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From indifference to protest: citizen activity at the local level in Poland

ABSTRACT

Recently, many local governments have tried to improve their efficiency and effectiveness by establishing partnerships with stakeholders such as citizens and third sector organizations, and not only with private companies as it was the case in the 1980s. Nevertheless, to foster productive partner relations between the local government and the local community some conditions must be fulfilled. The article focuses on citizen activity, as well as its forms and dimensions, as one of the most important prerequisites for an effective partnership. The analysis is based on the preliminary findings from the Self-Government Activity Project (Pol. Projekt Aktywności Samorządowej – PAS) that has been realised by seven local governments since February 2011. The article concludes that with regard to Poland citizens' indifference might be one of the most significant obstacles towards any close cooperation with local authorities. The analysis proves, however, that attempts at establishing partner relations also face other obstacles, *inter alia*, a poor awareness of local issues, lack of trust in local authorities, different perspective on local problems and objections raised by the elected representatives.

Key words: citizen activity, participatory policy-making, local communities, partner relations

INTRODUCTION

The transformation of the political and economic system that took place in many Central and Eastern European countries in the 1990s caused fundamental changes at the local level. A significant effort was put to re-establish free, independent and elected local government. Local self-government was strongly believed to be an antidote to the centralized state and an institution through which people could gain

control over their lives, as well as regenerating and revitalising their communities [Campbell, Coulson 2006: 543].

From the early stage of the transformation in Poland, the citizens were involved in the process of local government building. Nevertheless, the turnout in the first local election in 1990 proved disappointing, despite the enormous effort of established civil committees and the social trust in the possibility of changing the reality. Moreover, over the following years, the society gained other opportunities of commitment as traditional forms of participation (elections, referenda, consultations) started to be supplemented by the cooperation of local government units with non-governmental organisations, local leaders, entrepreneurs, etc. Also the shift from local government to local governance supported the trend [Lynn, Heinrich, Hill 2000].

At present, some innovative local authorities try to introduce other forms of civic participation, such as participatory budgeting, citizen juries, etc. Also under the umbrella of the President's Chancellery, additional reforms are now in the pipeline aiming at promoting deeper involvement of citizens into decision-making processes. Some of the proposed changes refer to the concept of 'big society' where individuals and communities have more power and responsibility to create better neighbourhoods and local services [Kulesza 2012a: 11–13; Kulesza 2012b: 8–10].

The aim of this article is to assess the citizens' attitude towards deeper involvement in local issues and the possibility of establishing partner relations with local authorities. The following questions are posed: In which areas is the citizen activity most visible? What are the stimuli for people to act? How do the projects aiming at fostering partnerships between citizens and local authorities influence the real level of citizen engagement?

This article relies on two kinds of data. To provide a general overview of citizen activity in Poland, the information from the reports prepared for the President's Chancellery and the Public Research Centre (Pol. Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej – CBOS) is used. The authors also refer to the Social Diagnosis 2011 (Diagnoza Społeczna 2011). The empirical part of the article is based on the research that has been conducted in seven local governments of the Lubelskie and Podkarpackie regions. Since February 2011, their local units have been participating in the Self-Government Activity Project (Pol. Projekt Aktywności Samorządowej – PAS)[1]. The main goal of the project is to improve the process of monitoring the delivery of local services, although PAS focuses also on improving the quality of services by establishing partner relations between citizens and local authorities. The innovative aspect of the project rests in treating citizens and local organisations not as subjects of the local politics but rather as partners in the governance process. The core idea of the project is to build a network of interactions between local communities and authorities and to empower the people to have their say in how the services are delivered. The project has a pilot character and it is financed by the European Social Fund (Measure 5.2 Strengthen-

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[1] Hereinafter called PAS.

ing the potential of local government administration, Priority V Good Governance, Human Capital Operational Programme 2007–2013). The whole project is scheduled to be finished in January 2015. At present, it has entered its third phrase; this article discusses data obtained only in the first phrase.

The article is divided into five main parts. To start with, it elaborates some theoretical issues: governance, citizen activity and the concept of 'big society'. The authors argue that in order to secure good governance, participatory policy making and establishing partner relations become a must. However, it also represents challenges – local authorities, citizens and other stakeholders have to abandon the routine procedures and start to think in the new way. The second section of the article focuses on citizen activity in Poland, its context and practice. The next two parts of cover directly the PAS project – its methodology and preliminary findings. The main pressure is put on the initial results of the project in the city of Lublin. The article concludes with some reflections on citizen activity at the local level and the obstacles to establishing partner relations at this level.

THE BASIC NOTIONS: GOVERNANCE, CITIZEN ACTIVITY AND 'BIG SOCIETY'

Over the last two decades, the debate on local politics has been dominated by the shift from traditional government towards local governance [Rhodes 1997; John 2001]. However, governance is a kind of a buzzword that is difficult to explain; its main assumption comes down to the idea that neither the state nor any other actors of public life have a monopoly on the truth, material and financial resources, information, knowledge or even coercive measures [Pawłowska 2007: 162]. The power is distributed geographically and socially, between many levels and stakeholders. That has brought many consequences and implications both for the governing process as such and for the politics and administration.

Some authors indicate that the transformation from government to governance chiefly means that the state has moved from the position where it both controlled and acted to the situation where it steers the boat and non-state actors do the rowing [McLaverty 2011: 402; Osborne, Gaebler 1993]. Nevertheless, others scholars describe the shift to governance not only as changing the activities of the state but also reducing the role the government plays within the society. In this context, governance at the local level can be understood as committing the elected government and officials to work with others from outside the city hall and further formal and informal networks and partnerships of various kinds [McLaverty 2011: 402; Rhodes 1997].

What is important in the context of this article, governance implies more direct and intensive interactions between the local government and citizens. Encouraging citizen participation and establishing partner relations between the authorities and the people seems to be vital for many reasons.

The first set of arguments for developing a more direct contact with citizens come from democracy and its values. First, democratic governance as such depends on the development of engaged and involved citizenry and a 'civil society' in which people work together to express their personal interest in the context of the broader community needs [Putnam, 2008; Denhardt, Denhardt 2011: 432]. Moreover, Geurtz and Van de Wijdeven point out that the direct interaction between the people and a government appeal more to a 'thick' democratic ideal than representative democracy in which citizens only have a voice every few years [Geurtz, Van de Wijdeven 2010: 533].

Second, it seems that strengthening people's capacity to make choices, accept the opportunity to determine their own priorities and take action to achieve goals create the best foundations for the local community development [Bun Ku, Yuen-Tsang 2011: 473].

Third, close relations and allowing communities to take the lead may not only contribute to the resurgence of civic activity and development but also narrow the gap which has apparently emerged between politicians and large sections of the public [Flinders, Moon 2011: 661]. In addition, cooperation at the grassroots level promotes and fosters accountability and transparency of decision-making processes.

The second set of arguments in favour of citizen activity is connected with the efficiency and effectiveness of the governance process. In the 1980s, the primary goal was to seek partners in the private sector in order to overcome the unresponsive, bureaucratic and producer-dominated organization of public administration. Two decades later, it was discovered that also the 'empowerment' of local communities in taking control of the local services may produce positive outcomes [Flinders, Moon 2011: 661].

First, involving citizens and other stakeholders at the early period of the policy-making process, rather than consulting them just before the final phrase, can create the much-needed support for political decisions from the very beginning and therefore ensure more legitimacy and efficiency [Michels, de Graaf 2010: 482]. Second, closer relations with citizens means more information and points of view to be taken into account by local authorities, let alone potential solutions for improvements [Michels, de Graaf 2010: 482]. In addition, active citizenship influences the level of public understanding of the challenges of the 21st-century government [Flinders, Moon 2011: 661]

Recently, more attention has been paid, however, to stimulating citizen activity at the local level in the context of 'big society'[2]. The concept seems to link both ideas of democracy and efficiency, and its central idea is to devolve powers on communities and provide a greater role in public services for voluntary and community organizations [Lowndes, Pratchett 2012: 30]. Nevertheless, 'big society' also means the shift from aggregative and negotiative participation towards a more deliberative approach

[2] At first the idea was introduced in England by the conservative-led collation government of David Cameron. However recently the 'big society' has gained importance also in other European countries.

that recognizes that not all people's preferences are fixed and seeks to provide opportunities for ideas to be developed and changed through a process of discussion and deliberation [Lowndes, Pratchett 2012: 30]. Many support the initiative and see in it as a new way of controlling services and neighbourhoods and a step forward to engage with the people, including the groups that have been marginalized from politics so far or play only a limited role in the more traditional methods of political participation [McLaverty 2011: 402].

Despite the fact that the 'small government and big society' concept has many positive aspects, it also poses significant challenges. On the one hand, local authorities have to abandon bureaucratic routines and long-established procedures and introduce policies that are based on citizens' involvement and mutual trust. In this context, initiatives undertaken by citizens cannot be perceived as an obstruction but rather as a new policy-making instrument. On the other hand, local communities, when accepting the role of partners of local authorities, have to understand and assume a higher level of responsibility. However, some researchers underline that this might be a problem [Flinders, Moon 2011: 661]. Finally, more complex, messy and asymmetrical patchwork of relations between the local government and other stakeholders may result in tensions between representative and participatory democracy.

THE CONTEXT AND PRACTICE OF CITIZEN ACTIVITY IN POLAND

In order to understand the practical facets of citizen activity at the local level in Poland and the provided case study better, it is necessary to make a short reference to the past. After the Second World War, between 1944 and 1989, Poland was under the communist rule. The political system was adjusted to the Soviet pattern. Though the system was coherent, it was built on the foundation that was contradictory to the basic rules of a democratic state. The preamble of the 1952 Constitution (amended in 1976) contained a statement that the main role of the state was to implement 'the great socialist ideas'. While formally power was held by 'the working people of the towns and villages', through the Parliament and the Peoples' Council, all vital decisions were made by the communist party. The society was to follow the direction set by the official ideology. The will of the people was less important as those who held sway over the country were aware that the nation was and would remain in opposition to the existing political system. In practice, however, it also meant that the central bodies decided about everything and any form of civic control over their activities was anything but genuine and effective [Kulesza 2002: 191].

When the communist regime collapsed in 1989, a significant effort was put to re-establish free, independent and directly elected local government. The support for the idea of self-government was clearly shared by the society. In many cases, the reinstatement of local government and appointment of elected local authorities were perceived as a value in itself [Swianiewicz 2002: 53].

The first wave of decentralization started already in 1990. Pursuant to the Act of 8 March 1990 on Local Self-Government, the independent municipal government was established. However, the solution was perceived as a provisional one. It was argued that the existence of 49 small regions (*województwo*) introduced by the communist administration in the mid-1970s was inefficient and called for a makeover. It was assumed that newly elected regional governments should be introduced along with an administrative division reform. Ultimately, for a number of reasons, the establishment of upper tiers of local government was postponed until the end of 1998 [Swaniewicz, Herbst 2002: 223–224]. In that year, under the Act of 5 June 1998 on Municipalities (*gmina*) and the Act of 5 June 1998 on Counties (*powiat*), the third tier was established in the local self-government system.[3] It was thought as the second wave of decentralization [for more, see, e.g. Radzik 2010; Swaniewicz 2005: 101–102].

Importantly, the decentralization process and the establishment of local government with elected authorities opened new possibilities for participation. On each level of local government, elected councils were introduced. In addition, in 2002 mayors elected in direct popular vote were established in all municipalities. The important step in the broadening of participatory mechanisms was also the passing of the Act of 11 October 1991 on Local Referendum (changed in 2000, amended in 2005). Finally, local consultation was introduced. Moreover, some local authorities decided to broaden the number of participatory opportunities and supplement representative and participative democracy by deliberative mechanisms.

Nevertheless, after more than twenty years of democratic rule and the implementation of the decentralization principle, it seems that the level of citizen activity and engagement in local issues is generally low. On the one hand, the turnout in local election has never exceeded 50%, and most of the conducted referenda were invalid as a result of excessively light polls [see Sidor 2011]. On the other hand, those who are actively participating quite often focus only on registering their protest against decisions taken by local authorities and refuse to enter any constructive dialogue.

However, the sources of such citizens' behaviour may be more complex than it seems at first glance. Conducted surveys prove that Poles generally understand the importance of involvement at the local level. 23% of the society declare that citizen activity and commitment are the most important factors in community development. 21% of the respondents regard the appropriate policy-making of local authorities as the most vital [OBOP 2012]. Nevertheless, the problem lies in the deficit of social capital (or superiority of human capital) and the lack of basic skills and competences [OBOP 2012].

In the literature, Poland is quite often described as a 'land of mistrust' [Herbst 2008: 20–53]. Indeed, surveys prove that the level of confidence in other people is one of the lowest among the European countries. Only 19% of the society have

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[3] The reform started to operate on 1st January 1999.

faith in others, whereas 78% prefer to act cautiously [OBOP 2012]. Moreover, Poles considerably less frequently believe in good intentions of other individuals. Only 13% of Poles trust other people and believe that they can be helpful. 33% of the society do not trust their neighbours and over 70% have no or very little confidence in local authorities [Czapiński 2011: 285; FRDL 2012]. Other surveys also demonstrate that the Polish people prefer to act individually than undertake collaborative action [OBOP 2012]. As the Social Diagnosis indicates, 'we live in the country of more and more effective individuals and invariably ineffective communities' [Czapiński 2011: 291].

These phenomena may be rooted in the history, especially in the communist past. As in that regime, so now people retreat from the public sphere and become more suspicious of the authorities as well as other individuals [see Herbst 2008: 25–26]. The lack of reliance, however, sets up a barrier for the implementation of solutions based on voluntary, vertical and horizontal partnerships. In fact, 85% of Poles do not belong to any association or organization, and out of 15% of those that belong only 8% are active [OBOP 2012]. Moreover, as shown in the relevant research, over the last year, 78% of the society did not take a part in any meeting or assembly pertaining to local community issues.

Still, from a different perspective, only some local governments are interested in engaging in a closer dialogue with citizens. As Swianiewicz points out, there are examples of innovative authorities which try to experiment with wider citizen participation, but most typically, local governments regard participation as a one-way street, that is, they communicate their policies and decisions to their citizens rather than being attentive to bottom-up initiatives and opinions [Swianiewicz 2011: 498].

METHODOLOGY OF THE PROJECT

The Self-Government Activity Project (Pol. Projekt Aktywności Samorządowej – PAS project) has been running since February 2011 in seven local government units of Lubelskie and Podkarpackie Regions (Leżajsk Municipality, Leżajsk County, Grodzisko Dolne Municipality, Lublin City, Świdnik Municipality, Poniatowa Municipality, Konopnica Municipality). The project spans four years and closes on 31 January 2015. As noted earlier, PAS is funded from the European Social Fund (Measure 5.2 Strengthening the Potential of Local Government, Priority V Good Governance, Human Capital Operational Programme 2007–2013).

The project is a pilot and concerns the development and implementation of an innovative system of monitoring public services in local administration. Its main objective is to improve the quality of local services through actively involving the local community in decision-making and information processes. The project also aims to forge partnerships between authorities, local government and citizens. As a result, a model of information exchange on public services is to be created along

with a system that will enable the citizens to exert a major influence on the quality of their neighbourhood and life. This solution is also envisaged to contribute to the strengthening of the potential of local action groups that will become a fixed component of the services monitoring system. The partner to the aforesaid local government units involved in the project is the Foundation for Managerial Initiatives.

Importantly, the project involves units of various size. The smallest one is Konopnica Municipality of less than one thousand inhabitants; another one is Grodzisko Dolne Municipality with the population of just over 8 thousand people. Similar population of less than 10 thousand is reported in Poniatowa Municipality. Leżajsk Municipality has 14 thousand residents and Świdnik Municipality 40 thousand. Also Leżajsk County (upper administration tier) with nearly 70 thousand residents takes part in the project.

The largest participating unit is the city of Lublin. Lublin is the capital of Lubelskie Region with registered 350 thousand residents. Lublin is the ninth largest city in Poland in terms of population. The city occupies an area of 140 square km and is the largest urban municipality east of the Vistula river and the chief academic centre in eastern Poland. Its five universities boast over 100 thousand students.

The project in all the listed local government units follows the same schedule and procedure. Various forms and methods of active communication with the residents are anticipated throughout the project. The elementary and most important method, however, is public consultation, or the so-called RADARs.

The RADAR method is a form of participation in management; when used, the process of consulting residents is much more thorough and more likely to lead to accepting their suggestions and proposals. The number of persons attending the first series of meetings ranged from 15 to 40. Invited to RADARs were local leaders: activists, councillors, representatives of NGOs, the Church, schools, etc. The meetings were also open to residents of individual municipalities and districts. The procedure of RADAR meetings was fourfold:

1. The identification and reporting of problems (the participants of open meetings divided into smaller working groups define problem areas in their place of residence);
2. Setting priorities (the person in charge of a meeting helps sort out and group the problems; next, they are presented in writing to other participants);
3. Voting (all attending persons have three votes to cast; they can vote to any of the presented proposals; after the vote, the result and the democratic choice are announced);
4. Solution proposals (action plan – a schedule); [Prokop, Bielak, Szlęzak, Antoń: 2011].

Three series of RADARs are to take place over 4 years of the project. It is assumed that during the first stage of consultation the key areas of public services and everyday burning issues will be identified. The outcome of the first RADAR meeting was for the individual groups to pinpoint the most important life and management areas. The participants made their choices from 15 areas, including free market,

employment, safety, health, culture, environment, democracy, education, transport, access to services and shopping facilities, access to sports infrastructure, social support, prosperity, housing, quality of administration. The meeting participants were free to choose the most vital, in their opinion, areas that the person in charge was writing down on a board. Then, each of them had three votes to cast to each of the listed issues.

The identification by the RADARs participants of areas important to them was the basis for drawing up a Quality of Life survey to be responded to by the inhabitants of the local unit. This was intended to confirm and expand the idea of quality research developed during the RADAR meeting by addressing the quality survey to a representative group of residents. In other words, if the group at the RADAR meeting indicated that their important area is safety, the survey contained specific questions on this particular issue (e.g. Has your municipality a municipal police force (city guards) and what is the cooperation with this force like?; What locations in your area are the most dangerous?, What is the cooperation with the police like? etc.)

The second series of RADAR meetings is intended to help define specific community problems and find ideas and solutions that can be implemented. RADAR II will yield a list of initiatives. Also local bureaucrats are to attend the meetings with residents; they are expected to respond to questions about the feasibility of proposed ideas (Is it possible to install lighting on X street and acoustic barriers on Y street? etc.)

The third series of RADARs will address ideas that have been positively assessed in terms of purpose and feasibility. The intention is that this part of the project meetings will gather the representatives of executive power, and they will introduce the list of initiatives earmarked for implementation. Earlier, the residents' initiatives are analysed by the administration in individual municipalities, and they recommend their mayor the implementation options.

In addition, during the project, the Quality of Life and the Quality of Management surveys are planned for citizens and the personnel of local government units. The surveys are expected to provide the answer to the questions of how citizens perceive the problems of their units and to what extent individual officers are able to improve the quality of local public services there. Among the project results there is the establishment of a virtual Bank of New Local Government Ideas and a web portal that would serve as a tool in monitoring public services. The bank's function will be that of collecting information; it will be open to all willing to use and apply best practices.

The PAS project is currently in its third stage of implementation; the first and the second RADAR meetings were held in all the involved local government units; Quality of Life and Quality of Management surveys were distributed and collected as well.

THE PROJECT IN LUBLIN

What is distinctive about the local government of the city of Lublin is much attention that the administration attaches to the issue of civic participation and inclusion of citizens and other stakeholders in decision-making processes. The city can boast several examples of participatory decision-making. First, many decisions are taken in collaboration between the municipality and a number of community councils. The following bodies operate in the city on a regular basis: Council for Lublin Development, Senior Social Council, Council for Culture of Space and Public Benefit Council.

The Council for Lublin Development gathers knowledgeable individuals having experience in socio-economic issues. They represent the local business, universities and other organizations and communities seated in Lublin and working for its development. Thanks to the effort of many local activists, the Council managed to draw up Lublin Development Strategy 2012–2020 (www.um.lublin.eu). Another example is the Senior Social Council which attends to the needs of elderly people and helps bring them back to the city's social life. Owing to the Council's initiative, the city maintains a cultural programme intended for the aged. Currently, the Council is striving to identify senior-friendly spots across the city for them to spend time actively. The Council for Culture of Space, originating from the seasoned and informal Forum of Culture of Space, brings together city planners, architects and a large group of individuals who hold the overall city aesthetics very dear. The Council's activists not only advise the mayor on the development of spatial plans but also put forward their own ideas or projects. The Public Benefit Council of Lublin is an advisory and consultative body focusing on the city's policy on non-governmental organizations. It is made up of representatives appointed by the mayor, City Council and NGOs. The Council supports the mayor in fostering the most advantageous forms of cooperation with Lublin's many and various NGOs. This is particularly salient in Lublin which, when striving to be awarded the title of European Capital of Culture 2016 (the city made it to the final stage of the contest), witnessed an unprecedented revival and mobilization of the public. Non-governmental organizations led the way in producing ideas and projects, and culture became the driving force behind the city's development (see: kultura.lublin.eu). The bodies in question are in an advisory capacity and attract groups involved in a particular area. Although the council teams engage in heated disputes when discussing vital local issues, they often arrive at valuable and workable solutions. The councils are partnerships of a kind that do community work for the city and seek to raise its level of development.

Moreover, Lublin is among few cities in Poland which decided to maintain participatory budgets in their districts. For four years, each of the 27 districts has maintained its own budget expended on projects in its area (Map 1). The councils have about EUR 26,000 at their disposal. These resources are mostly spent on the upgrading of minor local infrastructure, such as parking bays, playgrounds, but also on expanding the cultural offer, etc.

Map 1. Division of Lublin into 27 districts
Source: http://www.kosminek.org/historia/historia-terazniejszosc (accessed 26.12.2012)

Finally, for nearly a year, the city has been testing the Social Dialogue Box. After entering www.dialog.lublin.eu, anyone can quickly register a request and a visit at the Lublin Municipal Office. But the Social Dialogue is not only aimed to facilitate on-line communication. Anyone who prefers the traditional way can submit their idea or issue in a printed form and drop them in purpose-made boxes at the Resident Service Bureau. In less than a year, the office collected about 800 messages concerning different areas of local government's activity. The issues raised by the residents

were forwarded directly to the competent organizational units within the Municipal Office for implementation. Some were purely informative.

Based on that experience, the municipal authorities decided to join the PAS project in 2011. Two years after the project launch, we are ready to draw some preliminary conclusions.

First of all, even at this stage, there are fundamental differences between Lublin and other local government units. They are discernible both in the activity of the population as well as in the areas that the residents wanted to see improving in terms of the quality of local services and a wider partnership with local authorities.

In all the municipalities outside Lublin, the meetings (RADARs) were held in a very similar way. The local leaders attended willingly: councillors, local parish priest, representatives of schools, the police, social activists, etc.; there were also other local residents. During the meetings, the invited guests were open to collaboration with the person in charge, got engaged in the discussion, put forward proposals and fulfilled the requests submitted by the organizers.

In Lublin, the organizers' activity met with great suspicion and even aggression of some participants. Because the city is incomparably greater than the other municipalities that participate in the programme, RADARs were held in as many as 10 locations. The meetings were held in the area of housing estates (mostly in schools or community centres) by combining 27 districts as it is done with constituencies (see Table 1; compare to Map 1). Interestingly, some meetings were attended by few and some by more than 40 people. The total number of participants in meetings held in Lublin was approximately 200 people.

Table 1. Division into locations for the purpose of the PAS project

Location 1	Bronowice, Kośminek, Tatary
Location 2	Czechów
Location 3	Czuby, Rury
Location 4	Dziesiąta, Za cukrownią, Wrotków
Location 5	Felin, Hajdów, Zadębie
Location 6	Kalinowszczyzna, Ponikwoda
Location 7	Sławin, Sławinek, Szerokie
Location 8	Węglin, Konstantynów
Location 9	Wieniawa, Śródmieście, Stare Miasto
Location 10	Zemborzyce, Abramowice, Głusk

Source: The Foundation for Managerial Initiatives: http://fim.org.pl/projekt/pas/materialy-do-projektu (accessed 27.05.2013)

Lublin residents complained that they had not been notified about the meetings in a proper way. The residents of smaller municipalities did not raise any objections, even though the notification method was just the same. It is worth noting that in Lublin (besides the information posted in local shops, bulletin boards and local churches) invitations were sent to district councils and city councillors requesting the forwarding of the message on RADAR meetings; in addition, text messages were sent to the residents and the municipal web portals published relevant information (Municipal Office website, city's fun page on Facebook, popular local government sites).

Moreover, the RADAR meetings, in terms of practical outcomes, were also very different in Lublin and in other 6 smaller municipalities. In accordance with the approved agenda, the first meeting was aimed to identify the areas of importance to local communities (out of 15 proposed by the organizers). Meanwhile, in Lublin the residents themselves registered very specific problems, and, based on that, the organizers identified the key areas. Interestingly enough, during the meetings, the participants often expressed their dissatisfaction with bureaucrats' activities or decisions made many years before. One example is the protest of residents of Czechów district; they were very resentful about the location of the Inland Revenue building in their area, which caused major transportation problems. It should be noted that the building was raised on the site which had been sold by the housing cooperative so that the investment might be completed, and the city had no legal options to prevent the construction (minutes of the RADAR meetings are available in the Municipal Office records).

The meeting participants also raised problems that were not within the city officers' remit. This shows that the local population display a relatively low level of knowledge and awareness of the division of competence among the municipality, the housing cooperative and the police. For example, the residents complained to the city authorities about their estate being covered in litter. That site belongs to a housing cooperative and their administration is responsible for cleaning. There was also a lot of confusion over the powers of the police and city guards.

This was an important topic in all 10 meetings in Lublin when safety issues were addressed. Some remarks were general and concerned the inefficient operation of the police or city guards. But there were also (a few dozen) specific proposals for improving safety in selected streets and quarters. Residents suggested that some sites be covered by the city monitoring system or vigilante groups be established. Much discussion was devoted to the road infrastructure: the participants submitted 78 proposals during 10 meetings. These issues were labelled by the persons in charge as 'transport and connectivity', although in practice they amounted to residents requesting minor repairs or the construction of new roads, installation of speed measuring devices or traffic lights. The next largest set of isolated problems were those related to environmental matters in a broad sense. Among them, more than 30 involved services provided by the municipality, such as building more parks and playgrounds; there were also concerns about the quality of cleaning services in the city and the insufficient number of dustbins in selected streets.

The table below shows some figures on the important areas of life identified by the residents and the number of collected responses (Table 2). It is worth noting that the perception of some needs and problems by the residents of smaller municipalities evidently departs from that of the urban population. The former struggle with the lack of employment, access to education or health centres, while the inhabitants of Lublin, as mentioned elsewhere, expect that life quality can be raised by the improvement in the area of safety, environment and transport.

Table 2. Life areas in Lublin that need improvement and increased cooperation between local authorities and residents (based on first RADAR meetings)

Other municipalities	Number of responses	Lublin	Number of responses
Employment	5	Safety	9
Education	5	Environment	9
Health	4	Transport and connectivity	8
Environment	4	Employment	6
Transport and connectivity	4	Culture	4
Safety	3	Health	3
Social support	2	Housing	3
Culture	1	Education	2
Access to sports facilities	1	Access to sports facilities	2
Prosperity	1	Quality of administration	2
Free market	0	Democracy	1
Democracy	0	Social support	1
Access to services and shopping facilities	0	Free market	0
Housing	0	Access to services and shopping facilities	0
Quality of administration	0	Prosperity	0

*Own study based on surveys conducted by the Foundation for Managerial Initiatives.

Moreover, the results of the surveys Quality of Life and the Quality of Management conducted between May and July 2012 among residents of 10 city locations (N=1500) and local officers (N = 104) revealed significant disparities in the perception of the location's problems. Many important issues for residents were perceived as the problems of the lesser importance for the city hall. Interestingly, according to local

officers, three areas – education, employment and social support are the key problems in all 10 locations whereas citizens have noticed also other burning issues (Table 3).

Table 3. The importance of the areas for citizens and local officers in Lublin
(based on the Quality of Life and the Quality of Management surveys)

Location	Quality of Life (Citizens)	Quality of Management (Local officers)
Location 1	1. Social support 2. Democracy 3. Health	1. Education 2. Employment 3. Social support
Location 2	1. Free market 2. Employment 3. Health	1. Education 2. Employment 3. Social support
Location 3	1. Health 2. Employment 3. Free market	1. Education 2. Employment 3. Social support
Location 4	4. Employment 1. Environment 2. Culture	1. Education 2. Employment 3. Social support
Location 5	1. Health 2. Employment 3. Free market 4. Democracy	1. Education 2. Employment 3. Social support
Location 6	1. Quality of administration 2. Health 3. Employment 4. Free market	1. Education 2. Employment 3. Social support
Location 7	1. Transport and connectivity 2. Employment 3. Free market	1. Education 2. Employment 3. Social support
Location 8	1. Prosperity 2. Free market 3. Environment	1. Education 2. Employment 3. Social support
Location 9	1. Health 2. Employment 3. Social support	1. Education 2. Employment 3. Social support
Location 10	1. Education 2. Employment 3. Social support	1. Education 2. Employment 3. Social support

Besides, it was only in Lublin that the idea of participatory policy-making processes met with resistance of some city councillors. During the RADAR meetings, they challenged the legitimacy of the programme and claimed that they know the needs of residents and local problems as nobody else. They were expressing their dissatisfaction over several subsequent meetings (it was the same group of few councillors), which significantly impeded the workshop. The attending residents expressed their astonishment and confusion about the councillors' resistance and were distrustful of the persons in charge of the meeting. As a result, it was difficult to proceed with the agenda and much time and energy was wasted on explaining the idea of the project and assuring everyone about the transparency and purity of intention. Negative emotions accumulated at the beginning of the meeting affected its further progress. It was not easy to encourage the participants to continue the workshop and get engaged in discussions, some retreated and some even left the meetings.

The atmosphere of anxiety caused the residents taking part in the first RADAR to refuse the organizers' requests to fill in questionnaires that they received earlier at the meeting. As with any EU-funded project, the questionnaire was intended to collect basic personal data of the participants. But they were not willing to complete them doubting that their data may not be safe or properly stored. The organizers were forced to modify part of the formal requirements behind the meetings.

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Two years after the PAS project kick-off, some preliminary conclusions can be drawn regarding the level of residents' activity and the possibility of their participation in local decision-making.

First, the opening phase of PAS reveals that the majority of citizens still seems to be indifferent to local issues. However, observations made throughout the project demonstrate that this approach varies depending on the size of the local government unit. In smaller municipalities, the citizens not only felt better informed about the project and the related opportunities of improving the quality of local services, but were also more willing to put forward constructive proposals for the development of the entire local community. In Lublin, individual and collective interest in the project was lower even though the city has been working hard for long to employ the participatory model of policy-making. Moreover, the attitude of many Lubliners was that of 'taking a lot for granted' – they focused mainly on issues affecting themselves and not necessary relevant to the entire community.

Second, the preliminary project results indicate that the key motivation for residents to take action is to tackle the so-called unsolved problems. In general in the case of Lublin, the most burning issue was to enhance safety in the city. In this very case, the residents were also ready to get involved directly by establishing vigilante groups. In smaller communities, the participants pointed to unemployment as a central issue.

The results of the surveys Quality of Life and Quality of Management conducted among citizens and local officers however also indicate that the hierarchy of problems looks very different from the perspective of both groups.

The PAS project also reveals that an attempt to extend the competence of local communities and ensure their wider inclusion in decision-making also encounters major impediments. One of them is a very low level of public awareness of the division of competence among the local self-government, local authorities and other actors involved in governance processes. Interestingly enough, during the meetings held in Lublin, almost all complaints and objections were directed at the city authorities. Furthermore, many problems that the residents reported during RADARs had never been communicated to the authorities. On the one hand, the participants reproached the city authorities for having failed to take care of their problems before; on the other, they admitted that they had omitted to report their concerns and had not attempted to solve them on their own. The conclusion is that the local community, rather than partaking in co-governance as early as they can, get mobilized only when in trouble. It is not so uncommon that such an activity takes the form of protest against proposed action or even already implemented solutions. In addition, such situations almost always attract the local media which assume the role of an arbitrator between the conflicted parties.

Motivating residents and building partnerships are also difficult because of the low level of citizen trust, both in one another and in the local authorities. For example, the individuals attending the Lublin meetings demanded the presence of the mayor as a guarantee of the project implementation and fulfilment of promises made. Another barrier is to convince the population that the initiative should also come from the local government.

Finally, the implementation of the PAS project testifies to how difficult it is for some, even the most innovative, local governments to shift from representative democracy towards participatory and deliberative democracy, and what tensions and frictions it is likely to cause. The approach of some city councillors afraid of their position or competence being threatened by the inclusion of residents in the process of monitoring of local public services is an example of that. The councillors also tried to fuel the already existing atmosphere of distrust between the residents and municipal authorities, promoting themselves as the sole defenders of the local community interest.

To sum up, the PAS project demonstrates that the approach of organized groups as well as individual citizens to being included in local decision-making varies from indifference, through constructive cooperation, to protest against the local policies. It transpires, however, that today the prevailing approach is the lack of involvement.

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