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Local Experts' Role in Polycentric Governance of Heritage Sites: the Case of Religious Sites in Toruń

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This is the author-accepted manuscript (AAM) of the book chapter "Local Experts' Role in Polycentric Governance of Heritage Sites: The Case of Religious Sites in Toruń", forthcoming in the edited volume "Glocal Experiences of Heritage: Imaginaries, Appropriations, and Conflicts in World Heritage Religious Sites", edited by Cécile Doustaly and Clara Saraiva, to be published by Leuven University Press. Minor editorial changes may still be introduced prior to publication.

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The number of Sites on World Heritage List increases every year. To effectively attend to the needs of the public where these are concerned, relevant decision-making processes are coming to include an increasing number of experts. Against that background, our work as detailed in this research paper has sought to examine the level of engagement of experts at local level in the decision-making processes specific to protecting sites of a religious profile within cities enjoying World Cultural Heritage status. Specifically, it is the governance and decision-making system that is explored, with the focus being on the concept of polycentric governance.

The research interest as detailed above has been crystallised in a specific case study relating to the Polish city of Toruń, which was granted World Heritage status in 1997, thanks *inter alia* to the historical significance it held as a Medieval religious centre. The empirical research here is based on semi-structured interviews with experts, participant observation, and qualitative text analysis, utilising relevant documentation of the two most significant projects linked to the World Heritage Site in Toruń.

Analysis of those two projects leaves it evident that, despite possession of valuable knowledge and experience of the local context, local experts make contributions that are often characterised by de

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facto limitation when it comes to decision-making processes relating to religious sites. However, this seems to be an issue being addressed thanks to recent changes in funding requirements that introduce public consultation. Overall, the recognition and influence of local experts within the local community are seen to have played a significant role in legitimising decisions, particularly where these deviate from the ones formulated by other decision-making centres in the field of World Heritage.

Introduction

The paradigm shift in public administration has prompted a demand for heightened levels of transparency and accountability within administrative structures (Armstrong, 2005; Gaventa & McGee, 2013). Consequently, the pursuit of alternative modes of communication has become of paramount importance, the aim being to establish a governance framework that is more inclusive and responsive. To tackle these challenges, scholars and practitioners have acknowledged and emphasised the existence and significance of polycentric governance systems, wherein a diverse range of policy actors engage actively in multiple policy forums, in order for interconnected issues to be addressed collectively (Fischer & Maag, 2019; Lubell et al., 2020; Angst et al. 2022).

Characterised by the dispersion of political authority to multiple independent bodies with overlapping jurisdictions, polycentric governance has gained significant attention in the environmental field. Its systems are characterised by the interconnectedness of policy venues, at which networks of actors deliberate, before collectively arriving at decisions on interrelated policy matters (Hamilton et al., 2018; Mewhirter & Berardo, 2019). The main advantages of polycentric governance as highlighted are increased public support, reduced risk of regulatory capture, local experimentation, and multiple checks and balances (McGinnis & Ostrom, 2012; Galaz et al., 2012; Morrison, 2017). The definition of polycentric governance extends beyond formal institutional arrangements in which state authority presides over collective decision-making processes, leading to alterations in the rules governing how resources are utilised (Carlisle & Gruby, 2019). Polycentric governance necessitates a multifaceted amalgamation of organisations, encompassing public, private, and voluntary sectors, with overlapping domains of responsibility and functional capacities (McGinnis & Ostrom 2012). The significance of incorporating multi-level learning, as underscored in the framework of polycentric governance (Ostrom, 1999; Vantaggiato & Lubell, 2022), proves essential in tackling challenges that transcend administrative boundaries. This concept has gained wide adoption, and investigation, across multiple disciplines. For example, in the realm of climate

policy, it has garnered significant attention among scholars specialising in polycentric governance (Ostrom, 2009; Cole, 2011; Spreng et al., 2016; Gillard et al., 2017).

Over time, researchers have also commenced investigating the application of polycentric governance to the realm of World Heritage (Gould, 2017; Morrison, 2017; Bertacchini & Gould, 2021). The governance of World Cultural Heritage is characterised by the active participation of diverse actors in decision-making processes spanning from the international to the local levels, with each actor exerting a discernible level of influence. Although considerable attention has been paid to the investigation of global actors' involvements, and their impacts on decision-making processes in the World Heritage field within the specific context of polycentric governance, there remains a noticeable dearth of comprehensive studies examining the role and contributions of local experts. That situation warrants research to enhance our understanding of the local experts' contributions and functions within the polycentric governance framework, including their interactions with other actors and their influence on decision-making processes pertaining to World Heritage Sites. Seeking to go some way to addressing that research gap, this paper aims to examine the role of local experts in the decision-making process related to the protection of religious sites in cities enjoying World Cultural Heritage status.

In the context of this article, the term "local experts" encompasses individuals who possess specialised expertise and far-reaching understanding and insight vis-à-vis World Heritage Sites, inter alia as regards cultural importance, historical context, and conservation efforts. Generally, these individuals are recognised within their local communities, and possess substantial experiential knowledge, even as they lack professional expertise in the World Heritage field.

The research methodology employed in this study incorporated three types of data collection engaged in between April and July 2023. The primary focus of our empirical investigation is an examination of various actors involved in the polycentric governance of heritage sites, and their participation in the decision-making process relevant to the case of the Polish city of Toruń.

Semi-structured expert interviews were conducted with key actors in Heritage Site governance (including city administration) and decision-making, with a view to comprehensive data being gathered. The interviews allowed for in-depth insights into these actors' perspectives, experiences, and roles, with the semi-structured nature ensuring flexibility in the exploration of relevant themes, even as a consistent framework across participants was maintained.Interviews were supplemented by participant observation relating to meetings of Toruń's so-called Revitalisation Committee. This approach allowed for firsthand observation of the Committee's dynamics, interactions and decision-making processes. By immersing ourselves in its activities, we gained a deeper understanding of how different actors contribute to the governance of World Heritage Sites. Qualitative text analysis was

also performed - on documentation relating to the implementation of the two most-significant projects with the World Heritage zone. This entailed systematic examination of written materials featuring published results of projects, with necessary scrutiny of the narratives, discursive strategies and discourses that shape the position of religious sites and attendant decision-making processes.Overall, this combination of semi-structured interviews, participant observation and qualitative text analysis provided for far-reaching comprehension of the roles local experts play in the polycentric governance of Heritage Sites in Toruń, as well as their involvement in decision-making processes.

Heritage Management and Expertise in Toruń

The norms governing the protection of Monuments in Poland are primarily established under the Act on Protection and Maintenance of Historical Monuments of 23 July 2003. This legislative framework encompasses a comprehensive set of guidelines, criteria, and provisions on the protection and preservation of monuments. It delineates the scope, boundaries, and modalities of Historical Monument protection and maintenance, while also addressing aspects such as the financing of conservation and restoration efforts, and the organisational structures responsible for Monument preservation. Notably, some 10% of Poland's territory is encompassed by areas granted statutory protection, be that in National Parks, Landscape Parks, Historical Monuments or relics (Górka, 2018). The remaining 90% of the country's territory is shaped and regulated by Local Spatial Development Plans overseen by local authorities, under preparation and adoption procedures governed by the Act on Spatial Planning and Development, entering into force on 27 March 2003, alongside subsequent amendments.

The structure to the ownership of Poland’s Monuments has undergone significant change since 1989 and the change of the political system (Purchla, 2017). There has been a shift from a predominantly public property structure to a private one, with the result that many religious sites returned to being owned by religious organisations. According to the report on the functioning of the system of Monument Protection published by the Ministry of Culture in 2009, the most prominent owners of Monument sites are private owners, followed by religious organisations. In fact, in the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship (province-region), religious organisations own 541 of the 2398 registered Monuments. The report further states that there are 55485 registered Monuments in Poland, among which no fewer than 13132 are in the hands of religious organisations ("Raport o systemie", 2009). Therefore, whilst private ownership is the largest category, religious organisation ownership is the most major one connected to organised institutions. These changes in ownership structure highlight the importance of religious organisations being considered critical actors in the governance

and preservation of certain Heritage Sites. Their substantial ownership and connection to organised institutions make them partners, likewise critical ones, when it comes to decision-making processes concerning Poland's management, conservation, and promotion of its religious sites.

Evaluation of the value of heritage is a challenging conundrum faced by experts across the globe. World Heritage Cities listed on the World Heritage List undergo a rigorous assessment process utilising the prescribed methodology within the World Heritage system. Nonetheless, the explanations presented in the Statement of Outstanding Universal Value that describe the value of World Heritage Sites often tend towards the descriptive, rather than the fully elucidative. Where historical cities are designated as World Heritage Sites, it is crucial that they develop comprehensive management systems, typically centred around Management Plans (Szmygin et al. 2021). The primary objective of these plans is to establish a strong connection between valuable features attributed to a city (specifically as defined for the purpose of inclusion on the World Heritage List) and their associated sites.The effective protection of a nominated property for current and future generations is a fundamental management-plan objective. Toruń was granted World Heritage status in 1997 for its comprehensive preservation of its old areas, which encompass the ruins of the Teutonic Castle, the Old Town, and the New Town (UNESCO, 1997). This distinctive amalgamation of castle integrated with two towns, as fortified by defensive walls, represents a noteworthy example of a Medieval settlement agglomeration.

As regards this site, it is possible to discern two significant aspects connected to its Outstanding Universal Value. Firstly, the Medieval Town of Toruń provides an unparalleled depiction of Medieval life, intricately reflected in its original street layouts and early architectural structures. The Old Town and the New Town feature impressive Gothic-style parish churches, which have retained their original Gothic facades, partition walls, stucco-decorated ceilings, vaulted cellars, and intricately painted embellishments. Secondly, the Medieval Town of Toruń showcases extraordinary universal value by meticulously preserving the medieval urban layout and notable early structures. As a benchmark for urban development during the 13th and 14th centuries in the region, Toruń exemplifies a rare form of Medieval settlement agglomeration, by integrating two towns and a castle. The town's cultural influence extended beyond its borders, leaving an indelible imprint on the then state of the Teutonic Knights, as well as neighbouring regions.

The implementation of management plans has impacted upon pre-existing World Heritage Sites, even predating the 2015 adoption of Operational Guidelines (UNESCO, 2015). This circumstance is exemplified by the case of Toruń, which attained World Heritage status in 1997. Regrettably, UNESCO did not provide a standardised template as a practical guide for generating management

plans for such cases. This shortfall can be attributed to the multifaceted and intricate nature of issues associated with preserving diverse World Heritage Sites, including those of a cultural profile (Feilden & Jokilehto 1998; Cleere 2010). At the same time, management plans were in a position to become essential where improved community engagement is concerned (Ripp & Rodwell, 2018). Subsequently, we will investigate this facet by illustrating the Revitalisation Committee established in Toruń.

Religious Sites and the Engagement of Local Experts

The World Heritage Site in Toruń emerged as a recipient of significant European Union (EU) funding through two major comprehensive multi-partner projects of substantial scale (Appendix 1). These were financed under the European Regional Development Fund, falling within the purview of the Infrastructure and Environment Operational Programme ("Mapa Dotacji UE", 2007; "Mapa Dotacji UE", 2014). These were overseen at the national level by the Ministry for Culture and National Heritage. These projects were selected for analysis by us, in line with the substantial financing that made them the most prominent initiatives within Toruń's Medieval Town, and ones the city administration deemed crucial to the preservation of the World Heritage Site. The aims of the projects lay in work to conserve, renovate and adaptat selected historic buildings of the Medieval town complex.

At our data-collection stage, we came upon a hypothesis that the inclusion of religious sites within these projects could indicate their significance within the World Heritage Site of Toruń. However, a closer examination revealed that this assumption could not be substantiated. The notable prevalence of religious partners in the project outline can be attributed to the project's structural design, which includes a restricted set of eligible partners for funding (Protection of Cultural Heritage and Development of Cultural Resources, 2017). Of those, only two categories of non-state institution are eligible — religious organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). However, the partner list of those projects features five church organisations and only one non-governmental one (the Tumult Foundation) — resulting in most of the funding going to religious sites within the World Heritage zone in Toruń. The other partners mentioned in the table are institutions in culture owned by municipal government at different levelsm as well as state actors. The project provided funding for conservation works on multiple sites to be carried out. Some were under the ownership of the municipality of Toruń, while various state actors or non-public project partners possessed others. Hence, not all religious sites were funded via religious partner organisations — some were ex-religious sites owned by the municipality.

Project name and Total Value/ EU Funding	Project partners
"Mediaeval Town of Toruń - protection and Conservation of UNESCO cultural heritage" (2008-2014) 38,950,020 PLN/ 18,942,830 PLN 9 sites (5 religious sites)	- Parish of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Blessed Fr. Stefan Frelichowski - Parish St. James the Apostle - Cathedral Parish of St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist - Diocese of Toruń, operating through the Diocesan Curia of Toruń and the Diocesan Museum - Religious House of the Society of Jesus in Toruń - District Museum in Toruń
"Mediaeval Town of Toruń - protection and Conservation of UNESCO cultural heritage, stage II" (2015-2023) 74,755,474 PLN/ 54,328,720 PLN 13 sites (6 eligious sites)	- Parish of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Blessed Fr. Stefan Frelichowski - Parish St. James the Apostle - Cathedral Parish of St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist - St. Stephen's Evangelical parish of Augsburg Confession - Kuyavian-Pomeranian Impresary Musical Theater - District Museum in Toruń - Teutonic Castle Cultural Center; today Toruń Cultural Agency - Tumult Foundation in Toruń

Appendix 1. EU funding projects implemented in Toruń.

The projects under consideration were implemented consecutively, with substantial overlap displayed as regards sites, partner organisations involved, and ongoing tasks. The principal distinction between these projects lies in the disparity as regards funding, with the second project receiving approximately double the amount allocated to the first. Additionally, the project's second iteration witnessed the inclusion of several new partner organisations, further expanding the established collaborative network. This sequential progression highlights the iterative nature of the

projects, with incremental adjustments made to enhance effectiveness and foster broader partnerships in subsequent phases. The city administration was effective in implementing and coordinating both projects in collaboration with non-state institutions that owned the selected monuments within the World Heritage Site in Toruń. However, the imposed preconditions and requirements limited project scope and the partnership selection process significantly. Despite the partners being chosen through a public call instead of direct approaches by city representatives, all applicants were obliged to adhere to the same formal requirements.

Within the project framework, the partner organisations were responsible for providing a financial contribution for their respective project parts, typically amounting to 15% of the funding (Protection of Cultural Heritage and Development of Cultural Resources, 2017). In multimillion-dollar projects, such financial obligations often prove unattainable for non-governmental organisations, while religious organisations are better equipped to meet these requirements. For instance, the institutional support from the religious sites played a significant role, as indicated by a city representative involved in the project, where the Bishop's involvement was crucial in guaranteeing the religious sites' contributions. Such an organised system of support is not typically available to NGOs. Furthermore, the legal structure of the project stipulated that the partner eligible for financing must be the owner of the renovated Monument. In the Polish context, it is customary for religious organisations to own their respective Monuments, as evidenced by ownership statistics (Rozbicka, 2017). In contrast, ownership by non-governmental organisations is relatively rare. These factors underscore the prevailing dynamics and constraints within the project framework, resulting in a concentration of funding and project ownership primarily within religious institutions. While NGOs face financial limitations and legal-ownership disputes, churches are in a better position to meet requirements, and benefit from project opportunities. In that connection, no rejections of any submitted applications were received, a clear indication that only the partners referred to possess(ed) the necessary institutional and financial capacities, and sufficient legal title, to be eligible for project participation. That outcome resulted in project funding being allocated to religious sites predominantly.

It was frequent for the engagement of partners in projects funded by the European Union to necessitate a putting-in-place of specialised roles dedicated to proficient project administration, coordination and management. These positions were established in direct response to the availability of EU funding, in recognition of the fact that the allocating of resources for such personnel was and is an item of expenditure both indispensable and anticipated. The posts in question were established within the partner organisations themselves, rather than being integrated into the city administration. More specifically, the underlying rationale for creating these positions

stemmed from an acknowledgment of the intricate complexities and bureaucratic intricacies involved in managing finances, collecting comprehensive information about project sites, and producing expert analyses.

The diverse requirements and guidelines accompanying EU funding necessitated the presence of dedicated experts capable of navigating and effectively overseeing the financial aspects of projects. In discussing the management structure of the projects undertaken by partners, a representative of the city administration emphasised the substantial bureaucratic challenges involved, stating that "(...) the bureaucracy is huge. Simply preparing, collecting or preparing corrections of these documents, and then preparing explanations somehow forced the partners to hire people working for them to manage those projects" (city administration representative number 5). By designating these specialised positions, the city administration and other project partners aimed to ensure the efficient administration and coordination of the projects. This approach optimised the utilisation of funding and facilitated compliance with the associated financial regulations, thus mitigating the risks of mismanagement or non-compliance. The consequence of all this was for a degree of local expertise in project coordination to develop within the partner organisations. The designated individuals assumed responsibility for generating project documentation, thereby facilitating the collection and coordination of expertise. However, the results of the interviews make clear the crucial point that these experts did not hold decision-making authority, and nor did they serve as the primary contact points for city coordinators. Instead, it was the heads of the parishes involved that fulfilled these roles consistently.

The absence of public consultations through the various stages of the two previous projects is a salient observation. This lack of public engagement can be ascribed to the absence of formal requirements mandating such consultations. The city administration took on the primary project coordinator role without actively seeking additional input from international or local experts during the project's formulation phase. Notably, our research findings suggest the complete exclusion of Toruń residents from participation in any decision-making processes regarding these projects. Where decision-making involvement beyond commercial interests was involved, partners relied predominantly on area of expertise. Religious organisations often established informal and opaque "conservation committees," acting as *pro bono* advisory bodies, as is indicated by a representative of the city administration involved in the projects. These committees typically comprised local Conservators of Monuments, primarily affiliated with the renowned Copernicus University in Toruń — an esteemed Polish academic institution specialising in art history and conservation studies. This conservation department has over 70 years of academic tradition, and is a research institution of the "A" category, i.e. the highest in the Polish academic system.

While the projects entailed specialised positions for professional administration and coordination, the decision-making processes primarily rested with the heads of the parishes, and public consultations were notably absent. Equally, non-commercial involvement in decision-making predominantly occurred within the realm of expertise, as was exemplified by the establishment of Conservation Committees comprising local Monument Conservators, often associated with the aforementioned Copernicus University. Employees of the university become crucial actors in providing expertise to the sites. The Committees form the backbone of the experience needed for a project at the application stage. Religious partners gain advice regarding the scope and exact nature of work to be undertaken, and via its funding. In more detail, the function was described by a representative of the city administration as follows: "They work at the parish, there are people from the academy, and before I receive any information that this painting is going to be worked on, for example, in a chapel or a vault, the Priest gets such information from these people, who say this is necessary, that is necessary, and so on" (city administration representative number 5). The gathering of such expertise was coordinated and transferred into the project documentation by the aforementioned people in project-administration positions employed by partners.

Religious-Site Narratives

The involvement of the experts referred to above is seen to have impacted upon the way in which the narrative on projects is constructed. Interestingly, the narrative built around the projects and funding did not underline the religious aspect or importance of the sites involved. Instead, the narrative developed was of this being part of the universal heritage of Toruń and having great value as a historical monument in its own right. The city administration published two books to serve as a summary and promotional material vis-a-vis the projects. The publications bear the same titles as the projects, and came out in 2014 and 2022 (Gontarz, 2014; City of Toruń, 2022a). They were in a position to serve as an excellent example of the type of narrative under discussion, and it was to that end that qualitative text analysis of the two books was engaged in.

The official position of the city-administration authorities on the inclusion of the sites in the project is also founded in the historical and universal value of their heritage, rather than the religious aspects. The speech from the Mayor in regard to the project said: "The project allows us to be proud again of the historical values that led to Toruń's inclusion on the UNESCO list" (Gontarz, 2014, p.7). It was thus felt that the project provided an opportunity for a regaining of a sense of pride and appreciation in the historical heritage that led to Toruń's inclusion on the World Heritage List. Such a position on the universality of value was transferred from the city authorities to become an official discourse of the project. In the official statement of the Mayor, the project's was hailed via an idea

that: "the result of the works carried out during the project is an example of understanding the value of our monuments, cultural heritage and continuity, and the prestige resulting from being on the UNESCO List." (ibid.). Nor is there a mention of religion within the introductory parts of the publications. As an example of the project further deploying such discourse and narratives, we will analyse the reasons for including the main religious sites as partners in the project.

The first case is the main cathedral of Toruń — the Cathedral Basilica of St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist. The city administration has constructed a narrative surrounding the restoration efforts carried out on the Cathedral to reinstate its "original form, evoking the time when Copernicus himself was baptised within its hallowed confines" (Gontarz, 2014, p.20). Moreover, the Cathedral has been depicted as a significant venue at which numerous pivotal official events occurred during the Medieval era. Simultaneously, a compelling argument has been made regarding the architectural value of the structure. This recurrent emphasis on the exceptional value and significance contextualised within its historical import is a common thread that binds all the religious sites showcased within the project. Notably, the city administration even characterises this preservation effort as a debt that the city honours: "Throughout the centuries, the renowned church stood as a testament to the aspirations of Toruń's affluent inhabitants. It steadfastly served the city's interests throughout generations, and in return, the city continues to preserve and restore this treasured monument (Gontarz, 2014, p.24).

The second case is Toruń's Parish Church of St. James the Apostle. Here, the church is presented as an exceptional point in the Old Town panorama. The Monument's value is constructed as resting in the exceptional architectural value of the building and the high artistic value of the architectural decoration presenting most of the forms of the mature European Medieval ages. This is followed by a detailed architectural description of how valuable the church is, it being presented in terms of "The pride of Toruń residents has been satisfied for many centuries. The architecture of the church remained in its fifteenth-century form. Today it is a great witness of time for us" (Gontarz, 2014, p.46).

The third case is that of Toruń's Parish Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Blessed Fr. Stefan Frelichowski. It is presented as a significant innovation in the context of Gothic architecture. As this is a sizeable historical church, it poses an enormous challenge for monument conservators. The project stipulates that "this church now is in good hands" (Gontarz, 2014, p.58). It creates a narrative that the religious authorities running the site care a lot about maintaining its heritage. Here, the religious organisation as Monument owner is presented as a "good" kind of owner working towards preservation. However, according to the book, the cost of renovation of the

roof and brick walls exceeds the financial capacities of the parish. But the city and EU fund were there to step in and help. This narrative is followed by a presented claim that the church is a model example of the Pomeranian Gothic style (City of Toruń, 2022a).

In the three cases examined, the emphasis was placed predominantly on the significance of the sites as integral components of Toruń's cultural heritage and local history, rather than in any context of religious community and religious utilisation. The analysis of the narratives within these two projects revealed a construct whereby religious partners are portrayed as proficient managers of their respective Monuments. This framing suggests that the expertise generated by the Conservation Committees and project management teams played a pivotal role in shaping perception.

The narratives surrounding these projects offered a broad underscoring of the sites' cultural and historical value, with their preservation, restoration and promotion being emphasised. With the relevant religious community and their specific religious practices not the primary focus, projects aimed to highlight the broader cultural importance and historical significance within a local context of the Monuments being referred to.The construct of religious partners as capable and effective managers of their Monuments can be attributed to expertise and experience garnered through their involvement on Conservation Committees, as well as in project implementation. Their understanding of sites' historical, architectural and cultural aspects allowed them to contribute valuable insights, and ensure proper preservation. While the religious aspect may not have been the central focus, the significance of these sites to the religious community and their religious practices can obviously not be overlooked. Project narratives that primarily emphasise cultural-heritage value do not thereby negate the importance of religious use, and the meaningful role these Monuments play within Toruń's religious community.

Consequently, a compelling case emerges to justify and legitimise the selection of partners and Monuments within the framework of large-scale, EU-funded projects for the restoration of Monuments. The aspects of the projects relating to the legal framework favoured sites of a religious profile, while an absence of public consultations regarding the scope of work and inclusion of specific sites necessitated the construction of a narrative highlighting universal and exceptional importance within the context of Toruń. The books offering detailed descriptions of the projects were distributed free of charge, suggesting a deliberate effort to legitimise both projects and partners by putting a narrative framework in place. According to information provided by a representative of the city administration, preparations are underway to apply for a new project, which will serve as a third-stage continuation of the projects analysed in this paper. Notably, the forthcoming project is slated for social inclusion, with plans for public consultations over shape and

scope. With a view to ensuring that these consultations are rendered effective, the present article is seeking to propose potential areas of focus and inclusion, *i.a.* suggesting that existing institutions already operating within the World Heritage zone in Toruń should be involved.

The Revitalisation Committee

The city administration's founding of a formal body going by the namely of Revitalisation Committee can be attributed to the formal requirement that a consultative entity for revitalisation processes be established, rather than to any directly motivation reflecting World Heritage Site management. In Poland, processes of revitalisation are matters for an Act of Parliament, which defines revitalisation as "a process of bringing degraded areas out of crisis, conducted comprehensively, through integrated activities for the benefit of the local community, space and economy, territorially focused, carried out by revitalisation actors based on the commune revitalisation programme" (Revitalization Act, 2015).

In the case of Toruń, the World Heritage zone (Medieval Town of Toruń) was selected as one of the three areas for revitalisation, ensuring its falling with the remit of the Committee, whose tasks, as described on the website of the city of Toruń, include that it "provides opinions and positions in the revitalisation process that are to help the commune in the proper shaping of its course and recommends solutions in matters related to the preparation, conduct, and evaluation of revitalisation. As an organisational liaison between the commune authorities and other actors of revitalisation, the committee will be one of the means to ensure the participatory nature of revitalisation" (City of Toruń, 2022b).

The Committee responsible for the revitalisation efforts encompasses various categories of actor within the areas slated for revitalisation. Its tenure spans five years, beginning in 2022 and concluding in 2026. In line with Poland's domestic law, the establishment of the Committee by the Mayor of Toruń was a formal requirement for the revitalisation process to be initiated and areas in need of such revitalisation identified (ibid.). It was on the Committee's recommendation that the City Council of Toruń came to designate the three specific areas for revitalisation, with the World Heritage zone being one of those areas. As religious sites are not classified as a distinct category for the purposes of the Committee, they lack direct representation thereon. However, given the Committee's spatial focus on the Medieval Town of Toruń, religious sites of course fall within its purview, and are therefore addressed in that light.

The Committee responsible for revitalising Toruń comprises a diverse range of members (23), these people represent a variety of sectors. Three represent citizens residing in the revitalised areas, with one representing the World Heritage zone *per se*. Two representatives are designated for citizens of Toruń from outside the revitalised areas, while three members represent businesses within them. The Committee also includes three representatives of NGOs operating within the designated areas. The city administration of Toruń is in turn represented by three members selected from different administrative bodies by the city Mayor. Notably, the Mayor has prioritised the inclusion of experts who specialise in the World Heritage zone. As such, the Director of the city's Office of the City Centre, a specialised department responsible for managing the World Heritage zone, has been appointed as the primary representative and Vice-Chair of the Committee. Heading the Committee is in turn a representative from Toruń's Copernicus University, which is also represented by way of two further members. The Mayor holds significant authority in shaping the Committee's composition, in particular enjoying discretionary rights when there are more candidates than available positions in a given category of membership.

It is important to note that the Committee's role extends beyond the one designated officially — as a consultative body in regard to revitalisation plans that outline the steps to be taken in the course of the revitalisation process. The Committee in fact has a broad mandate with respect to various sites within the World Heritage zone, including those of a religious profile and status. Its structure accommodates multiple overarching categories of actor, and representatives from diverse social groups. *De facto*, this configuration positions the Committee as a forum (venue at which actors meet to resolve collective action problems) for local experts, fostering connections and serving as a decision-making centre for their collaborative initiatives.

Our results indicate that Committee Members share information regarding their respective organisations' projects, and extend invitations to fellow members to discuss and participate. This networking aspect gains official sanction and organisation within the Committee, with the Vice-Chair engaged in the regular, remote circulation to all Members of information on projects and initiatives. While in-person meetings occur once every three months, such sharing of project updates and collaboration opportunities happens more frequently by way of the remote channels of communication referred to, ensuring ongoing engagement among Committee Members.

The Committee demonstrates a non-compartmentalised approach to its tasks, and one devoid of categorisation in line with specific areas represented by Members. Instead, all Committee Members collectively address issues arising from the revitalised areas as a cohesive unit. Notably, the representatives of the city administration within the Committee have adopted an expanded

perspective, envisioning the Committee as an accessible and legitimate public-consultancy body that focuses specifically on Toruń's World Heritage zone.

The city administration is consistent in extending invitations to the Committee, seeking its active participation in public-consultation processes relating to diverse city-centre projects. A recent Committee Meeting witnessed the issuance of two such invitations. The first sought the Committee's selection of a Member to serve on the Jury Panel for a city-led competition aimed at discerning the most notable "Site of the Year" within the confines of the Medieval Town of Toruń. The second scenario involved city-administration representatives in soliciting the Committee's involvement in an upcoming public-consultation process associated with the final developmental stages of the Management Plan the city administration has been making ready. This comprehensive plan governs the management of all Monuments, including an assortment of religious sites that constitute an integral part of the application.

In presenting their invitation to the Committee, the representatives of the city administration emphasised the utmost priority afforded to the enactment and consultation process surrounding the World Heritage Site Management Plan. This Plan is of major importance as it encompasses the management of religious sites outlined within the application for World Heritage status. Notably, the city administration intends to utilise this document to influence the passage of a Local Spatial Development Plan tailored explicitly to the Medieval Town of Toruń. In turn, the status of a Local Spatial Development Plan is one of pivotal significance, as these serve as fundamental reference points for spatial management in urban areas across Poland. Domestic legislation mandates that all urban areas eventually adopt such Plans (Act of 27 March 2003 on spatial planning and development, 2003). The absence of an enforceable Local Spatial Development Plan for the historic city centre of Toruń restricts the city-administration's legal instruments in governing spatial management within this designated area. Notably, one crucial stage in establishing such a plan involves obtainment of approval for the draft from the Conservator of Monuments acting at the level of the Voivodeship. The Conservator indeed represents the central government's jurisdiction as regards the protection of Monuments (Rouba, 2013).

The representatives of the city administration have been wont to expound on the arduous nature of the present process, highlighting how, despite their plan's being ready since 2019, the Voivodeship Conservator of Monuments has consistently withheld consent, necessitating multiple amendments. To address this impasse, the city administration has appealed against adverse decisions to the Minister of Culture and National Heritage, overturning specific concerns raised by the Conservator.

The ongoing discussion between the two institutions has anyway hindered the progress and advancement of the plan.

Within its merits and the governed site, the city administration has observed the intersection between the Site Management Plan and the Local Spatial Development Plan in relation to the Medieval Town of Toruń. The World Heritage Site Management Plan is not as detailed, and nor does it provide legal and administrative tools to the city administration; but it does outline a management strategy focused on the protection and preservation of Monuments. This is precisely the area of conflict pertaining between the city administration and the Voivodeship Conservator – which prevents the Local Spatial Development Plan from coming into being. As adoption of the World Heritage Site Management Plan requires public consultation, while not entailing complex inter-institutional approvals, the city administration has been prioritising its approval, with the intention of this document serving a legitimising function in the ongoing dispute over the Local Spatial Development Plan.

The city administration demonstrates a keen interest in engaging in extensive public-consultation processes as this is seen to enhance the perceived legitimacy of their arguments, and operate alongside the interinstitutional conflicts with the Voivodship Conservator of Monuments that otherwise be the sole activity. To this end, the city administration has turned to the Revitalisation Committee as a readily-available formal body at or around which public consultation might take place. While consulting on the Site Management Plan is not a direct responsibility of the Committee (its role being limited primarily to advice over the revitalisation plan), the latter's local expertise is available to be leveraged by a city administration that seeks out its institutional legitimacy to contribute to other high-priority processes of public consultation. In addition, representatives of the city administration have conveyed to the Committee their intention to extend invitations of the same kind regularly in the future, implying that the case of the consultations described above is not a singular one. Rather the city administration of Toruń is envisioning the Revitalisation Committee as an indispensable local expert consultancy entity when it comes to the city centre area and affairs, in such a manner that the Committee`s formal role in revitalisation consultations is surpassed. By recognising the Committee Members as local experts, the city administration intends to secure their persistent involvement in various institutional contexts, through the regular extending of invitations to participate to different bodies.

To conclude the case analysis, we note how the Revitalisation Committee in Toruń provides a clear example of a city administration engaging with polycentric governance and conscripting the help of local experts in furthering the legitimacy of its actions. This city administration treats the Committee

as a forum at which local experts can be met, and their help employed when needed. Interestingly, the agency of the Committee, and the local expertise in question, is seen as beneficial in cases of some strengthening of the city administration`s position in inter-institutional conflicts within Poland's state governance system.

Conclusion

While the only possible conclusion must remain that the role of local experts in decision-making processes for religious heritage sites within a World Heritage zone is limited, we may note how the EU funding of projects offers significant potential for the development of local expertise, as well as community engagement more generally. External funds and support foster the involvement of local expertise, enabling active participation of the community in decision-making. The local experts referred to have a unique perspective rooted in their understanding of the local community and heritage. Their practical experience and involvement allow them to provide valuable insights and make informed decisions aligned with the local context. The founding of institutions that empower such experts acts to acknowledge their contributions, while integrating their decision-making into the governance framework for a given World Heritage Site.

While acknowledging the limitations of this study, we are constrained to highlight the valuable insights accruing from its deliberate focus on local expertise in the decision-making process as regards the protection of religious sites within a given World Cultural Heritage city. Through such a narrowing of scope to actors at national and city levels, our work has provided an opportunity to examine local experts' specific impact and influence within their own cultural and historical contexts. This localised approach allows for a deeper understanding of how these experts contribute to the preservation and management of religious sites, given their unique knowledge, experiences, and connections to the local community. Furthermore, by considering the prerequisites for establishing a Revitalisation Committee in Toruń, the study sheds light on the initial stages through which an expert organisation for religious sites is set up. While it acknowledges the possibility of future inclusion of other actors in decision-making processes, the study captures an important moment in time. It highlights the role of local experts in shaping an initial framework. This understanding can provide valuable insights for other World Heritage cities and contribute to the ongoing discourse on the involvement of local expertise in the preservation of religious sites. Further research is therefore needed to expand our knowledge of the contributions and role of local experts in polycentric governance, their interactions with other actors, and their influence on decision-making processes relating to World Heritage Sites.

An established Revitalisation Committee is seen to be in a position to discuss actively, and to secure financial support for, the sites that require attention, including those of a religious status and profile. With its knowledge of the local context and enjoyment of community trust, such a Committee can contribute to the resolving of complex issues, and ensure balanced decisions. In the specific case of Toruń, and potentially also in general, a Committee focused initially on revitalisation can expand its scope to include governance, and collaboration with various actors. In Toruń, a polycentric-governance context sees the Toruń Committee potentially enjoying a status as a significant decision-making actor within the city's World Heritage zone. The acknowledgement and influence of local experts within the community have been instrumental in substantiating decisions there, in particularly where these are seen to deviate from those formulated by other decision-making centres in the field of World Heritage.

Toruń's Revitalisation Committee has demonstrated its commitment to discuss restoration and development in that city, contributing effectively to decision-making and collaborating with other actors. Additionally, its involvement in projects beyond its official mandate highlights ways in which the city administration makes strategic use of its expertise. Involvement of that kind, exemplified by the development of the Site Management Plan and approval of the Local Spatial Development Plan, showcases the administration's reliance on the Committee's local expertise. As the number of actors involved in decision-making around a World Heritage property expands, local experts come to enjoy ever-greater opportunities to participate in decision-making – as is seen most clearly when we examine the process through the lens of polycentric governance. Engagement of local experts and the fostering of multi-actor collaboration prove crucial to the management of religious heritage and a World Heritage zone overall. Through their involvement, knowledge of the local context and enjoyment of community trust, local experts can engage in the effective resolution of complex issues relating to such sites, and ensure more-balanced decisions.

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