

**PATRYCJA KRUCZKOWSKA, MAGDALENA REK-WOŹNIAK:
A PICNIC FOR WINOS?¹ ON INSTITUTIONALISED CULTURE AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION
IN A POST-INDUSTRIAL CITY**

Citizen Versus Consumer: Who is Culture for in the Age of Cognitive Capitalism?

Access to culture is one of the most important dimensions of social division (see: Bourdieu 2006). Nevertheless, it is considered a civil right, just like access to education or public healthcare. Consequently, this sphere can be seen as an area for the social inclusion of those groups who are particularly exposed to deprivation on many levels. Social and political engagement in the production of culture usually takes two forms: an artistic analysis of social phenomena and actions aimed at encouraging participation in culture, in a broad sense, by individuals and social groups threatened by social exclusion. Both mechanisms seem to have critical potential,² but can also bring about the petrification of existing hierarchies and power relations.

“Soft” mechanisms of social inclusion are gaining importance in post-industrial societies. Thus, in the debate on inequality, access to culture is beginning to be treated the same way as access to education has been treated for years. A review of strategic EU documents reveals that while there is no clear definition of “culture”,³ there is a clear tendency to automatically associate the term with notions of creativity and innovation, which in turn are crucial for increasing Europe’s economic competitiveness.⁴

As a result of the “commoditisation of social relations” (Ziółkowski 2004) or the “colonization of the lifeworld by the market”, the concept of the citizen has been replaced with that of the consumer. The consequences of this shift are noticeable in all spheres of life, both in Poland and abroad. Such shift has resulted in the growth of the commoditised vision in cultural policy. At the local level, it has come to mean focusing on marketing initiatives⁵ and infrastructural projects aiming to increase the attractiveness of a specific area for tourists, investors and the middle classes. The gentrification and growing segregation of urban areas is one of the clearest effects of such activities.

1 This title was used in an opinion expressed on a Facebook discussion forum about the bid for the title of European Capital of Culture.

2 These ideas are sometimes criticized. For example, Rebecca Gordon Nesbitt (2009) points to the counter-effectiveness and ideological ambiguity of state programs for social inclusion in culture. However, the Polish reality seems to be quite different from the case she analysed in Scotland.

3 It follows from the analyses conducted within the KATARSIS project (<http://katarsis.ncl.ac.uk/wp.html>), that culture is understood as art, normative systems, creativity, innovation etc., cf. KEA European Affairs, 2006, *The Economy of Culture in Europe*, Report to the European Commission, http://ec.europa.eu/culture/eac/sources_info/studies/economy_en.html.; see also: *Creative Europe Report. On Governance and Management of Artistic Creativity in Europe*, www.creativeeurope.info/home.html

4 As a result of the public administration’s recognition of the socio-political potential of culture, albeit as a stimulant for the mythical “innovativeness”, culture is included in various detailed policies, including in the broad sphere of welfare. Those trends are reflected in the growing number of EU grant competitions in this area. Recently, this has been further stimulated by the fact that 2010 was the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. Bearing in mind all the objections to the idea of the European social model, the grant system etc., it is worth keeping an eye on how such problem affects the *modus operandi* at the local and regional level, especially in extremely deprived areas.

5 The authors of the KATARSIS report (<http://katarsis.ncl.ac.uk/wp/wp2/papers.html>) list three main “uses” of culture in the context of local policies: marketing (culture as a showpiece of a given location, attracting tourists and investors), job creation (to be generated by the creative sector) and social revitalization (culture as an element in inclusive strategies devised for those threatened by social exclusion).

These processes have been accompanied by the development of grass-roots activities and non-governmental organisations, which are supposed to counterbalance the bureaucratic practices of public institutions and concurrently, to implement the idea of “civil society”. Nevertheless, such trend seems to harmonise with the idea of the small state because the existence of the third sector (not only in institutionalized culture) is a convenient argument for minimizing the authorities’ activities under the pretext of mobilization of social capital and decentralisation.

Łódź: The Charm of Haphazard Transformation and “Patchwork Policies”

Łódź is a specific case on the map of socio-economic transition in Poland. With its textile monoculture, the city can be seen as a symbol of rapid and brutal transformations: industrialisation in the second half of the nineteenth century, as well as deindustrialisation at the end of the twentieth century. In addition, as a city of industrial workers, lacking “rich” academic and cultural traditions, it has experienced and continues to experience difficulties in adapting to the requirements of cognitive capitalism.

Even though poverty levels in Łódź have not increased in recent years, average income and living standards are still relatively low compared to other large cities in Poland (cf. Czapiński, Panek 2007). Further problems include growing social inequality, its intergenerational reproduction and spatial concentration in so-called ghetto areas (Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, Jankowski, 2010, Golczyńska-Grondas, Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 2009), which though unlikely to turn into hyperghettos, are characterised by poor quality infrastructure, including institutions. On the other hand, many cultural institutions in Łódź are located in or around the poorer areas. Yet the neighbourhood remains “silent” and attempts to break this silence are rare.⁶

Łódź can serve as a good case study for an analysis of the processes taking place in the public sphere in Poland, which have resulted in incoherent social and cultural policies, as well as political failure to recognise the overlap between them. Both fields are characterised by short-term project activities and the tendency to delegate responsibilities to NGOs. Both spheres remain “invisible” to each other. None of the research on poverty in the region of Łódź and its institutional environment, conducted systematically over the last twenty years, has revealed any participation by cultural institutions in inclusive practices. Even if the authors of *Strategy for the Development of Łódź Voivodeship* for the years 2007-2020 are aware of the lack of social cohesion, citizens’ mistrust in public institutions, as well as the decline of cultural participation, social policy and culture remain entirely separate areas of the authorities’ activity.

The Institutional Environment and Administrative Strategies: Łódź-style Culture

The problem of social exclusion is not raised in institutional discourse at the municipal and regional level. Neither the Mayor’s Office nor the Town Hall have imposed any relevant obligations on the cultural institutions under their supervision, given any instructions, paid bonuses for activities in this area or imposed reporting requirements.

Activities carried out by Łódź cultural institutions that aim to deliver equal opportunities in cultural participation are, in the overwhelming majority of cases, of an auxiliary nature and serve as a marketing tool (gaining new customers through non-standard promotion and encouraging them to buy tickets at a normal price, or projecting the future consumer of a culture product – the Łódź Philharmonic Hall, Baby Boom Boom workshops, the Museum of Art and “workshops for 4+year-olds”), as a mechanism for the creative

6 A few exceptions worth mentioning: the private theatre “Szwalnia” which used to be located near a social welfare centre that was closed by the authorities for not meeting fire protection regulations; actions organised for the residents of Wschodnia street by the Białe Gawrony (*White Crows*) Foundation and the summer picnic organized by the Stefan Jaracz Theatre, preceding the autumn festival “New European Classics”, which aimed to overcome institutional barriers by arranging a series of meetings with local residents in the theatre’s courtyard. Unfortunately, the theatre administration is not interested in any long-term dialogue with the guests of the picnic. This kind of approach translates into the lack of an appropriate offer or mechanisms for breaking down financial, spatial and educational barriers.

implementation of grants (“regional branches” of the Stefan Jaracz Theatre) or a combination of the two aforementioned functions (“initiatives for the socially excluded and disabled” at the “Powszechny” Theatre).⁷

As far as the third sector is concerned, the *Programme of Cooperation between Łódź Voivodship and Non-governmental Organizations* incorporates various forms of activities for the region’s inhabitants, from school sports to healthcare. In the field of culture and the preservation of cultural heritage, only three areas have been prioritized: the organisation of large promotional campaigns, the cultivation of Polish identity and education. The ten tasks to be realized this year also included “the participation of the most deprived residents in cultural events”.⁸ This seems optimistic when compared to the proposals included in the documents produced by the Łódź city authorities. Its long-term strategic priorities were defined by the McKinsey strategy for Łódź based on three pillars: festivals, films and multiculturalism.⁹ Other documents, this time relating to the bid for the title of “European Capital of Culture 2016”, also fail to do bring much hope for the promoters of an “egalitarian Łódź”.¹⁰

Manufaktura, the New Centre of Łódź and Creative District: The Future Łódź is not for the Wino

Even though poverty levels in Łódź have stabilized in recent years, average income and living standards are still relatively low compared to other large cities in Poland (Czapiński, Panek 2007). Further problems include growing social inequality, its intergenerational reproduction and spatial concentration in ghettoised areas (Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, Jankowski, 2010, Golczyńska-Grondas, Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 2009).

The revitalization of Łódź is best exemplified by three flagship projects. The first is ‘Manufaktura’ – a shopping and entertainment complex opened in 2006 in a former textile factory. It has been granted several awards, for example for urban planning (Urban Land Institute, 2007) and is often used to symbolize Łódź as an investment-friendly and creative city that is open to new challenges, reinventing itself as a city of designers rather than workers. The complex hosts a branch of the Museum of Art (MS2) and a few commercial,

7 Those who can prove their unemployed status at the ticket office are entitled to two tickets for PLN 1 each, for special performances held for the unemployed once a month. Such initiatives, if developed into a systemic solution embraced by public and cultural institutions all over Łódź, could become the Polish equivalent of the Austrian “Hunger auf Kunst und Kultur” program.

8 The authorities held a competition for managers of specific events (a budget of PLN 600,000, including PLN 200,000 earmarked for the Chopin Year celebrations). Only one out of 19 beneficiaries implemented the idea of inclusion through culture – the “Chorea” Theatre Society, “Theatre Zone” – a regional theatrical tour, an educational and artistic project (PLN 35,000).

9 The report was forgotten as soon as the Mayor of Łódź, Jerzy Kropiwnicki, was dismissed and the key events of the project were discontinued: the Four Cultures’ Dialogue and Cameraimage festivals.

10 While research and new strategies were being developed on the regional and city level, Łódź Art Center was selected as coordinator of Łódź’s bid for European Capital of Culture 2016. Despite its failure, the bid became a strategic document (http://www.lodz2016.com/articles.php?a_id=484&page=2) and the likely winner of the city’s mayoral elections, Hanna Zdanowska, foresees the implementation of its objectives. The bid document is dense with EU-newspeak, in which culture is associated with innovativeness, entrepreneurship and creativity. The creative industries are to be the main instrument for urban development in Łódź. The issue of counteracting marginalization is mentioned just once in the application, on page 189, along with the 2011 Dance United Łódź project, coordinated by the “Chorea” Theatre Society and Dance United Foundation, and supported by the Łódź Philharmonic Hall. The target groups mentioned in the application are “young people at risk of social exclusion”, the disabled (pp. 175-179), the elderly (p. 189), children and parents (p. 181) and “young people” in general (pp. 182-188) (http://www.lodz2016.com/aplikacja_pl.pdf). A little more attention is paid to the issue in the document “Łódź. A Revolution in the Making. 2010-2015”.

entertainment cultural establishments. In addition, the building is located in the direct vicinity of the Museum of the City of Łódź, as well as the enclaves of multi-generational poverty consisting of tenement houses along Ogrodowa St., the inhabitants of which are mostly descendants of the female workers once laid off from the original factory now revitalised. They are not the “obvious” customer group for either the commercial centre or the Museum of Art. While Manufaktura tries to create an image of a “socially responsible” business,¹¹ the public cultural institutions located in its vicinity seem oblivious to their social surroundings.

The second project, “Creative District Księży Młyn 2016”, a crucial aspect of Łódź’s bid for the title of European Capital of Culture 2016, is quite different. The document “Revolution in the making. 2010-2015,”¹² is described as a “grass-roots” initiative, involving creative and comprehensive revitalisation. In the first stage, empty council flats in this former workers’ district are to be transformed into usable premises for the creative sector, with the option of expanding such premises over time. The initiative aims to revive the district, create new workplaces and “provide the local residents with the opportunity to spend their free time in a creative way” (p. 311). However, the rules governing how such places are granted and how the project will be consulted with the local community, especially in a city lacking council flats is unclear. So far, doubts and critical opinions have mostly been limited to heated debates on Internet discussion forums.

The third project, by the Łódź Art Center foundation (which coordinated Łódź’s bid for European Capital of Culture 2016), entitled ‘C’ was conceived, to some extent, in ideological opposition to the New Centre of Łódź project, “the largest and boldest infrastructural investment in Poland” (p. 346). The investment is undoubtedly bold, assuming the construction of an architectural complex around the Fabryczny railway station in the city centre. More than symbolic, the Centre will serve as a cultural, artistic, services and intermodal communications hub, aiming to connect Łódź to Europe. The project has reopened the debate on who the model Łódź resident should be (in light of officials’ demands to drive out all those unable to pay their rent from the city centre, which is attractive to investors). In fact, the matter boils down to who will be welcomed as a resident of the centre of modernized Łódź and who will not. The mayoral election campaigns in Łódź indicate that the city centre “local” no longer be welcome there.

Łódź, European Capital of the Culture of Poverty?

Although there are many contributing factors to the situation only briefly outlined here, in our opinion, the general Polish discourse on inequality, citizenship and deservingness plays a key role. The decision-makers, but also those who implement social policies at the local level, perceive the problem mainly in the context of economic shortages or limited educational opportunities.¹³ This approach rests on the assumption that those at the bottom of the social ladder have a limited need for cultural consumption. Low aspirations and insufficient sensitivity would also be an element of the “culture of poverty”- a syndrome that is almost genetically inherited and spreads like a virus within enclaves of poverty (cf. Woźniak 2010).

11 The document “Łódź. A Revolution in the Making. 2010-2015” tell us that Manufaktura supports the Mother Theresa of Calcutta Association located on Ogrodowa St. It runs an activities room for children from the poorest families living in the local area. The Centre supports the Association’s current activities and co-finances summer camps for the children. “Manufaktura” also supports the City Library and runs the Factory Museum (http://lodz2016.com/rewolucje_pl.pdf, p. 77).

12 See: http://lodz2016.com/rewolucje_pl.pdf. This document was a supplement to the bid application.

13 Although children from socially dysfunctional or poor families are offered various activities to develop their aesthetic sensitivity, such activities usually take place in their local environment (schools, activity rooms); they rarely facilitate the “taming” of cultural institutions, which appear as “hostile” as any other public institutions to the socially marginalized individuals and groups.

The participation of cultural institutions in the discourse on welfare, as well as attempts to include social inequality issues, tend towards a reductionist understanding of "social integration through cultural participation" by associating those communities with *goût barbare*. As a result, the majority of such activities directed towards those threatened with exclusion from cultural participation take the form of street festivals or picnics.

It seems typical that the coordinator of the (unsuccessful) bid for the ECC title should choose such form of engagement with local residents, rather than offering activities that could potentially have a direct impact on their quality of life. The idea had its fans and critics and even though only the inaugural picnic of the Księży Młyn 2016 project attracted significant numbers, the debate on the appropriateness of the Łódź Art Center's ideas was mainly limited to internet discussion forums. Some of the critics pointed out the folk character of the picnics and questioned their seemingly inclusive character. The picnics, held in the less elegant parts of Łódź, such as Księży Młyn, which is literally cut off from the city centre, gave the impression of an invasion of middle class tourists who had come to observe the simple life of barbarians in their natural habitat.¹⁴ On the other hand, some voiced their disapproval, claiming them to be "picnics for winos", undeserving of such a "reward".¹⁵

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14 Edward Said's notion of orientalism can be applied to the Polish discourse and social practices dealing with marginalized groups (cf. Buchowski 2008).

15 As a result of mechanisms of social stigmatization and the use of the label *underclass*, the residents of deprived areas or streets are characterized by such terms as acquired helplessness, demanding attitudes, demoralization, low aspirations, etc., due to the very fact that they simply live there and irrespective of any other variables (cf. Bauman 1998, Wacquant 2008, 2009).