Urban Cultural Change - Rethinking Europeanisation from Central European (Polish) Perspectives

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Scenes from Wola

Warsaw Hub: Human, urban, business

Wola: bikers and buildings

Place-making takes many forms

Polish Cities of the Future 2017/18

Cathy Mullan | 13/02/2017 9:00 am |

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Warsaw has retained the title of fDi's Polish City of the Future for 2017/18, with Krakow remaining in second place and Wroclaw rising to third. Cathy Mullan reports.

Nowhere in Poland matches the level of FDI received by its capital city, Warsaw, which has – for the second time running – been named **fDi**'s Polish City of the Future. Warsaw attracted 392 FDI projects between 2006 and 2015, according to greenfield investment monitor **fDi** Markets, which represented nearly one-fifth of Poland's total inbound FDI.

Business and financial services were the primary FDI sectors, accounting for nearly one-third of total inbound FDI. The city boasts the country's highest GDP and GDP per capita figures, which have helped contribute to its first place ranking in the economic potential category.

More from this report

fDi's Polish Cities of the Future 2017/18 – FDI strategy winners

Europeanisation as a backdrop

- Europeanisation is frequently understood as a convergence to a set of ideas, norms and practices and the diffusion of urban governance methods and strategies that make recognisable a "European way of doing things".

- Alternatively, Europeanisation can be understood as a project of constant becoming, made up of highly varied local appropriations of governance, culture and history that only partly conform to specific EU-European norms.

- In this perspective, the assumption is made that urban place-making and appropriations of culture give evidence of highly differential patterns and trajectories of Europeanisation

- How have the EU and its policies been utilised in the Polish case?

- How important are East-West distinctions? If so, in what ways?

Theoretical objectives and considerations

- Moving beyond "Anglosphere" and Global North perspectives (Watson 2016) but without re-inventing the wheel. Rather, we seek to promote a more nuanced and contextual debate

- Investigating the significance of cultural Europe (see Shore 2009) for urban policies, practices

- Moving beyond the theoretical hegemony of neo-liberal governance (Parnell and Robinson 2012)

  - Neo-liberalism as de-contextualisation?

  - Urban innovations that work with market mechanisms not necessarily zero-sum games in terms of economic benefits

  - Despite asymmetric institutional relationships in general terms we find very differentiated local governance patterns and innovative strategies

Methods and sources

- Polonez project (RECENTRE) located at the Dept. of Socio-Economic Geography, U. Gdansk. Ongoing research on urban cultural and governance change in Poland. Main examples are 1) Smart Cities, 2) ECOC initiatives

- Questions: space for innovation (civil society participation and a shift from traditional "hard" locational logics and paternalistic governance)? How do place-making cultural practices fit in?

- Methods
  - Analysis of media representations
  - Framework analysis of the political framings of urban culture
  - Secondary analysis from different academic/non-academic sources
  - Interviews with key actors

- This lecture: rather that present results (too early!) lecture about collect your impressions, opinions as part of discussion

Urbanist debates as background – conceptual change and governance processes in framing roles of cities and urban life

- Reflections of the national significance of urban life and culture
  - In terms of values
  - In terms of consumption patterns
  - In terms of public life, public spaces, participation
- Indications of change in understanding and mobilising cultural heritage, multiculturalism, sustainability, smartness, coolness
- The framing of place-making and urban development policies (e.g. ECOC, Smart Cities, city marketing, etc.)
- Role of the EU (EU policies) and Europe more broadly

Following contemporary urbanist debates in Poland

- Context: Impact of historical legacies and traditions
  - Historical context (Kubicki):
  - State socialist legacies
  - Socio-economic trends since post-1989 Transformation
  - Europeanisation and East-West references
- Expression: Role of cities in modernisation, transformation, cultural change
  - Urban governance (Florczyk, Kaidanek, Koczarowicz)
  - Urban cultures (appropriations of the city as a public space) (Koczarowicz, Kowalski)
  - Gentrification and social injustice (Górczyńska)
- Focus: Nexus between place-making, culture and governance

Some context.. a mosaic of narratives from interviews

- Legacy of accelerated industrialisation, delayed urbanisation
- Privatism (work, family, home) and a lack of public housing policies / new Polish bourgeoisie not urban in a European sense but dreams of semi-rural pseudo-reality!
- City-sceptic traditions (mistrust of urban cosmopolitanism, entrepreneurial spirit, individualism)
- Planning chaos and lack of coordination
- Hierarchical, paternalistic decision-making
- Suburbanisation, a non-urban urban middle-class
- Shallow urbanism, trivial cosmoplitanism
- Environmental stress and new environmental activism

Four urbanist strands selected (out of many potential candidates)

- Emerging from political, academic and civil society debates
    - Urban renaissance (cultural, structural, gentrification)
    - Anti-urbanism (structural, ideological)
    - Place-making
    - Urban activism

Place-making, culture, governance: Two examples

- The perspective: place and processes of place-making in a wider European context

- Culture as a strategy for developing European cohesion policy

- European Capital of Culture Programme 2016 (ECOC) example of a tool of place–making and locality building through trans-local policies, activities and links

- ECOC competition and Polish examples of 'place framing'

- Smart Cities as a nexus between environmentalism, technological modernisation and more efficient public services

ECOC and place-making strategies

- Social milieu, institutional cultures, multilevel power structures, and democratic traditions deeply influence the realisation of ECOC projects

- a common denominator of the various spatial-administrative interests needs to be found, in order to ensure that the positive impacts gained by the mega-event are sustained on a longer term.

- ECOC has limited resources, is public-sector driven and is hard to categorise in terms of hard-core neoliberal governance

- Németh (2017), comparing Pécs (Hungary) and Turku (Finland), suggests that ECOC can result in
  - Positive effects on governance processes
  - Inclusion of a wider range of actors than normally the case
  - Making culture more accessible

Polish ECOC applications under study

- ECOC- 11 Polish cities competed for 2016 round, representing very different contexts and histories: Białystok, Bydgoszcz, Gdańsk, Katowice, Lublin, Łódz, Poznań, Szczecin, Toruń, Warszawa, Wrocław

- Comparative matrix based on mission statements, content, strategies, referencing and framing of local urban culture, development objectives

- Interviews with expert observers

- Analysis of existing secondary literation

- Comparative study of ways in which (EU) Europe and European culture were referenced

Wrocław 2016 (the winner)

- Multicultural past seen as asset

- Critical and uncensored evaluation of local history

- Understands ECOC as an initiative against the commodification of culture, culture a shared good

- Cultural transformation understood as a transformation of varieties of (local) cultures into urban cultures of variety

- Places local urban culture within a European future and has helped open up culture as everyday rather than ceremonial element of urban life

- But top-down governance that excluded many citizens and civil society groups (see, for example, Wiktorska-Święcka 2016)

ECOC Preliminary considerations

- In several cases downplaying of the local image are starting points (need for development rather than positively showcasing that what exists)

- Belief in the primacy of physical improvements rather than social investments – innovation remains intangible?

- Instrumental approaches dominate

- Tendency to maintain a highly localised/introverted perspective – only hesitant connection to wider European context in cultural and historical terms

- Minimal effects in terms of institutional change

- Culturally conscious and open approaches are identifiable in specific cases
  - For example, Wrocław and Gdańsk appear highly confident
  - Lodz and other cities focused on development
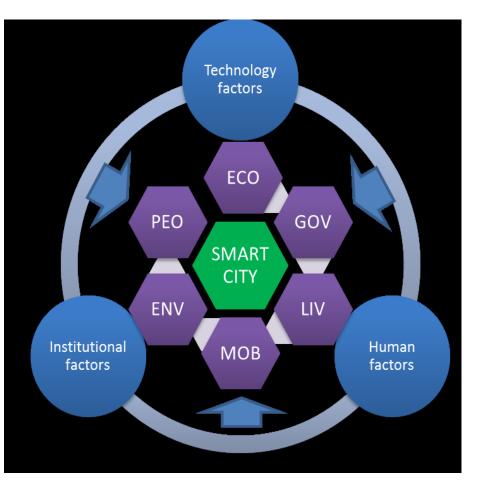
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The Smart Cities movement

- 'A Smart City is a city seeking to address public issues via ICT-based solutions on the basis of a multi-stakeholder, municipally based partnership' (EU 2014).

- Similar to ECOC the focus is on governance, place-making and urban cultural change

- Smart City competitions – where and who is the smartest?

- Big Tech and Big Visions (possible centralising effect)

- Democratisation of information and knowledge (possible bottom-up empowerment)

SC a decentralised EU (and global) paradigm

Studying Smart Cities processes in Poland

- Normative visions of the Smart City (SC) promulgated by the European Union couple advances in ICT with the development of social and human capital,

- This holds the promise of more inclusive, effective and democatic local governance and an envigorated sense of local citizenship and place attachment. Critics of SC paradigms urge caution.

- The frequent interplay between Big Tech interests, elite place-making projects and technology-centred interpetations are one reason why SC paradigms could in fact result in more, not less, technocratic and top-down governance (Calzada and Cobo 2015, Kitchin 2015).

- Our aim is to investigate trajectories of Smart City strategies within the context of Poland's urban transformation.

Analysing SC strategies

- In their bid for greater visibility and in hopes of combining economic growth with efficiency gains, environmental improvements, and more positive images, large Polish cities (Warsaw, Cracow, Łódź, Wrocław, Poznań and Gdańsk) have embraced SC strategies.

- Unclear is the extent to attempts to create urban "smartness" support a wider sense of place attachment, for example through greater citizen involvement and recognition and inclusion of bottom-up initiative.

- Do Polish SC strategies provide space for innovation in the sense of greater civil society participation and a shift away from traditional orientations based on "hard" locational factors and paternalistic governance?

- EU's role in promoting SC initiatives? Has EU support been used to address community needs.

Gdynia – Central Europe's first Smart City (outsourcing website)

- In 2017, [Gdynia](), as the first city in Poland and Eastern Europe, received a smart city certificate according to the ISO 37120 standard. This is a confirmation of the fact that Gdynia keeps monitoring the quality of life, with smart technologies supporting this process. A smart city is a magnet for investors and residents alike. This is one of the factors why Gdynia is an attractive destination for foreign investors and, as one of the few large cities in Poland, maintains constant population figures.

Gdynia recognised as Smart City

by **Ewelina Nurczyk** in: **Living in Poland**, 06 Jun 2017   1 Comment

Gdynia, part of the Tricity agglomeration, has been recognised as the first Polish Smart City. The city of approximately quarter a million citizens was awarded the World Council on City Fata (WCCD) certification, which hosts a network of innovative cities all over the world. How did Gdynia get there?

Gdynia's governance experiences (URBACT)

- The main challenge faced by the city is the need to organise local communities in Gdynia districts.

- The problem is the lack of engagement of the inhabitants in social change and the reluctance of the residents towards the local administration (disbelief in the possibility of change, etc.).

- There is a need to change the relations between the city council and residents through the use of collaborative tools and the co-production of solutions for urban problems (URBACT).

- We will be following Gdynia, Gdansk, Warsaw and Wroclaw in their efforts to implement SC but also to study the nexus between economic development, place-making, local identity, governance and urban culture

Concluding observations

- Revaluation of urban culture, slow institutional change at the formal level, civil society activism creating new sense of place

- ECOC/Smart Cities can stimulate the re-discovery of places and reassessments of local histories and cultures

- Role of EU has been instrumental in providing major incentives for urban improvements as well as the development of CSO capacities funding of urban experiments

- However, ability to make effective use of these instruments depends on highly contingent local capacities to appropriate EU policies and ideas

- Result: urban traditions and cultures being re-made within a context of socio-economic transformation, city competition, re-framing of local identity and activist pressure

Thank you for your kind attention!