a response to the borough's depopulation seems to be the primary motive for action for Socially Engaged. Thus, the diversity of projects undertaken here is notable, from ecological ones (e.g. protecting urban greenery), through education youths in need, to cultural ones.

What we identify as most entrepreneurial here is the innovative approach to governing the commons, manifested in the ability to reach out to a wide range of stakeholders and undertake the cooperative form of action. Thus, working-class residents, middle-class residents, children, activist, local public authorities, planners, etc.), who have learned culture of understanding for the sake of the place and speaking the same language. This has helped, to some extent to break the existing "private vs public" dichotomy in governing this place. The analysis of these indirect forms of community-based organisation undertaken to identify and meet needs and improve the quality of life seems to be an exciting area of in-depth research.

¹ Zasina J. Sokołowicz M.E., Nogalski S. (2020). *Lodz City Tour: The changing nature of the urban restructuring of a post-socialist industrial city*. "dISP", in press