

ŁÓDŹ AS AN EXAMPLE OF SUCCESSFUL REVITALIZATION OF POST-INDUSTRIAL CITIES

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Abstract

Łódź to typowe miasto postindustrialne, które po upadku komunizmu podzieliło los innych miast w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej. Miasto fabryk i rewolucji stało się w latach 90-tych XX wieku synonimem biedy, marazmu i braku perspektyw. Obecnie uważane jest za jedno z najbardziej dynamicznie rozwijających się miast w Polsce, między innymi dzięki przemyślanej rewitalizacji. Stare fabryki są przekształcane w przestrzenie usługowo-rozrywkowe, a stare kamienice poddawane są renowacji. Kiedyś nieatrakcyjna Łódź, dzisiaj staje się popularną destynacją pośród polskich oraz zagranicznych turystów. Łódź is a typical post-industrial city, which after the fall of communism shared the fate of other cities in Central and Eastern Europe. A city of factories and revolution, in the 1990s it became a metaphor for poverty, marasmus, and lack of perspectives. Today, it is regarded as one of the most dynamically developing cities in Poland, thanks in part to thoughtful revitalization. Old factories are being transformed into service and entertainment spaces, and old tenement houses are being renovated. Once unattractive, Łódź is now becoming a popular destination among Polish and foreign tourists.

Key words: Łódź, revitalization, post-industrial cities, identity, Bilbao effect, Hanna Zdanowska.

1. Introduction

For years Łódź was associated with the textile industry, for which reason it was called the Polish Manchester. The fall of communism and the economic transformation meant the closure of factories, the pauperization of society, and long years of stagnation for Łódź. In 2010, Hanna Zdanowska became the mayor of Łódź and launched a program of thoughtful and effective revitalization, following the example of the Spanish city of Bilbao. The role of this text is to demonstrate Łódź's successful path.

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In 2023, Łódź celebrated the 600th anniversary of the granting of city rights (which took place in 1423), but for many years it remained a small agricultural town, which only changed at the beginning of the 19th century when a decision was made to locate the textile industry there. Then, the town's rapid growth began, with a population of less than 1,000 in 1827, in 1865. - 40,000 and in 1914. - 540,000 (Robert, 2023: 28). There is a view that this was the highest rate of demographic growth in the history of the world. Factories were owned by Jews and Germans, and belonging to the Russian Empire resulted, among others, in an influx of Russian officials and their families. From that period comes the famous phrase describing Łódź as a city of 4 cultures, which has become one of the pillars of the city's identity today.

The city growing at a rapid pace attracted both rich capitalists and poor workers. Most of them were women. By the end of the 19th century, women made up more than half of the factory workers (Madejska 2018: 59). Łódź – a city of factories – became an inspiration for writers, including Władysław Reymont (winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature), whose novel Promised Land was translated into many languages.

During the First World War, Łódź suffered severe material and, consequently, demographic losses. Nevertheless, in 1918. it became the second largest city (after Warsaw) in independent Poland. The textile industry continued to develop, but economic crises significantly limited it (Pakuła, 2024: 199).

The communist period (1945-1989) resulted in a steady city demographic growth, but not as impressive as in the 19th century. In 1946 the population did not go above 500,000, but in the 1970s it exceeded 800,000 and was constantly growing. The overwhelming majority of the inhabitants were women, Łódź had the highest feminization rate in Poland and was therefore called the city of women (Szukalski, 2024: 521). Compared to other Polish cities, wages in Łódź were low. The state invested in other strategic industries for the economy, such as mining. The oversupply of women made it difficult to start a family. On the other hand, communist mythology idealized Łódź as a city of factories, revolution, and socialist ideals.

There were projections that Łódź would soon become a metropolis of one million people; there were even plans to build a metro. This growth trend was reversed by the political transformation, which resulted in the collapse of most factories and layoffs. For the working class, especially unskilled women, this meant mostly no prospects for new employment. At that time, the consequences of underinvestment, and poor infrastructure became evident. (In Łódź, mainly factories and workers' housing estates were built).

In the 1990s, Łódź faced many problems typical for post-industrial cities; it was associated with poverty, hopelessness, and successive corruption scandals. The other parallel problem - apart from the decline of the industry - was the low quality of the political elites (with a few exceptions). Łódź, unlike Krakow, Warsaw, Poznań and Wrocław, was not lucky to have charismatic mayors, who would think first and foremost about the thoughtful development of the city.

A new chapter in the history of Łódź started in 2010 when Hanna Zdanowska (who still manages Łódź today) became mayor. Her idea for the development of Łódź has been based on the so-called Bilbao effect and could be implemented due to the UE subsidies. A multi-faceted long process has been undertaken as part of this program, which includes:

- revitalization of post-industrial spaces
- revitalization of tenements
- infrastructure development
- construction of spectacular buildings
- tourism development.

1. Revitalization of post-industrial spaces

The revitalization of large, but now dormant, post-factory complexes is a phenomenon typical of post-industrial cities in the Western world. In Łódź, the first investment of this kind was opened in 2006. Manufaktura - a center of trade, entertainment, culture, and services, became one of the city's biggest attractions. In the post-industrial, renovated buildings, museums, restaurants, cafés and a cinema have been located. Between them, there is the so-called market square where concerts and cultural events are held. The whole is complemented by one of the largest shopping centers in Poland. In the following years, further post-industrial spaces were renovated: Off Piotrkowka (restaurants, bars, handicraft shops, artists' boutiques), Monopolis (cultural zone, restaurants, office space), Geyer Gardens (restaurants, services, event center) and Fuzja (entertainment venue, cultural attractions, gastronomy, apartments). Currently the WIMA factory building is being renovated to house flats, offices, and a large recreational space. The revitalized former factories attract citizens of Łódź as a place to spend leisure time. Still, they are also a showcase for the city, which, lacking the historic part of the old town, the traditional market, or the big river, promotes itself as a city of post-industrial spaces.

2. Revitalization of tenements

When Hanna Zdanowska took office, she promoted the slogan "City of Tenements" ("Mia100 Kamienic", which was a play on words, as in Polish a city is miasto and a hundred is sto, whereas kamienica is tenement). The slogan was quickly changed to City of Quarters (Mia100 Kwartałów). It is not only the tenements in the representative Piotrkowska Street and its immediate vicinity that are being revitalized, but also the entire neighborhoods (Bujalski, Wesołowski). Włókiennicza and Lipowa Streets are among the symbols of these transformations - poor working-class areas have become well-kept, full of green woonerfs (streets excluded from traffic). It is worth mentioning that Łódź is considered the Polish capital of woonerfs (the first one was created in 2014, there are now more than 20, and others are planned).

3. Infrastructure development

Infrastructure development is another idea taken from Bilbao. Without this, it is not possible to attract many tourists. Between 2011 and 2016, the central coach and bus station (Łódź Fabryczna) was modernized and is now one of the most modern stations in Poland. Currently, Łódź-Kaliska station is being renovated and the cross-town tunnel between those two stations is under construction. Between 2013 and 2015, a major project was carried out to modernize and extend the so-called W-Z route, which is the city's main east-west boulevard. On the other hand, in the North-South direction, successive renovations of individual tram lines are being carried out. The Łódź Regional Tram project aims to improve communication between Łódź and the surrounding towns to the north and south of the city (Zgierz, Pabianice).

Łódź is also at the center of a major state project called Central Communication Port (in Polish: Centralny Port Komunikacyjny - CPK). The idea of the CPK originated in the 1970s and has recurred in the political programs of many governments. It assumes the construction of a gigantic transport hub between Warsaw and Łódź (hub airport, railway, highways). Unfortunately, there is no space in this text for an in-depth analysis of this initiative. It is only worth pointing out that today the project is politically controversial, as its construction started during the rule of Law and Justice (2015-2023) and became one of the flagship investments of that era. The opposition at the time strongly criticized this idea but has continued to pursue it after taking power. Without going into details, it is worth noting that the CPK will improve the railway infrastructure in and around Łódź. The journey to Warsaw, which is currently around 90 minutes, is to be significantly reduced.

4. Construction of spectacular buildings

Transformation in Bilbao has been successful, thanks in part to the construction of the Guggenheim Museum, which attracts crowds of tourists worldwide. Many of them decide to extend their stay to visit other attractions, e.g., the old town, revitalized post-industrial areas along the river (Orzechowska-Waławska, 108-109). In Łódź such flagship projects are: the EC1 and the Orientarium.

EC1 is one of Central Europe's largest Science and Technology Centres, featuring interactive installations for experiencing science. The facility also includes, among others: a Planetarium, Centre of Strip, and National Centre for Film Culture. Numerous cultural events and concerts are held in the vast spaces of EC1. The Orientarium, on the other hand, is a modern pavilion added to the Łódź Zoo which houses flora and fauna from Southeast Asia (a response to the Afrikanarium in Wrocław). The essence of Orientarium (as well as Afrikanarium) is to build a zoo of 21. century where animals live in comfortable conditions. The attractions are not only the flora and fauna but also architectural solutions or interactive games. Both Orientarium and EC1 have become part of the tourist map of Poland, thanks to which Łódź has become an alternative to Kraków, Warsaw, Wrocław or Gdańsk. Moreover,

in recent years Łódź has been experiencing a tourist boom, with more and more people visiting the city every year and increasing revenues from souvenir sales (Rekord turystów w Łodzi...).

5. Tourism development

The rising popularity of Łódź as a tourist attraction results from several factors. On the one hand, there are the key projects as EC1 and Orientarium, on the other hand, the authorities of Łódź skilfully invest in city promotion. Łódź's assets include its central location, airport, and close distance to Warsaw. The tourist offer concerns not only interesting ways of arranging post-industrial spaces but also coping with the lack of the traditional market, river, and old town. The main attributes of Łódź have become its multicultural legacy (orthodox churches, synagogues), Piotrkowska Street (one of the longest shopping streets in Europe), the so-called Łódź courtyards (courtyards arranged by artists next to renovated tenements), or cinematography. It is worth specifying that for years Łódź was not only a city of factories but also the film capital of Poland. The Łódź film school is popular all over the world.

Every year, more foreigners come to Łódź to study, or to work in the growing number of foreign corporations. Their visiting families are certainly boosting the statistics of the tourism boom.

6. Challenges and problems

Although Łódź is considered one of the most dynamically developing cities in Poland, the transformation process is fraught with challenges and problems. Due to the limited size of the text, the author will limit herself to the most important ones. Between 2015 and 2023, under the rule of the Law and Justice party, most of the money was transferred to areas managed by local authorities close to the leading party. Meanwhile, Hanna Zdanowska belongs to the Civic Platform. In addition, other problems have arisen: the COVID pandemic, meaning less revenue for the city budget (e.g. from owners of restaurants and bars), and the war in Ukraine and the influx of Ukrainian refugees, who had to be housed and supported, especially in the first months of their stay.

A major challenge is the continuing depopulation of Łódź, which, from being the second city in Poland, now ranks fourth in terms of population. On the other hand, one might ask whether Łódź needs to aspire to the role of a metropolis, especially as Warsaw is only 130 kilometers away. Perhaps its status as a big city better fits local needs and expectations, and an additional advantage may be lower prices than in the capital.

Finally, it is clear that Łódź is experiencing similar problems to those faced by other Western cities implementing the revitalization process (e.g. New York, Berlin). Although the Łódź authorities are trying to avoid the negative consequences of the process, by cooperation with experts/scientists, not everything is going as expected. Urban activists complain that often former residents cannot afford to live in the

modernized spaces (Budują miasto od nowa...). One of the examples of how revitalization creates controversies is the open market on Jaracza Street, where the modernized space remains empty during the week (the market is open only at weekends). The high rents in the new market zone have increased prices for goods that residents, mostly pensioners, cannot afford (Targ Jaracza...).

On the other hand, the revitalization processes can be viewed differently. The older, working-class generation, mainly residents of the city center and now living on low pensions, will slowly give way to younger generations. Łódź, with its numerous Western investments and lower cost of living than in Warsaw, Krakow, or Gdańsk, is attracting more and more young, enterprising people from home and abroad.

Conclusions

Łódź is considered one of the most dynamically developing cities in Poland and a model example of benefiting from membership in the European Union, but of course, money from Brussels is not the factor of change. Smart management and smart planning have played an important role. Thoughtful revitalization, inspired by the Spanish Bilbao, was consulted with numerous experts. The structural redevelopment was not accompanied by corruption scandals. Hanna Zdanowska - mayor since 2010 - has made spectacular changes to the grey, post-industrial city, thanks to which Łódź became a popular tourist destination. Her achievements are appreciated by the citizens, as she constantly wins already in the first round. In the 2018 elections, she achieved a record 70.22% of the votes (Bujalski).

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