

Forum for the Development of Cities

Memothesis

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The document presents the main conceptual presuppositions of the Forum for the Development of Cities. The Forum is a part of the project named “Gen-Y City – Get into the swing of the City!” financed under the URBACT III Programme. The City of Poznan is the leader of this project.

Introduction

The formula of the Forum for the Development of Cities is based on the premise that the development of a modern city requires a bidirectional cooperation and a mutual exchange of ideas and energy between the authorities of a city and the residents. The theme of the first day of the Forum on 6 December 2017 will be “A city for the residents”. The theme of the second day of the Forum on 7 December 2017 is “Residents for the city”.

The document describes the most significant issues related to the themes of the Forum reflecting the key areas for the development of contemporary cities. These are:

1. trust;
2. civic society and social capital;
3. innovations;
4. participation of the residents;
5. locality and heritage;
6. revitalization;
7. culture in the city;
8. young generation – Y generation;
9. new forms of employment and jobs of the future.

The residents of the city are the most important aspect in each area. We thus speak of residents who place their trust in each other; residents who carry out common projects; residents creating innovations and being subjects of the innovation process; residents engaging in the life of the city; residents discovering their historical heritage and experiencing the local character of the environment in which they live and work; residents taking part in the city revitalisation process; residents participating in culture; young people – generation Y in the city; residents developing their skills in modern enterprises and institutions.

The contemporary development of cities is based on the creation and adaptation of innovations, the use of social capital – the ability of the residents to participate in the life of the city and the creation of social innovations. The adaptation of innovations takes place rapidly: any innovation that enters a list of 10 best urban innovations in a given year is adopted in other cities on a large scale. Polish cities apply solutions that 15 years ago would

only be described by futurologists, such as free hot-spots, power supply stations for electric vehicles, automatic urban monitoring system, crowdsourcing, online communication with the residents, urban e-services.

The globalisation has made the world a field for competition of subjects that have never been direct mutual competitors in the past. This concerns not only enterprises, but also cities – also on a global scale. The cities have competed with each other for some time for residents, tourists and students, investments of enterprises, public investments, localisation of cultural and sports parties of international range, localisation of seats of organisations and central institutions.

In a report on the innovativeness of the Polish economy, Jerzy Hausner indicated two core aspects of building the competitiveness of cities and regions: “competitive will be those of them which win in the global competition for the capital, especially the creative capital (both material and human) and those which provide conditions letting companies located in them gain a high competitiveness” (Hausner 2012: 9).

The development of a city in the long term is a constant improvement of quality of life of the residents. The process is based on a creative dialogue between the residents and the local self-government, involvement and cooperation of the residents, business and organisations operating in the city. Without the knowledge of needs only an apparent success can be achieved: through the construction of communication paths which destroy the urban area and railway stations which annoy the travellers; investing in cultural events which do not create the urban tissue nor the social capital; supporting the investors who engage in a long-term development of a city.

The increasing civic awareness and the access to specialised knowledge increase the expectations of the residents within the scope of application of the transparency rule by managers and ensuring social participation in the process of making decisions on public issues, highlighting the assumption of responsibility for the jointly elaborated solutions. The rapid flow of information plays a growing role in the process of shaping the opinions and organisation of social protests. Technologies and media allow for a quick process of learning the views of other people and for a consolidation of attitudes of openness, understanding, innovativeness and cooperation. The personalised communication is becoming a standard in public space and cities should adapt to this trend. On the other hand, we become resistant to the ways the institutions try to influence us. We defend ourselves better each time; however, we notice less things, including the valuable messages. We are becoming less trustful. Inspiring and initiating innovations through looking for non-obvious solutions for obvious problems is becoming the role of a city. Contemporary cities support the growing number of bottom-up initiatives favouring the increase in social capital and improving the quality of life of the residents which allow for a satisfaction of needs of local communities. Activity in the area of culture, arts and sports positively influences the development of innovative economic activity. A change in the way of thinking about organisational structures approaches.

1. Trust

New types of bonds based on trust are necessary to ensure development of cities. The culture of trust leads to open, innovative and spontaneous actions, raises the level of mobilisation, activity, freedom of the society; intensifies interactions, strengthens social bonds, leads to a merge of communities (Sztompka 2007). A significant influence on the construction of culture of trust can be exercised by a city as a social organism whose coordination is carried out by the city hall. The civic dimension of strategic city management is a form of description of issues related to crisis of trust in the context of its development. The notion of trust in urban communities requires redefinition. When we speak of trust of the city authorities to the residents and the trust of the residents to the city authorities, we should take into consideration specific types of relations.

Planning the development of cities is ceasing to be – as before – the domain of urban planners, and is becoming, to a growing extent, the domain of social psychologists, economists, sociologists. Contemporary cities are becoming not so much the recipients of resources (from their environment), as spaces processing the already possessed resources, making more efficient use of their immaterial resources. The “Residents for the city” is primarily a “new” – at least in Poland – way of thinking of the residents about their role as co-creators who are co-responsible for the city.

2. Civic society and social capital

The social capital consists of bonds between people: trust, mutual understanding, shared values and behaviours which bind the members of human networks and communities and allow for common activities (Cohen, Prusak 2001). The social capital is inherent to the trust between strangers.

Three types of social capital are distinguished (Guide to Social Capital 2016). The first of them is the capital of social bonds which concerns close connections between people, for example members of a family, and members of the same ethnic group. This capital allows for survival in life. The next type is the bridging capital that describes the distant bonds between people and social groups. What counts here is the ability to establish contacts with “strangers”, to go beyond the social circles determined by the above mentioned capital of social bonds. The third type of capital is the linking social capital describing the connections between people occupying important posts in institutions and the residents. In other words it is the “distance of people from the authority”. It is important if the residents want to receive support from public institutions, including the self-governmental ones.

The social capital is assessed from the point of view of the extent to which it contributes the development of the local social environment. Currently the social capital is measured with the use of (Cohen, Prusak 2001) the level of trust assessing whether the residents trust their neighbours and whether they think of their district as a place where neighbours help each other; the level of membership checking to how many clubs, associations and social groups the residents belong; the level of social networks and intensity of social contacts, assessing the frequency of meetings of the residents with members of their families and their friends.

The civic activity, which is one of the themes of the Forum, is a specific kind of a positive idea. Not only “activity”, but also “idea”, because the activity of others has an inspiring power that removes barriers of mutual communication and thus stimulates the emergence of innovations. During the Forum we will try to answer the question to what extent this idea practically translates into development of a city. The theory of a civic city, which is rightly promoted in many Polish cities, is subject to a confrontation with reality. As Anna Wierzbicka, a bilingual and bicultural citizen of Australia notes (Wierzbicka 2001: 3-27), the Polish culture puts great emphasis on the expression of strong “good emotions” in relationships between people, and a smaller emphasis on avoiding hurting or offending others. This feature does not help in the development of a self-government, where constant search for win-win solutions is necessary. The culture of “championship in criticising criticism” and permanent imperfection that stems from some cultural codes promoted in the Polish educational system is one of the barriers for the development of self-governments. The skills of modifying the criticised solutions of others and improving “not our” ideas are attributes of a high social capital and of the culture of innovativeness, which the Polish self-governments often are deprived of.

3. Innovations

An innovation is a positively assessed and implemented solution. The self-governments (i.e. city, municipality and county offices) should care themselves for the implementation of innovations, so that they could be reliable partners for all organisations and residents. The business incubators and co-working spaces are some of the instruments for supporting innovativeness in cities. The need to create social innovations cannot be, however, forgotten. Their creators, apart from the self-governments, are often non-governmental organisations.

The popularisation of innovations is called diffusion of innovations. The knowledge about the rules of diffusion of innovations has a key meaning for the development of innovations in self-governments. The attitudes of people towards novelties are the prime aspects that decide whether and how fast an innovation will diffuse.

In a survey carried out in 2016 among 840 representatives of county offices (including city halls) questions concerning the attitude of self-government officials towards innovations (Fazlagić 2017b) were asked. From amongst all the participants of the survey, most often an orientation towards searching for new solutions in own local communities was noticed by the representatives of the southwestern (42.2%), then northwestern (31.9%), and southern (30.5%) regions. The weakest orientation towards searching for new solutions is in the eastern region, as only 21.6% of people from this region notice such a dominating orientation in their environment.

The development of cities is not shaped by innovations, neither technological, nor social ones. Some time ago “innovation” meant improvement, acceleration, increase. In other words, an innovative solution was innovative because it offered more values than the previous one. Nowadays, the way of thinking about innovations goes in a different direction. The most radical form of contemporary innovations are those innovations that are oriented at

eliminating and not reducing negative phenomena. Another sign of the times is the use of IT technologies to engage residents in the life of a city.

4. Participation of citizens

The participation of citizens has a key significance in the process of transformation of the image of Polish cities. This fact was strongly outlined in the Development Strategy for the City of Poznan 2020+, where the City Hall was indicated as one of (not the only one) the agents of change and the implementator of the strategy.

It is indicated that the participation of citizens is the most important observed result of the existence of social capital. At least several motives of civic participation and areas in which it becomes distinguishable can be named. T. Weryński distinguished three types of participation. The first, the republican one, is related to the zone of administration and political and self-governmental activity. The second, liberal, is oriented towards the area of economic and social activity. The third, ethos, is related to the zone of sociocultural activity and non-resource-generating participation (thus an idealist one – not oriented towards innovations). It is rooted in Polish intelligent traditions of the Russian partition in the 19th century (in Wielkopolska the attitude towards participation was already liberal at that time).

One of the more popular manifestations of civic participation is the crowdsourcing – the notion describes the phenomenon of processing the “wisdom of the crowd” to creating common projects using collective knowledge of the participants.

The soundness of engaging citizens in the process of making decisions is sometimes undermined. The election cycle “produces” local elites which as the time passes become to a lesser or greater extent cut off from local problems. The civic participation can also be interpreted as questioning the mandate of the self-government authorities and bodies, including, among others, the City Hall.

5. Locality and heritage

A significant element in the development of self-governments is the aspect of locality, as self-governments are “small homelands”. The notion of locality becomes particularly important and is a challenge for the builders of civic societies in the “small homelands” in Poland, a country which after 1945 observed great population movements.

One of the elements of locality is the sense of historical heritage. Poles are a nation that is fascinated by history. We thus face from one side a great supply of historical knowledge, but at the same time also a low awareness of local history among Poles. Maybe in the upcoming years the situation will improve when the history of Poland becomes de-ideologised and demythologized. The demythologization of history is a great opportunity to discover a new historical heritage of the “small homelands”.

6. Revitalisation

The revitalization of Polish cities, compared to western cities, is carried out with a several-decade delay. From a purely economic point of view, it is the result of the change of the economic model, i.e. the servitisation of the economy. As a result of the processes of deindustrialisation great urban areas covered in the 19th century by industrial areas become desolate. Additionally, a great challenge to Polish cities in the field of revitalisation is the chaotic development that makes the creation of social capital in the centre more difficult. Polish cities are crossed by communication arteries built within an area previously covered by urban buildings. The still visible influence of the damage from the Second World War on the urban arrangement of the centres of Poznan, Warsaw, Gdansk or Wroclaw cannot be omitted.

The revitalization of the buildings is not the greatest challenge; it is more difficult to succeed in the revitalisation of the human tissue. Many cities in Poland implement revitalisation programmes addressed to the residents. Under these programmes activity aimed at the improvement of quality of the functioning of small craftsman workshops, the education of microentrepreneurs, the organisation of cultural events and the activation of youth and persons from problem groups is carried out. Revitalisation programmes are very important elements in the development strategy of the cities, as they improve the attractiveness of the city for potential tourists from outside the city, and they are a factor that discourages the current residents from emigration.

7. Culture in the city

The role of the institutions of culture and the participation of the residents in culture are important elements of the intellectual capital of a city. From a historical point of view, the economic development has, to a lower or greater extent, accompanied the development of cultural institutions, although the interdependence between culture and economic development has not always been closely related.

The functioning of culture involves creative industries operating at the verge of cultural activity and the “normal” economic activity. The cultural activity is both a source and a recipient of products of creative industries, which in many cases serve the commercialisation of cultural and artistic achievements.

From the perspective of the development of a city, the participation in culture requires involvement of cognitive, aesthetic and spiritual values. Thanks to culture, social identity is built through an increase in self-awareness and self-confidence, experience of the feeling of satisfaction and reaching a goal, and improvement of one’s own value and dignity. One cannot also forget the aspects related to the construction of the image of a city in its surroundings thanks to culture-forming activities. Cultural events and institutions perform functions generating “power” of inspirations and regenerated employees for the economy.

The supply of cultural goods is the result of both commercial activity and activity subsidised from private (patronage, private sponsoring) and public (governmental and self-governmental subsidies) funds. Local self-governments can not only become patrons of art, but also create conditions for combining the demand and the supply for culture sponsoring. For example, the patronage granted by the Mayor of a city can encourage private sponsors to

get involved in a given undertaking. Local self-governments are frequently the main owners of the cultural infrastructure and the copyrights. They are linked by a complicated system of contracts and agreements, in which culture and economy, non-profit institutions and for-profit companies function in separation or entanglement. The local authorities not only regularly subsidise institutions of culture, but also provide grants for single initiatives, such as festivals or concerts. While thinking about the participation of self-governments in the process of subsidisation of culture, it is worth mentioning that self-government authorities should take into consideration to whom the culture subsidised from their funds is addressed. The dilemma of “ambitious elite culture” versus the “folk mass culture” is obvious. Subsidisation of culture means long-term investments in the development of the creative class, social and human capital, and the promotion of the brand of the city.

8. Young generation – Y generation

The Y generation was first defined in 1993 as a generation of people born between 1974 and 1980 – the generation next to the generation of the demographic boom after the Second World War (after the X generation). It is currently thought that even people born up to 2001 belong to the Y generation. The representatives of the Y generation who come from wealthier families received a great portion of additional education (know several foreign languages, went to many countries during their summer vacation, had an interesting hobby). Among twenty-year-olds one can find really well prepared employees, because apart from school education they have very quickly started to develop their professional passions. The Y generation is the first generation that was raised with e-mails, internet communicators and mobile phones.

The cultural specificity of the Y generation makes it necessary for the cities to adapt to the lifestyle, aspirations and expectations of the “Y-ers”. This may be reflected in the creation of facilitations for the potential economic activity established by the “Y-ers”, for example through the construction of environment for people starting their economic activity (for example co-working spaces), and provision of selective support for these types of economic activity that will produce jobs and services desired by the “Y-ers”; designing public services (service design) satisfying the lifestyle of the “Y-ers”; creation of methods and channels of communication between the self-government and the Y-generation residents satisfying the needs of the “Y-ers”; organisation of cultural events and supporting the organisation of cultural sector satisfying the expectations of the “Y-ers”.

9. New forms of employment and jobs of the future

The deindustrailisation and servitisation of the economy make cities the centres of economic development having an increasing share in the GDP of the developing countries. At the same time we observe radical changes on the labour market. New jobs and new forms of working appear. It is accompanied by the phenomenon of increasing automation and robotisation. New forms of work that will emerge in the subsequent over-a-dozen of years will require improved conditions for living in cities. The cities should thus anticipate the approaching changes on the labour market to become attractive for their residents from the point of view of the jobs they do.

The labour market of the future will significantly differ from the contemporary one. Many jobs will disappear and new ones will emerge. The changes on the labour market will result from changes in the socio-economic environment, as the increasing life expectancy that makes the average life in retirement as long as several dozens of years; the trend of a decreasing average time of employment by one employer, especially visible in the Y generation; the progressing automation of work performed until now by white-collar workers; the development of social media causing the emergence of a new media ecosystem in which the language of communication will change.

The changes on the labour market are both a threat and an opportunity. The most benefits will be drawn by those enterprises and employees who will adapt their business models and skill sets earlier than their competitors. Opportunities appear also for the training and advisory branch which will be able to help employees and enterprises adapt faster to the changes.

Summary

The Forum for the Development of Cities that will take place in Poznan on 6 and 7 December 2017 is an event during which we will debate, listen to each other, talk and discuss on how the Polish cities can and should develop in the coming years. The Forum was divided into two parts. During the first, entitled “A city for the residents” there will be discussions on key issues related to creating urban space as a place for the development of its residents. During the second, entitled “Residents for the city” we will discuss on how the residents can join and initiate changes. The broad range of topics presented in the document is aimed at inspiring individual reflections and directing the discussion during the Forum, and encouraging a dialogue.

It is necessary to remember that the development of cities is determined by many factors and this is why an opinion of Francis Edgeworth is worth mentioning: he believed that it is not appropriate to have too small goals. The goal, as he said, “is not so much to shoot a particular bird, as to shoot the most dense flock to kill as many animals as it is possible” (Ball 2007: 264). This is the spirit of discussion, initiation of new ideas and ideas related to the development of cities in Poland that should be continued.

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