

STRUGGLE FOR NEW ECONOMIC AGENDA IN URBAN PLANNING IN POLAND

Introduction

In the current environment of rapid global change, population growth, changing economies and social preferences, Polish cities face enormous problems. The ability to achieve stable sustainable development is an ongoing and difficult challenge.

Before the Soviet Union's implosion, Polish cities were governed by a central planning system that emphasized the development of national large-scale industries. These investments preceded the production of mass housing. City infrastructure, social amenities and the availability of basic consumer goods lagged behind. Investment shortfalls contributed greatly to the systematic erosion of prevailing environmental protections. "Sustainability" was only as defined only by the ruling communist party and discussed only as a doctrine.

In 1990's Poland's old communist and centrally planned economy returned to a liberal democracy and market based system. These changes have transformed all aspects of Polish society. Polish cities began a phase of dynamic economic, social and spatial restructuring made possible by a new emerging market economy, growing global competitive pressures and the increased freedom to locate new activities.

All this has caused the economies and spatial organization of Polish cities to undergo many transformational shocks. The most significant of these include:

- Structural economic changes
- Improved telecommunications
- Growing unemployment and social inequities
- Homelessness
- The break down of old social values
- Declining faith in the legal system
- An erosion of public safety

Additionally, the economies of Polish cities have had to interact with the enormous worldwide forces like globalization, foreign competition, reverse foreign investment and a new network of financial markets and political guidelines. Links with the world community have only strengthened after Poland ratified UN and EU initiatives to achieve desirable sustainable development (i.e. Agenda 21- Rio de Janeiro 1992) and its plan of implementation (Johannesburg 2002). Further, Poland's entry into the European Union (May 1st 2004) also accelerated the adoption of new guidelines and directives to help match Polish cities and regions with European networks, organizations and programmes.

Why should Polish cities consider new economic perspectives?

All of the above changes have resulted in increased dynamic spatial and social polarization. This is a change that has accelerated the overall decline of Polish cities. This is underscored by:

- Large scale and uncontrolled suburban residential development
- New infrastructure investments (roads and transportation systems) without clear purpose
- Rising infrastructure costs resulting in stressed land use, reductions in natural habitat areas and an over-reliance on the automobile and superhighways

These changes have contributed to higher urban noise levels as well as reduced air and water quality negatively impacting long term social, economic and environmental costs.

It can be argued that these changes are only natural outcomes of a rapidly improving national economy. However the economic restructuring and shift away from a predominantly industrial economy to an information and knowledge based one does not preclude creative approaches that might avoid the current problems of cities in the developed world.

The most important reasons for rethinking the development strategies of Polish cities from a different economic perspective could then be to avoid:

- The rapid decline or stagnation of city centers in terms of their productive capacity and population base
- Poor strategies that fail to properly maintain unique global competitive edges over other cities
- Not fully taking advantage of the positive elements of traditional (or inherited) city governance and the growing emphasis on cooperation and partnership between cities and regions.

It is increasingly acknowledged that we live in an environment of virtual global networks and new power structures that influence financial markets. This new paradigm of development is based more on a "borderless" network of economy and society rather than old hierarchic organizations that were territorially arranged systems of economic-spatial and administrative planning.

This new paradigm opens new questions of the current and future identity and culture of cities, potentially increasing alienation from old and familiar living patterns that are accentuated by the associated erosion of distance in both space and time. Through the daily struggles of crime, unemployment, homelessness, pollution we can observe increased divergence between and within cities. Often in the rush to become "globally relevant" cities forget that their aspirations are unrealistic and lack the necessary capacity for innovation and ability to build appropriate public infrastructure.

Clearly, the jump towards rapid urbanization is confronted by the contemporary shifts to an information society and globalized economy. This need to become relevant does not make embracing the newest global challenges of sustainability, reasonable consumption, and balanced growth easy to deal with. Despite this some Polish cities are increasingly able to address inherited environmental, economic and social limitations while moving towards integrated development. (Gdansk – The Lower Town, Krakow- Kazimierz, Lublin – Stare Bronowice, Sopot, Szczecin)

Economic Challenges for Polish Cities.

Considering both the neoclassical economic theories that are the basis of modern capitalism and real life examples, it can be concluded that the cities are a modest variable for economic analysis. Worldwide recession cycles, strategies for renewed development energy and trial and error suggest that the modern economies are far from the pure classical models that relied only on statistics and trajectories. New economies must now deal with the growing role of citizens, public organizations and evolving methods of city management. There is still much room to influence improvements in income, employment, education.

The city planners, city governments and economists are slow in their forecasts and the results of increasingly formulaic planning processes are often not satisfying when the new activities interfere in unexpected places. Further, complex inherited governmental planning systems are not always able to implement strategic decisions. It is hard to indicate initiatives coordinated supporting particular long-term strategy in the city or region in government and non-government organizations (NGO) initiatives. We need better institutions to ensure successful development outcomes.

Improving the Competitiveness of Cities:

Culture as an economic generator

Culture can be a useful economic activity for the city thus supporting its local economy and generating windfall gains. Cities like Gdansk, Krakow have redefined themselves by developing new cultural attractors often in post-industrial areas. Such strategies when combined with the redevelopment of existing industrial infrastructure and associated unique heritage can generate a high public profile. Positive changes that include strategic urban design improvements and the restructuring of public spaces can stimulate local economies. Cities like Krakow have already used such strategies to become famous.



Gdansk Development Agency

The role of institutions

Institutions have been defined as "formal and informal rules that constrain individual behavior and shape human interaction" (i.e. North, 1994). The role of institutions is surprisingly absent in traditional neo-classical theory where economic development relies primarily on technological and human capital investments. The importance of institutions however is gaining attention since there is clear that good institutions can play a major role in enhancing economies.

Good institutions actively influence city governance and decisions thus tying together private and public sectors in synergistic ways. Increasingly new institutional forms create successful public-private partnerships, public-private community partnerships and urban initiatives.

Cities as sources for innovation

One set of contemporary criteria for addressing a city's economic, social and environmental demands is the ability to realize diffused innovation and knowledge across different scales. New technological, science and industry clusters (science, technology, business parks) within the inner city act as significant agents of urban change. With the right critical mass they create productive economic centers, help reconfigure urban development and use city infrastructure better.

“Better” social values

In emphasizing creativity and better public amenities planning cities are able to better attract people to live and work in them. When successful they become competitive and known as places with high livability.

Co-operative networks

In a global environment people are connected both locally and globally in diverse networks of real and virtual communities. These networks are reinforcing but also influential across scales (i.e. global, national, regional, city and local).

To the extent cities can recognize and relate with these networks they will be able to create new economic development and working partnerships.

Conclusions:

Polish cities are undergoing dramatic economic transformations. This new economic landscape is increasingly dominated by foreign competition and globalization and complex networks of investments. The resulting geographic shifts (regional and urban-suburban) have brought prosperity to some communities and decline to others. It is clear there are positive outcomes from improving the economic competitiveness and cooperation between geographies. Cities that are able to support their local economies through innovation, better social values and maintain relevant changes to the role of their institutions will continue to have distinct advantages over others. It is also clear that standardized policies and copied “best practices” are often impractical.

Transitions that have allowed Polish cities and regions to adopt good local or regional planning are positive outcomes. Yet there is a need for public policy to adapt more creatively to ensure that strategic planning can properly track investments and identify the most appropriate locations for jobs, residences and transportation systems. The importance of participation and the role of a civil society, and its ability to engage different actors and attract the private sector can not be overestimated. The most important priorities for a city or regional policy must be to ensure long-term development that can be implemented without loss of shared local social values and benefit.

New economic development strategies for Polish cities should consider new factors to ensure sustainable competitiveness. These might include:

- Human resources that are capable of producing goods
- The capacity to generate innovations
- The ability to participate in international creative networks
- The ability to enhance local cultural values
- The ability to mobilize capital
- Stabilizing city centers with supporting peripheral activities
- Modern high quality local public transit with national links

Meine Pieter van Dijk suggests decentralization in developing countries provides new opportunities for urban management. This implies that “local governments get more responsibilities”. Success will be difficult unless attention is paid to coordinated strategic planning, cooperation between different levels of government and ensuring a healthy financial base. Successful development strategies require good urban management that can play an active role in developing, managing and coordinating resources to achieve strategic planning objectives.

The issue is clearly complex. Continued studies need to consider on the fullest impacts of governance and municipal finance, competitiveness and the ability to attract private sector and promote employment, the capacity to deliver public services in an efficient manner and the environmental capacity of urban agglomerations.

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