

Postindustrial urban development and class politics

A case study from Poland

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1. Aim

The paper explores the topic of class politics in the context of urban politics and policy-making. I would like to discuss the role of different social actors in the struggles surrounding the implementation of strategic plans of urban development, inspired to a large extent by the global ideas of “creative economy”, “urban renewal” and “city megaproject” approach. The presentation will aim at mapping interest groups acting locally within the field of public policy as defined by Vincent Dubois (2012, inspired by the concept by Pierre Bourdieu).

The paper will be based on the ongoing case study conducted in Łódź, being the third largest city in Poland, which had grown rapidly in the second half on the XIXth century as a centre of textile monoculture and was hit heavily by the socio-economic transformation after 1989. Since then, the city formerly holding a label of the “Manchester of the East” and being an island of modernization in a semi-peripheral society, has been in constant and desperate search of a new identity.

2. Data & Methods

So far, the critical analysis covered strategic documents, political manifestos and PR materials published by the city authorities after 2010, documentation of consultations processes and media content referring at city development. Currently, in-depth interviews with local stakeholders engaged in different subfields of local public policy, are conducted.

3. Results

The analysis of existing data enabled reconstruction of dominant and alternative visions of the city and its inhabitants, grounded in different regimes of justification. Reconstruction of the worldviews as well as social background (habitus) of the authors and main proponents via in-depth interviews will be next step of analysis.

4. Conclusion

Although in democratic societies, such mechanisms as consultations, participatory budgeting or referenda could play important role in the process of institutionalization of class-based social conflict, the discussion about visions of the city seem to be the intra-elite struggle, resulting mostly in the reinforcement/changes of the hierarchy within the field of public policy. This hypothesis will be tested in course of the study.