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The concept of the “co-created city” – experiences and visions of its implementation from the viewpoint of the Łódź authorities and Municipal Office stakeholders

Abstract

In November 2021, the Łódź City Council adopted the “City Development Strategy – Łódź 2030+” document. The strategy used the “co-created city” catchword as its guiding idea. Also in 2021, the Łódź Foundation launched the Project “Łódź as a Co-Created And Co-Governed City”, which included a series of individual in-depth interviews with local journalists and municipal office stakeholders. For the purposes of this article, the collected research material was analysed in terms of current application of the governance concept elements. The visions of city governance offered by the authorities and by representatives of various stakeholder groups were also compared to each other. Moreover, an attempt was made to analyse the possible directions for the implementation of these visions. The conducted analyses show that the directions of activities to be undertaken in order to make the idea of governance a reality have been identified and described in a similar way by both the Łódź Municipal Office and the stakeholders. The differences between the two visions are the result of participatory, not always positive, experiences of stakeholders. Based on

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the hypothetical directions of implementing the idea of governance, either a variant assuming a new opening in relations with stakeholders or a variant of continued apparent activities appears likely.

Keywords: urban policy, governance, co-created city, Łódź, qualitative research

JEL Classification Codes: H79, L38, Z18

Idea „miasta tworzonego wspólnie” – doświadczenia i wizje jej realizacji z perspektywy władz Łodzi i interesariuszy urzędu miasta

Abstrakt

W listopadzie 2021 roku Rada Miejska w Łodzi podjęła uchwałę o przyjęciu „Strategii rozwoju miasta Łodzi 2030+”, w której, jako idea przewodnia, pojawiło się hasło „miasta tworzonego wspólnie”. Także w 2021 roku, Fundacja Łódź rozpoczęła realizację projektu „Łódź – miastem współtworzonym i współzarządzanym”, w ramach którego przeprowadzono serię indywidualnych wywiadów pogłębionych z lokalnymi dziennikarzami i interesariuszami urzędu miasta. Na potrzeby niniejszego artykułu przeprowadzono analizę zebranego materiału badawczego pod kątem aktualnego wykorzystania elementów koncepcji *governance*. Porównano również wizję współzarządzania władz miasta z wizją przedstawicieli różnych grup interesariuszy, a także podjęto próbę przeanalizowania możliwych kierunków wdrażania tych wizji. Z analiz wynika, że kierunki działań, które należy podjąć w celu urzeczywistnienia idei współzarządzania są identyfikowane i opisywane w podobny sposób zarówno przez Urząd Miasta Łodzi, jak i jego interesariuszy. Rozbieżności w obu wizjach wynikają z dotychczasowych, nie zawsze pozytywnych, doświadczeń partycypacyjnych interesariuszy. Natomiast z hipotetycznych kierunków wdrażania idei współzarządzania prawdopodobny jest wariant zakładający nowe otwarcie w relacjach z interesariuszami lub wariant zakładający kontynuowanie działań pozorowanych.

Słowa kluczowe: polityka miejska, współzarządzanie, miasto współtworzone, Łódź, badania jakościowe

Kody klasyfikacji JEL: H79, L38, Z18

Cities are complex systems in which thousands of economic, social, institutional and environmental threads intertwine (Figuereido, Honiden, Schumann, 2018: 4) They are the driving force of economic progress, producing 80% of the world's GDP (UN Habitat, 2016b), as well as of social and cultural progress (Kubicki, 2016: 8). Currently, one half of the world's population lives in cities and this percentage is expected to reach 70% by 2050 (Turok, 2014). Due to the role and importance of

cities, together with the challenges they face, for example those related to climate change and its consequences (cf. Rzeńca, Sobol, 2020), it becomes necessary to pursue a well-considered urban policy and to devise effective management methods. For the recent several years, these issues have become a fertile ground for discussions and negotiations, with various concepts and paradigms clashing (Domaradzka, 2021a: 3).

For some time, models and concepts in which economic growth was assumed to be a cure-all for each and every malady had been coming under fire. For example, the New Public Management doctrine originating from the Anglo-Saxon neo-liberal economy current (Sześciło, 2014: 51), touted as a universal remedy for most public administration problems, has lost its appeal relatively quickly (Izebski, 2007: 14). Proponents of abandoning this kind of policies note, among others, their undemocratic nature and the growing social inequalities (Domaradzka, 2021a: 6, cf. Karwińska, 2009, Podgórnjak-Krzykacz, 2016, Sagan, 2017). As a result, more democratic concepts offering citizens additional opportunities to become involved in decision-making processes are enjoying a surge of interest (Dryzek, 2002).

Particular attention should be paid to the *governance* term (cf. Jessop, 2007; Rhodes, 2010) made popular by the World Bank (WB, 1991; Offe, 2009; Pawłowska, 2016; Podgórska-Rykała, Kępa, 2020) and to its derivatives: *collaborative, good, local, smart, urban governance* etc. (cf. Andrew, Goldsmith, 1998; Ansell, Gash, 2007; Sirianni, 2009; Karwińska, 2009; Bolívar, Meijer, 2016; Meijer, Bolívar, 2016; Podgórnjak-Krzykacz, 2016; Pawłowska 2016; McCann, 2017). Their underlying ideas are a reaction to the social and economic changes taking place in the 1980 s and indicate that "... the networking of connections, the numerous aspects of decision-making processes, the retreat of the state from areas it had traditionally monopolised, the policy of subsidiarity, the crisis of representative democracy and the growing importance of the civic sector – all these factors led to reformulating the manner in which power is exercised" (Sagan 2017: 40, cf. Izdebski 2006; Jessop 2007; Rhodes, 2010). Consequently, new forms of governance were to be characterised by a vertical structure of connections and the dispersal of power and control among public, social and economic entities (cf. Bovaird, Loffler, 2003; Izdebski, 2007; Sagan, 2017; Podgórska-Rykała, Kępa, 2020). Speaking most simply, they were to form "a network of interdependence, cooperation and partnership relationships" (Pawłowska 2016: 11). The concept may be observed to include elements of "participative", "partner", "interactive" and "deliberative" democracy (Izdebski, 2007: 17). Individual constituents of the above forms of democracy can be identified in smart governance (Bolívar, Meijer, 2016; Meijer, Bolívar, 2016) or even collaborative governance projects (Ansell, Gash, 2007). Components of smart governance listed in literature include collaboration between citizens and public entities as well as the use of technology (Tomor et al., 2019: 7). Further,

Chris Ansell and Alison Gash (2007: 544–545) define the notion of collaborative governance as a form of management in which public agencies engage non-public entities in the collective decision-making process. At this point it should be noted that a peculiar relation between governance and deliberation is identified by Jacek Sroka (2018: 14–15), who metaphorically compares governance to the hardware of public policy, “a complicated and expanding, multi-sectoral, multi-functional, multi-stream executive tool of public policy” and deliberation to software, the operating memory of that policy, which allows individual streams of governance to be coordinated. It appears we are able to view deliberation as a foundation of governance because of the way this topic evolved. The discussion on the idea of deliberation has been ongoing for four decades and encompassed four generations of concepts, evolving from idealistic models to models that offered tools usable in practice (Mansbridge et al., 2012; Elstub et al., 2016; Sroka, 2018; Ufel, 2022), such as the deliberative polling (Fishkin, 2003, Krzewińska 2016).

Importantly, the governance concept is not merely a playground for scholarly debates. Its ideas are recommended for implementation on city and state level by numerous international and EU as well as national strategy documents (cf. the New Urban Agenda of the United Nations (UN); New Leipzig Charter; 2030 National Urban Policy). Already the early 2000 s EU White Paper (EC, 2001) noted that governments of each state but also the EU as a whole should include citizens in the policy-shaping process. This was to be supported by the so-called five good governance principles which laid the foundations of democracy and rule of law. These principles are openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence.

Participation and involvement of citizens in joint decision-making processes are one of the catchwords and recommendations appearing most frequently in numerous documents. The UN New Urban Agenda (UN Habitat, 2016a: 11) offers a preferred vision of cities that are, among others “ (...) participatory, promote civic engagement, engender a sense of belonging and ownership among all their inhabitants, prioritize safe, inclusive, accessible, green and quality public spaces (...)” In turn, in the New Leipzig Charter (MFPR, 2020), the principles of good city governance include “participation and co-creation” and “multi-level governance”. Both principles speak about the need to involve inhabitants as well as non-state entities in the urban policy-shaping processes: “ (...) vertical and horizontal multi-level and multi-stakeholder cooperation, both bottom-up and top-down, is key to good urban governance.” (MFPR, 2020: 13). State-level documents, such as the 2030 National Urban Policy (MPFR, 2022: 22), likewise list popularising social participation as well as the cooperation and partnership principle among the rules on which pursuing city development policy is based.

The pressure, increasingly more noticeable in strategic documents, to involve inhabitants in joint decision-making processes is further driven by the pressure exerted by urban movements (Kubicki, 2017, 2020; Domaradzka, 2021a, 2021b). As a result of grass-roots social activity, municipal authorities are confronted with the challenge of greater involvement of inhabitants in decision-making processes, which – despite declarations of openness and readiness for broader participation – are often seen by the authorities as a hindrance and “necessary evil” (cf. Kusińska, 2017; Domaradzka, 2021b).

The tripartite influence described above – scholarly reflections, regulations found in strategic documents and grass-roots pressure – must also be demonstrated in activities undertaken by municipal authorities. The article attempts to evaluate the current use of the governance concept components in Łódź as a selected Polish city. In addition, the text compares the vision of governance adopted by the municipal authorities with the vision formulated by representatives of various groups of stakeholders, and an attempt will be made to analyse the possible directions of implementing these visions.

The context and methodology of conducted studies

Since some time, attempts have been made in Łódź to build an image of the city as a place with particular emphasis on participation and involvement of inhabitants in joint decision-making processes. Following the Sopot experiment, the city relatively quickly launched a participatory budgeting, described as an example of good practice (Galecki, 2013), conducted numerous public consultation processes and a citizens’ assembly, introduced the “Vox Populi” platform allowing to stage local quasi-referenda electronically, and declared the introduction of the “Participation 3.0” project. In 2021, under a resolution of the Łódź City Council, the “City Development Strategy – Łódź 2030+” was adopted and featured the leading idea of “co-created city” (UMŁ, 2021). In the same year, the “Łódź” Foundation completed a research project entitled “Łódź as a Co-Created And Co-Governed City”, whose objective was to describe the specifics of the current method of city management and to identify its limitations and driving factors, and also to attempt designing a new model corresponding to the adopted development strategy (FŁ, 2022: 10). One of the project components was conducting individual in-depth interviews (IDI) with local journalists and representatives of organisations and companies cooperating (or not cooperating) with the Łódź Municipal Office (UMŁ). Here it should be stressed that conducting interviews with officials was planned as well, but the municipal authorities refused to grant their consent. In total, 35 interviews were conducted (7 with journalists,

15 with cooperating stakeholders and 13 with non-cooperating stakeholders). The study used the snowball sampling method, with interviewees identifying additional potential interlocutors. The interview scenarios included discussing threads concerning: current capabilities of city stakeholders to jointly shape municipal policy, the factors supporting or limiting joint-decision making capabilities, and the vision of a co-created city. The authors of the article conducted some of the interviews and were also responsible for analysing the empirical material.

As a point of departure for formulating research objectives and questions to channel the analysis whose results are presented in the article, it was assumed that the governance concept was rooted in such principles as openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence, as well as in mutual and feedback-based relationships between the authorities and citizens (Podgórska-Rykała, Kępa, 2020: 33; cf. Bovaird, Loffler, 2003; Izdebski, 2007; Sagan, 2017), and therefore could in practice take such forms as: „(...) joint competences, joint actions, joint coordination, initiation of or participation in proceedings and procedures, submitting positions and opinions, consulting, controlling, monitoring, hearing, public debate, discussion forum, inhabitant initiatives (...)” (Podgórska-Rykała, Kępa, 2020: 35). Another assumption was that deliberation was the foundation of governance (Sroka, 2018: 22) and in this article it is equated mostly with the public nature of discourse, one of the three main features of deliberation described by Jacek Sroka (2009: 28), the other two being a persuasive choice of arguments and the intention to reach consensus. However, in line with what Sroka, following others, calls the return to realism, both in research and in shaping relations between public policy actors (Sroka 2018: 20), the authors of this text also focus mostly on the public nature of discussion and giving representatives of varied stakeholder groups an opportunity to speak up, putting less emphasis on consensus and persuasive argumentation.

With data from interviews at our disposal, the first objective of this article has been defined as an attempt to evaluate the degree to which the governance concept components are currently used in Łódź. Taking also into account the passages found in the city development strategy, the second objective of the article is to compare the vision of governance sketched in that document with the vision formulated by the interviewees. With respect to the first objective, the authors defined the following problem question: how do the interviewed city stakeholders (for the purposes of this text, the category of stakeholders is equated with the interviewed groups, although the authors realise that this category is broader and includes virtually every inhabitant) view and assess the participation instruments (selected governance concept components) used so far? In other words, recalling the reflections of Jon Elster (1997), is Łódź a Marketplace or a Forum, or at least a democratic debate arena consisting of

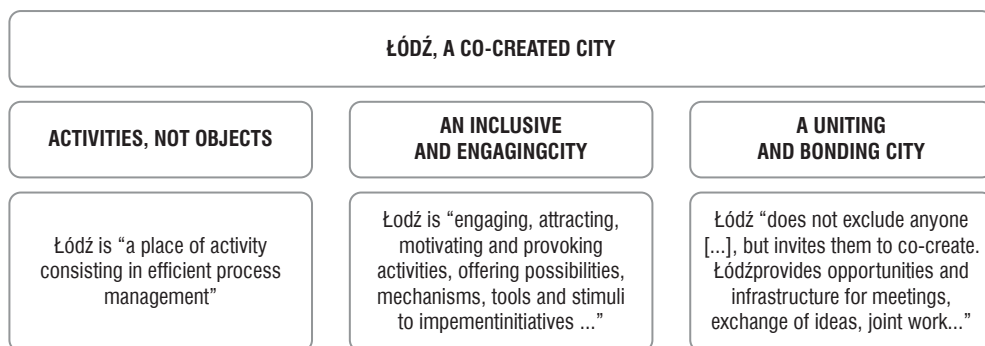
multiple groups of stakeholders (cf. Mansbridge et al. 2012: 7)? Do the interviewees think that activities offered by municipal authorities have an inclusive nature and allow stakeholders to participate in governance as agents? As for the other objective, in turn, the authors posed the following question: is the vision of city governance adopted in the Strategy aligned with the vision of the interviewees? In addition, a question was asked about the possible directions of implementing the governance concept in Łódź that result from evaluating its previous implementation and the alignment between the visions of the Municipal Office and the stakeholders.

Activities of the city to implement the idea of governance

The adopted Strategy contains the “co-created city” catchword as a leading idea. Already in the introduction of the document, stress is laid upon the necessity of inhabitant participation in setting the directions of city development, and ultimately also in making these directions a reality. It is also noted that “one of the most important tasks will be [...] to encourage Łódź inhabitants to initiate changes and participate in introducing them, also through a wide-ranging programme of consultations” (UMŁ, 2021: 7). Accordingly, the vision and idea of Łódź development is formulated as a set of three catchwords related to the activity and inclusion of inhabitants in initiatives for the city (Fig. 1).

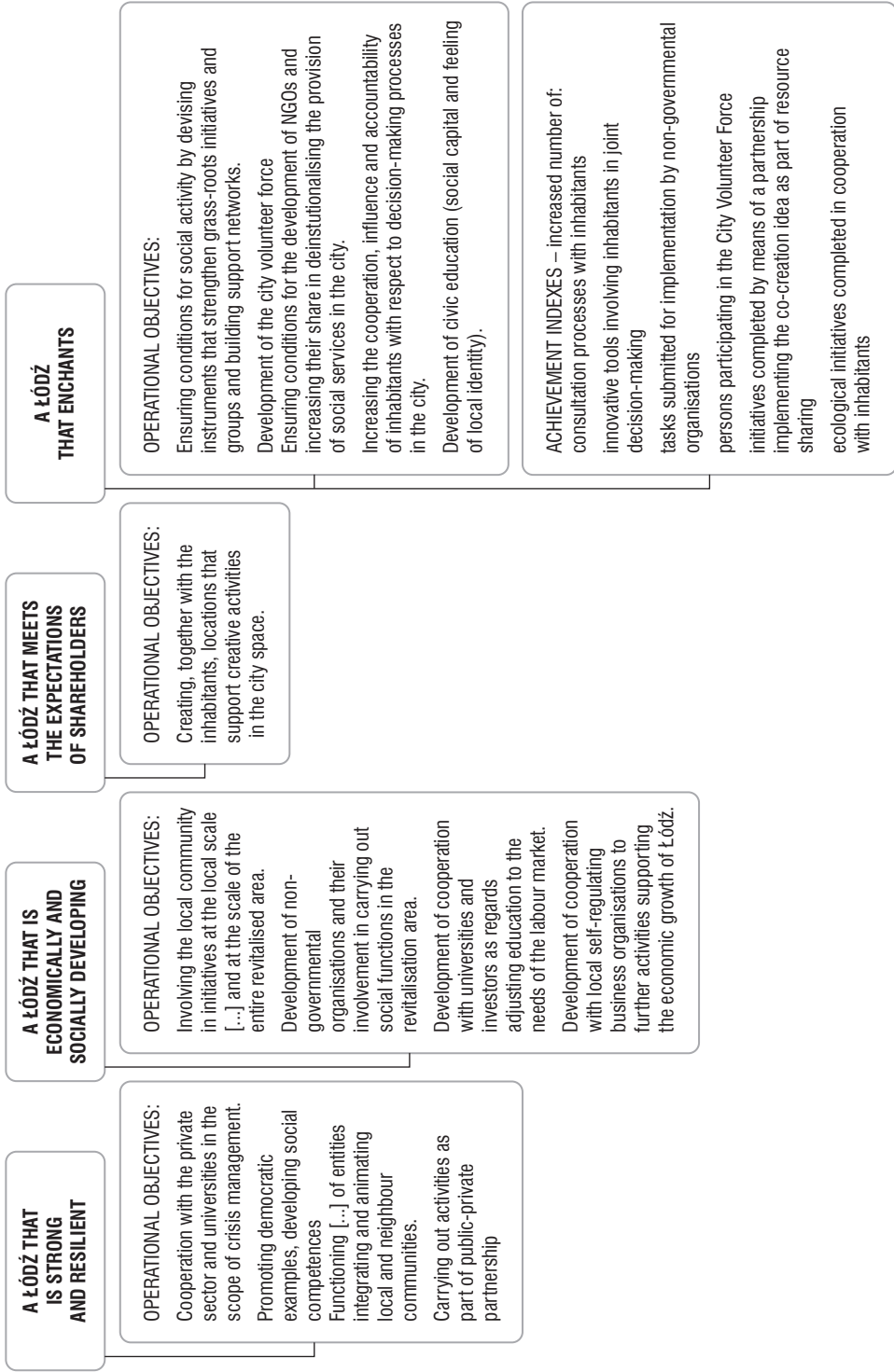
These ideas are reflected in 4 strategic objectives and then put in the concrete form of operational objectives and indexes, a small part of which relates to participation and joint decision-making in city matters by inhabitants. The majority of such connections is found in the fourth objective which encompasses the thematic area of civic activity (Fig. 2).

Fig. 1 Vision and idea of Łódź development



Source: own research based on UMŁ (2021).

Fig. 2 Strategic objectives versus the corresponding operational objectives and achievement indexes related to participation



Source: own research based on UML (2021).

Activities aimed at increasing the role and involvement of inhabitants and social organisations in city governance have also been recognised in two out of twelve strategic undertakings. Firstly, the Revitalisation Programme is meant to develop the city “using tools to cooperate with the inhabitants” (UMŁ, 2021: 59), but fails to name either these tools or any actions that might bear proof of their use. Secondly, the Social Actions Programme provides for: “tasks implemented together with non-governmental organisations and informal groups [...]; developing a system of social consultations [...]; actions involving inhabitants in decision-making processes; launching the City Activity Factory [...]; development of the City Volunteer Force, civic education [...]; actions supporting and activating local communities...” [UMŁ, 2021: 64]. Here also the description of actions relates mostly to the underlying objectives and not the manner in which these are achieved. Nor does it contain any assumptions concerning the scale of planned activities which might serve as a basis for evaluating the effectiveness of this undertaking.

Analysing the passages of the “City Development Strategy – Łódź 2030+” document, whose guiding principle is “a co-created city,” one can hardly avoid the feeling that this idea has been reflected in plans of specific activities to a relatively small degree only. The document contains a large number of catchwords and objectives that refer to involving stakeholders in decision-making processes and cooperation with the Łódź Municipal Office, but only a few of them are stated in specific terms in the form of results or achievement indexes. The stakeholders appear in them mostly as the participants in consultations and performers of tasks ordered by the Office. The indexes themselves refer primarily to designing or enhancing the participation toolkit and creating a framework that allows the participation to exist, and not to actual participation processes found inside such a framework.

Considering the Municipal Office’s activity in the area of involving inhabitants in joint activities prior to passing the Strategy it should, however, be noted that from 2017 to 2020, the city carried out public tasks in cooperation with over 300 organisations on average each year, entering into more than 400 agreements annually.

Only in 2020 and 2021, the Łódź Municipal office conducted 20 consultation processes with stakeholders. These processes dealt with issues of major importance for the functioning of the city, such as the Łódź strategy of development, city budget, programme of cooperating with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), investments, housing policy, zonal planning for specific areas, city greenery or the very principles of conducting consultations. They were accompanied by 32 ballots at the Vox Populi platform, half of which formed part of consultations and the remainder dealt with other topics, usually with slightly less importance. Issues voted on included the location of monuments, choice of names for new streets and parks, appearance

of the city bike or prizes in the city tax lottery. Łódź inhabitants have shown most interest in ballots related to development projects (26,914 and 12,455 voters) and also to the development of areas which could be used for green infrastructure or residential estate projects (11,145 voters).

A number of advisory and initiative bodies are also affiliated with the Municipal Office: the Public Benefit Activities Council, five Civic Dialogue Commissions and nine teams active in various public benefit areas, where different groups of stakeholders engage in dialogue on issues important for the city.

Assessment of city activities related to implementing the governance idea, and the vision of governance in the opinions of stakeholders

Stakeholders cooperating with the Łódź Municipal Office in performing public tasks have, for the most part, viewed relations with their partner in a positive light, appreciating mainly the freedom and independence granted to them in conducting specific activities. As a rule, stakeholders included organisations with a past history of cooperating with the Office. Some of the interviewees, however, both those who had just started the cooperation and those with more experience under their belts, viewed the cooperation as demonstrating a lack of real partnership and shifting the entire weight of planning and implementing public tasks on the organisations, with the city limiting itself merely to provide the necessary funds. Some among the interviewees also believed that the Łódź Municipal Office did not trust their organisations or appreciate their competences.

The participatory budgeting was named as an important instrument allowing inhabitants to participate in setting the city policy and budget. In the 2021/22 edition, over 1,080 projects were submitted, of which 717 were put to vote, while in the 2022/23 edition, the figure was 913 projects. The interviewees see this as a success, but almost all of them also point to distortions of this form of participation. According to them, these distortions related mainly to the nature of the submitted projects and resulted from the lack of education in this area and from the failure to understand the idea of participatory budgeting. This situation is comfortable for the Office in the sense that it allows using the participatory budgeting to perform tasks which need to be done by the city anyway. In the belief of interviewees, such participation is therefore somewhat illusory, because the inhabitants do not, in fact, set new objectives for which money is to be spent, but only expedite the performance of certain municipal tasks at the expense of civic initiatives.

The interviewees acknowledge the considerable activity of the city in the area of public consultations, noting that they allow anyone who wants to speak up on proposed issues to do so. A large number of interviewees stressed, however, that consultations are often about trivial matters, such as the colour of the city bike, while essential or controversial topics are passed over. Moreover, even if consultations on weighty matters, such as the city budget, are held, they have a ritual nature – while they do occur, the opinions and suggestions of stakeholders are ignored. The community is not treated as a partner in the dialogue, but as a beneficiary of the proposals dictated by the Office. The consequence is that consultation processes are often focused on assessing ready-made projects and not on planning them. The activity of stakeholders is often limited to choosing from among a number of predefined options. In this context, representatives of non-governmental organisations pointed to the threat resulting from overinvolvement of the Office in performing tasks which could be done by the organisations, noting that “the social partner becomes sidelined in these activities because officials [...] are doing things in lieu of NGOs, pushing them out of the market somewhat” [W28]. The organisations also noted the lack of space and readiness of officials to enter into dialogue and cooperation with groups critical towards the authorities and their ideas.

Advisory bodies affiliated with the Łódź Municipal Office are viewed in a similar light. According to the interviewees, they are a platform for exchanging information between stakeholders and enable them to articulate their own opinions and ideas. From the viewpoint of participating in city governance, they are, however, “a false front which exists because it has to but exerts little real influence on anything” [W8] since stakeholders often do not receive feedback on the proposals they submit. In effect, what decides on the actual participation and influence of each organisation are often informal contacts between their leaders and officials. Another consequence of this circumstance is the further weakening of dialogue bodies and the impossibility of coming up with “an organised group in Łódź [...], a group of people who have a vision of the city 10–20 years in the future and are not politicians or officials” [W35].

Considering the above assessments of the stakeholders, it is no surprise that the vision of the “co-created city” they formulate is a reaction to their previous participatory experiences. The majority of interviewees view the methods of using participation instruments by the Municipal Office as imperfect, which results in a number of proposals addressed to that authority. First, attention is called to the need to more intensely engage the Office in a dialogue with various groups of entities. Such a dialogue, however, is only meaningful when it is characterised by recognition of formal partnership of all involved parties and symmetrical relations between them. Only such a position of shareholders may lead to increased willingness to participate

in public affairs discourse on their part and extend their accountability for the implementation and effects of the resulting solutions. Furthermore, the vision of the interviewees also included the need to devise lasting and widely accessible influencing mechanisms to reduce the importance of informal access routes to information and participation in decision processes. The third condition of making the governance idea real was, for the interviewees, increasing the effectiveness of communication between the Office and various groups of stakeholders. This assumes, firstly, ensuring access to information – in a form matching the needs and capabilities of stakeholders – about the objectives and priorities of the city and the circumstances underlying their choice, the planned and implemented undertakings (consultations, competitions, tasks) and the related expenses, problems and resolution methods. Secondly, this assumes guaranteeing that the stakeholders receive feedback about their initiatives and activity and this must not be limited merely to a message about accepting or rejecting submitted comments or proposals.

The interviewees are convinced that incorporating the above proposals would lead to a co-operation city based on dialogue, trust and appreciation of each of the partners: the Municipal Office, active non-governmental organisations and engaged inhabitants.

Summary

The visions of developing governance ideas pictured in the Strategy and the statements of stakeholders replying to interviews did not reveal major differences in recognising the most important objectives or directions of action. The Strategy, however, hardly mentions specific drafts of solutions to achieve these objectives. Such solutions remain for the most part on the level of buzzwords, ideas for development which can be stuffed with contents (understood as implementation in practice) in very different ways. Only in a few cases does the Strategy include additional operating objectives, results and indexes, the latter referring as a rule merely to establishing instruments and mechanisms allowing participation in providing opinions, without mentioning the possible methods and assumed effects of using such opinions. This fact is slightly concerning since, as demonstrated by previous experiences of shareholders, it is the practice that puts mechanisms, assumptions and ideas to the test. Without defining and using margin conditions to evaluate their soundness and suitability for achieving the objectives as set, they more often than not become warped.

The mere recognition of a need to act in a specific area is, undoubtedly, an essential and necessary step towards undertaking the action but does not make it certain.

Moreover, it seems that to achieve the objective of increasing the participation of stakeholders in governing the city – understood as actual inclusion of various social groups in both the dialogue process and the implementation of various undertakings – granting them the opportunity to participate may prove insufficient. After all, it is not tantamount to stimulating their engagement. Consequently, the visions of governance formulated by the stakeholders and the Municipal Office have demonstrated discrepancies as to the methods of using and assessment of objectives to which participation instruments are currently subservient and should be so in the future.

Putting these two dimensions – the assessment of activities undertaken by the city so far in the area of involving inhabitants in governance and the alignment of the vision of governance formulated by the Municipal Office in the Strategy with the vision of stakeholders – side by side allowed us to come up with four scenarios of that vision which is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Hypothetical variants of directions of implementing the governance vision presented in the City Development Strategy – Łódź 2030+

Opinion on the use of participation instruments by city authorities	Alignment of the city governance visions	
	yes	no
positive	1. continued use of methods employed to involve stakeholders in city governance so far	2. insufficient or excessive (depending on the area) involvement of stakeholders in city governance
negative	(3.1.) a new opening in relations with stakeholders and including them in city governance as partners, or (3.2.) continued apparent activities	4. lack of space and unwillingness to engage in dialogue, sham governance (apparent activities)

Source: own research.

Out of the four scenarios presented above, variant no. 3 seems the most applicable to Łódź: the negative opinion on previous use of participation instruments is combined with alignment of visions of city governance found in the Strategy and in the opinions of stakeholders. The basis for this supposition, in addition to the cited results of research, includes observations of local discourse, as made by the authors: local media and social media portals in which (mostly) city activists, who can be equated with "new bourgeoisie" (Kubicki, 2016) and representatives of at least some city stakeholders offer a critical view of the manner of involving inhabitants in governance processes. Further, this scenario provides for two additional variants whose verification will be possible only at a future time. The alignment of governance visions with the simultaneous negative view of previous Municipal Office activities, as expressed by the shareholders, may lead to a new opening in relations with the latter (3.1.). Such change may be reflected in positive opinions about the

use of participation instruments. In other words, the stakeholders would feel that in governance processes, they are located on a higher rung of the participation ladder (Arnstein, 2012), or in the Forum as described by John Elster (1997). This solution could be compared to transformation in the cultural sphere, which Jacek Sroka (2018: 19) views as the true ingredient of deliberation. In other words, changes in the area of formal institutions are secondary with respect to changes in cultural institutions, hence a change of mentality is needed – a change based on Michel Foucault's *governmentality* (Sagan 2017: 23). In order to make this variant a reality, in addition to being solicitous about a formal framework that allows participation, it is therefore necessary for both the Office and local social activists to demonstrate willingness to enter into dialogue, and also to animate and coordinate wide-ranging informational, educational and proactive activities focused on improving the competences and motivations of inhabitants to become involved in joint actions and preparing them to assume responsibility for course and results of such actions.

On the other hand, in the second variant a situation could arise in which former, Marketplace-like participatory activities which do not satisfy the stakeholders would be perpetuated (Elster, 1997). The article has diagnosed the focus of the Municipal Office on creating mechanisms and participation instruments as an objective unto itself, without considering their further use. Such focus will not lead to involving all interested stakeholders in the dialogue and achieving a real implementation of the *governance* idea.

Statement about the contributions of each author

All authors contributed to the writing of this article and approved the submitted version.

Statement about conflict of interest

The authors declare that this study has been conducted without any commercial or financial ties which might be interpreted as a potential conflict of interest.

Statement about the source of financing

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Statement about research ethics

The authors represent that the research presented in this article has been conducted in accordance with the research ethics of the affiliated university.

Statement about the availability of study data

The original data presented in the study are found in the article. Further inquiries may be made to the authors.

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