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Revitalization microprojects: how the civic budget supports regeneration activities in cities: the Łódź city case study

MAGDALENA ŚLEBOCKA

University of Lodz, Faculty of Economics and Sociology, Institute of Finance,
ul. Rewolucji 1905 r. 39, 90-214 Lodz, Poland

✉ magdalena.slebocka@uni.lodz.pl

 orcid.org/0000-0003-1957-3717

Abstract

Motivation: One of the distinguishing features of revitalization processes is social activation of the local community. It results directly from the very definition of revitalization, which is understood as the process of social and investment character carried out in degraded urban space which is implemented concertedly by the territorial self-government, the local community and other participants. The residents of the run-down quarters are the main beneficiaries of revitalization policy. Undertaken regeneration efforts are, first and foremost, aimed at improving their life situation. Not only grand projects are important in order to revive degraded space. It is those projects which are conducted on a microscale, which do not require substantial financial outlays and on which the inhabitants of degraded areas subjected to regeneration exert an impact that are equally significant.

Undoubtedly, the civic budget and the projects submitted within its framework which supplement revitalization undertakings pose an opportunity to regenerate run-down areas on such a microscale.

Aim: The purpose of the study is to evaluate the role and significance of the microprojects financed from the civic budget which fit into the revitalization process. A research hypothesis was advanced for the purpose of the article which states that the revitalization microactivities which constitute a part of the civic budget are a tool for supporting revitalization process.

Results: Revitalization focuses not only on the technical aspect consisting in regeneration activities performed within the buildings themselves, but it also effectively engages local communities with the use of disposable financial means. In Łódź a systematic increase in the activation of the community dwelling in degraded area is observed. Social participation enables dialogue and cooperation among all the stakeholders, which may in turn lead to consensus and to working out the solutions satisfactory for all the parties concerned, starting from the territorial self-government which initiated the process to the inhabitants of degraded areas. One of the tools which enables local community to actively participate in the decision-making process is the civic budget. It results from the fact that the civic budget and the projects submitted within its framework are convergent with the undertaken revitalization activities. Year by year the interest in the civic budget increases and almost 50% of the projects submitted for implementation in Łódź within the analysed period of time and the spatial framework being the subject of analysis concern the activities aimed at regeneration of public space. The projects regarding public transport infrastructure, improvement of the condition of roads and pavements in revitalized areas or concerning green and recreational areas gain considerable popularity.

Keywords: revitalization; regeneration; social participation; civic budget

JEL: H61; H72; H76; R58

1. Introduction

Presently there is not any city in Poland which would not struggle with the problem of progressive degradation of the urban fabric. Run-down, devastated over the years city centres, in particular, require intense activities aimed at restoring them to their former glory. Revitalization has become an answer to the undertakings carried out in this sphere. Unfortunately, the projects implemented in this regard, which consist in regenerating degraded urban fabric, are cost-intensive investments which require substantial financial outlays. It should be remembered, though, that in order to restore to life degraded areas not only grand projects play a vital role but those conducted on a microscale, which do not require substantial financial outlays and on which the inhabitants of the areas subjected to revitalization exert an impact, are equally significant.

The objective of the study is the evaluation of the role and significance of the microprojects financed from the civic budget which fit into the revitalization process. A research hypothesis was advanced for the purpose of the article which states that the revitalization microactivities under the civic budget constitute a tool for supporting revitalization process. The following research questions posed by the author of the article proved useful as regards the verification of the advanced hypothesis:

- Can the civic budget contribute to revitalization processes?
- What are the examples of projects of a regenerating character that can be found in the civic budget?
- What share do the projects of a regenerating character account for as regards all the projects intended for implementation in the civic budget?

The time period being the subject of the study covers the years 2013–2021. Such a time perspective, which takes into account all the years in which the civic budget has operated so far from the very moment of its introduction until today, will enable the author to form accurate conclusions regarding the significance of microprojects within the framework of the civic budget submitted by the stakeholders of the revitalization process.

For the purpose of verifying the research hypothesis advanced in the article and accomplishing its purpose the article was divided into the following parts: a review of the literature on revitalization and the civic budget, the research methods applied and conclusions. The following study was compiled on the basis of the literature review, numerical data analysis and the information concerning revitalization microprojects which can be found in the Łódź city civic budget as well as a research survey carried out among the residents of Łódź.

2. Literature review

2.1. Revitalization: a step towards a better life

According to the data pertaining to the year 2015 provided by the Institute of Urban Development, as much as 20% of urban areas in Poland (inhabited by approximately 2.4 million people) may be described as degraded areas (Kołącz & Wielgus, 2015, p. 5) and there is nothing which could indicate that these data have become outdated. Due to such a huge scale of this phenomenon it is currently hard to find a person who has not heard of the activities aimed at regenerating degraded urban fabric, i.e. of revitalization. Although the term itself is often overused as regards the activities which do not fit into a comprehensive process of regenerating run-down quarters (Kaczmarek, 2011, pp. 23–27; Ramlee et al., 2015, p. 361; Stowarzyszenie Forum Rewitalizacji, 2012), the undertakings in this regard constitute the foundation of urban policy (Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy, 2021) and of the principles of sustainable development¹ being different from them in terms of the environmental aspect, which in the case of revitalization activities does not encompass the natural environment but dense and in general inner-city buildings. The origin of comprehensive regeneration of degraded urban fabric in the countries of Western Europe dates back to the second half of the 20th century, which was directly connected with the necessity to modify the recovery programmes after World

¹ The concept of sustainable development was described by the 1987 Bruntland Commission Report as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” There are four dimensions to sustainable development — society, environment, culture and economy — which are intertwined, not separate. Sustainability is a paradigm for thinking about the future in which environmental, societal and economic considerations are balanced in the pursuit of an improved quality of life (Mensah, 2019; UNESCO, 2022).

War II which turned out to be insufficient to achieve the satisfying quality of urban space (Stangel, 2009, p. 45).

Even though the process of degradation of the urban fabric in Poland had been progressing for decades, it particularly intensified in beginning of the 1990s. The aforementioned intensification ensued from the dynamic changes in the economic and social sphere in the wake of the political transformation which contributed to the deterioration of the quality of municipal infrastructure in the cities. Revitalization has become a response to this state of affairs which was supposed to be a remedy to the process of suburbanization and to the replacing of old and often historic buildings with new developments (Chmielewski, 1996, pp. 119–120, as cited in Kopeć, 2011, p. 2).

Representatives of various scientific disciplines embark on a task to define the notion. The scientists who deal with this issue encompass architects, town planners, lawyers, sociologists and economists. Such a large circle of researchers points to the interdisciplinary character of revitalization (Ślebocka, 2018, p. 25). However, its multifacetedness generates substantial difficulties as regards formulating an unequivocal definition of the said notion since diverse definitions may be found which depend on the field of specialisation of a given author and which put an emphasis on different aspects of revitalization. As a result of this diversity the process of revitalization was perceived in a fragmentary and sectoral manner (Gasidło et al., 2010, p. 234).

Architects put at the forefront the technical aspect. For them rehabilitation consists, first and foremost, in adaptation or restoration or modernisation of devastated buildings. One of the forerunners in this field in Poland was Skalski (1996, p. 16), who claimed that “revitalization is defined as a comprehensive programme of renovation, modernisation of buildings and public spaces, renewal of historical monuments in a selected area, usually in an old residential area of the city in connection with economic and social development. Revitalization combines activities relating to the technical aspect such as renovation with programmes stimulating economic recovery and the activities aimed at solving the following social problems prevalent in these areas: unemployment, crime, a lack of demographic balance”. According to another architect, Lorens (2009, p. 7), revitalization consisted predominantly in enhancing the technical condition of the existing old buildings as well as in socio-economic reform which would in a measurable manner contribute to the preservation of the cultural identity of a given quarter, residential area, locality by means of protecting significant values of the cultural landscape.

Town planners brought to the foreground the environmental aspect consisting in stamping a consistent character upon inner-city space. “Urban regeneration involves the process of remaking places. In this process, regeneration initiatives are planned to improve the physical conditions of places, increase economic growth and environmental sustainability, in order to facilitate better social life for people” (Ujang & Zahariya, 2015, p. 711). Zuziak (2012, p. 9) maintained that “a vital aspect of revitalization constitute the relations between

the values of sites in the urban area which require an intervention conventionally referred to as <<revival>> and the project strategies which make up this kind of operations”. Podolak (1998, p. 297, as cited in Burchard-Dziubińska et al., 2014, p. 102) emphasised the fact that revitalization is one of the activities undertaken within the framework of urban policy, which is predominantly targeted at conservation and revival of cultural and ecological values of urban areas combined with promoting new activities aimed at enhancing the economic base of the city including the activities carried out by the local community residing in the particular area to which the aforementioned activities directly pertain. Kaczmarek (2001, p. 23) in her deliberations on revitalization highlighted the significance of the changes it triggers. And thus, “revitalization is the process of transformation of the functional and spatial structure of the areas which, due to various determinants, underwent a severe crisis and are not able to maintain their purpose which they have been serving so far. Revitalization takes into account the essence of the process, i.e. scheduled investment and recovery activities which introduce new qualitative values into a particular area, by, first and foremost, equipping it with new functions distinct from the previous ones”.

Legislative issues, which ensure legal security with regard to the undertakings within the framework of revitalization activities, take a prominent position among lawyers (Szlachetko & Borówka, 2017, p. 24). At this point it is worth quoting the first legal definition of revitalization. For 7 years the legal framework of revitalization has been regulated by the *Act on revitalization* (2015). Article 2 Section 1 of the *Act on revitalization* (2015) stipulates that revitalization should be perceived as the process of a comprehensive character of recovering from the critical state of degraded areas conducted by means of integrated activities for the benefit of the local community, space and economy which are concentrated on a particular local area and undertaken by revitalization stakeholders pursuant to the revitalization programme adopted by the *gmina*. “The definition set forth in the said legal act encompasses, in a comprehensive manner, all the elements pertaining to the recovery of degraded urban fabric. Thus, the legislator defined what revitalization is by specifying adequate and accurate perception of the process” (Hajdys & Ślebocka, 2021, p. 20). Sociologists highlight the social aspect of revitalization, whereas economists focus their attention, first and foremost, on the economic aspect trying to define all the potential sources of financing of the activities encompassing the recovery of degraded urban fabric. Markowski (2014, pp. 2–3) points to the significant elements of this process. As a result of a public intervention ensuing from the social and economic activities carried out within the framework of revitalization projects there should emerge sustainable investment capacity of the participants and users of the area in which the said intervention is undertaken. According to Kłosowski (2005, p. 2), the process of regenerating degraded urban area, i.e. revitalization “means the revival of the socio-economic processes in the area in which the said processes perished. The areas in need of revitalization are not those selected in terms of their historical value but the areas where socio-economic problems

accumulate with special intensity (...). Thus, revitalization must engage (...) all the actors of the local scene: the territorial self-government, different public services as well as business and civic organisations, and finally the inhabitants themselves”.

The multitude of presented above definitions of revitalization indicates, first and foremost, the salience and significance of this process. Although different elements are highlighted in the aforementioned definitions, it is possible to point to a common denominator, which enables to specify the typical features of revitalization processes. And thus revitalization is:

- a comprehensive, multifaceted process in which all the undertaken activities are interconnected;
- optimal utilisation of the specificity of a given area and enhancing its local potential;
- a process geared towards the enhancement of the living conditions in the degraded area by reconstructing it or by assigning new functions to the regenerated quarters;
- a particularly cost-intensive process which in general requires the financial resources acquired from the private entities operating in the market;
- a process in which the leading role is played by the inhabitants of degraded areas and it is precisely their needs that should be taken into consideration.

To sum up, “urban regeneration involves the distressed urban areas revitalization, through actions such as:— rehabilitation of historic areas;— improvement of living conditions in residential districts;— redevelopment of public spaces: squares, parks, urban furniture and so on;— modernization of urban infrastructure: water networks, gas, electricity, transport infrastructure. A project of this complexity, such as that of sustainable urban regeneration can be achieved only through the cooperation between institutions, universities, urbanists, environmental associations and builders. Urban rehabilitation actions are based on social, economic and technical” (Alpopi & Mamole, 2013, p. 179). Thus, as it may be noticed, the way in which urban fabric is degraded is the combined effect of overlapping multiple elements and a number of factors which predominantly encompass:

- the environmental factor, i.e. the level of dilapidation of the city buildings;
- the economic factor, i.e. the lack of sufficient funds which could help to maintain the city infrastructure at the acceptable level as well as reduce the negative effects in this regard among the community residing in the degraded area;
- the social factor, social participation (social activity) is of particular importance in revitalization processes. It is the social interests, which are determined by diverse groups representing various needs, should be taken into consideration when formulating the recovery plans of degraded urban fabric.

It should be remembered that revitalization has never been and will never be a spontaneous undertaking. The actions taken in this field always result from the well-thought-out initiative of the territorial self-government, which in ac-

cordance with the ideal revitalization model should cooperate with the stakeholders of this process or should at least listen to them when they define their needs. Thus, social participation is a vital element of the whole regeneration process. Revitalization does not only consist in investment but, first and foremost, in cooperation with the people who make up a given community. Even though renovation works in the buildings and in public space are the most noticeable changes, it is the overcoming of the social crisis that is the most significant in the whole process of revitalization. Planning with regard to regeneration requires involvement in these processes on the part of the local community since it enables citizens to actively participate in shaping their own living space, which is consistent with the EU documents regarding revitalization activities. Revitalization encompasses issues such as: vocational activation of the inhabitants, culture, education, sport, leisure, municipal services. And these are fundamental as regards the projects submitted within the framework of the civic budget.

2.2 The civic budget: social projects on a microscale

The civic budget constitutes an indispensable element of social participation which may be defined as more or less direct participation on the part of the society in the decision-making process on the local, public or political platform (Długosz & Wygnański, 2005, p. 11; EPA, 2022; Kamierczak, 2011, p. 84; Wojtoszek, 2015, p. 327).

The idea of social participation, respected by almost all countries in the world, came into existence in the 1970s in Europe and, in simple terms, constituted a link between the state and the market (Hajduk, 2021, p. 13). It ensued from the opposition on the part of the society to a too strong position of the bureaucratic hierarchy and technocracy (Długosz & Wygnański, 2005, p. 11). In Poland the possibility of participation of citizens emerged as a result of the self-government reform in 1990. Since that time it has been possible to define the notion of co-participation as a relation between citizens and the state, naturally taking into account mutual limitations and obligations of both parties (Peisert & Matczak, 2012, p. 103). Its significance was emphasised in the Preamble to the *Constitution of the Republic of Poland* (1997) which stipulated that we “hereby establish this Constitution of the Republic of Poland as the basic law for the State, based on respect for freedom and justice, cooperation between the public powers, social dialogue as well as on the principle of subsidiarity in the strengthening the powers of citizens and their communities”.

Civic participation may take various forms which take into account different levels of engagement of the local community in the decisions made by territorial self-governments. In the literature on the subject the diagram of such involvement is commonly referred to as the Ladder of Citizen Participation. It was first put forward in 1969 and it was authored by Arnstein (1969, p. 217, as cited in Gaber, 2019, p. 189). The model presented by her encompassed a number of levels (each level corresponds to a particular range of citizen powers) starting

from those which are characterised by a total lack of participation of citizens in social life, i.e. manipulation and therapy to those which could be described as the most conscious form of participation, among which the most significant from the point of view of the principles of functioning of the civic society turned out to be partnership, delegated power and citizen control.

The Scheme 1 presented herein is an abridged version of the Citizen Participation Ladder which encompasses only those rungs which include an element engaging the local community in the decision-making process.

Informing constitutes the simplest form of participation. In this case citizens are involved to a small extent and it mainly comes down to conveying information to the inhabitants about the actions undertaken by the authorities. Consultation constitutes the second level of participation. In Poland this is the most popular form of engaging citizens in the decision-making process. A characteristic tool applied at this level is consulting which, if it is used effectively, significantly facilitates the process of implementation of projects as well as helps to mitigate potential conflicts and disputes in this regard. Co-decision-making, i.e. partnership constitutes the final level which enables conscious involvement of citizens in determining decision-making criteria and in specifying the preferred solution. In this case the partnership between the authorities and citizens is manifested in delegating certain powers to society as well as responsibilities concerning the undertaken activities. The civic budget has become one of the instruments used at this stage which is aimed at engaging the local community in the decision-making process². It is a form of participation of the inhabitants which exerts an influence on the decisions made by territorial self-governments (it accounts for a part of the financial means allocated from the city budget and its value in general does not exceed 1 % of the whole territorial self-government budget (Dorosz-Kruczyński, 2019) as regards the distribution of local budgetary means (the said distribution is carried out on the basis of the projects submitted by the citizens) (Bernaciak et al., 2017, p. 899; Rzeńca & Sobol, 2018, p. 209). It serves the purpose of activating the inhabitants in the public sphere and it is an effective means of spending public funds since it is the residents themselves that decide about what is most needed at a particular time.

Until 30 January 2018 the functioning of this institution was not regulated by any provisions of law, which meant that there was no enshrinement as regards the rules of functioning of that tool. The *Act on amendments to certain acts* (2018) which came into force on 31 January 2018 changed this state of affairs. Due to the legal regulating “the functioning of civic budgets enabled the direct participation of city dwellers in the decision-making process regarding the disposal of a particular amount of budgetary means of territorial self-government

² The first civic budget was introduced in 1989 in the city of Porto Alegre in Brazil. The initiative came into being on the volition of its citizens who came to the conclusion that they would like to have a greater impact on the development of their city. In Poland Sopot was the forerunner in this regard where in 2011 the inhabitants were for the first time entitled to vote on social projects (cf. Burchard-Dziubińska. 2016, p. 237).

units. Thanks to such social participation in exercising power by the organs of the *gmina* civic society and the citizen trust towards the territorial self-government and its representatives is enhanced” (NIK, 2019). In general, the civic budget is a tool which creates an opportunity to submit and promote one’s own unconventional initiatives which exert an influence on the functioning of not only one’s residential area but of the whole city³. It is one of major instruments which enable to take into account the preferences of local communities as regards the most desirable, in their opinion, directions of spending public funds.

The spectrum of tasks submitted within the framework of the civic budget is very broad. It is possible to find in it the tasks which consist in modernisation and expansion of the urban infrastructure, i.e. the so called “hard projects” but also the projects of a prosocial, educational and cultural character, which are colloquially referred to as “soft projects” are submitted. Thus, the civic budget does not solely encompass major investments but, first and foremost, minor changes. It is connected with the limited amount of funds at the disposal of residents, which automatically translates into the size of the investments undertaken within the framework of the said instrument.

To sum up, the underlying objective of the civic budget should, first and foremost, be establishing and reinforcing of local bonds thanks to generating common ideas and initiatives. Sensitizing and activating of the local community is usually carried out by the participation in social consultations, applying the mechanisms of the citizen’s legislative initiative in terms of resolutions or of the local initiative (PBiS „Stocznia”, 2014, p. 23). The civic budget constitutes an important component of the knowledge on various aspects of social functioning including revitalization due to the unique knowledge of the inhabitants as regards the problems they cope with and the needs which should be primarily met. The projects submitted within the framework of the civic budget should be complementary to the principles set by particular urban policies, adopted development strategies and revitalization programmes.

Thus, the civic budget has become one of the tools commonly used in the revitalization process. The involvement of residents in the said process by giving them an opportunity to submit their own initiatives and projects enables access to unique knowledge as regards needs, potentials and local resources which is in general inaccessible to public entities.

³ „Jednorożce do stajni jednorożców — nie całkiem poważny pomnik dla małych i dużych łódzian” (“A unicorn for the unicorn stable — a not quite serious statue for small and big Łódź city residents”), which was backed in the process of voting by 3774 Łódź city dwellers was implemented within the framework of the civic budget, (cf. Górski, 2017). Moreover, in 2019 there was a motion filed to organise the Unicorn’s Festival (the project was not approved for implementation) (cf. TVP3 Łódź, 2019).

3. Methods

In order to achieve the objective of the article and verify the hypothesis formulated in the introduction, it was necessary to present the concept of the civic budget and the basic principles of revitalization.

For the purpose of the conducted study a typology of revitalization projects which fit into the formula of the civic budget was put forward by the author. It was done due to the fact that not every project submitted within the framework of the civic budget will be aimed at the recovery of degraded urban fabric, not every project will be related to revitalization and will meet the criteria set for it.

It is particularly difficult, taking into account the multitude of projects, to indicate those which could be unequivocally qualified as activities which fit into revitalization efforts. It is connected with the fact that the undertaken activities are targeted at the residents of those residential districts which are of a degraded character, i.e. they are characterised by social exclusion, communication barriers, devastated technical infrastructure and limited access to public services.

In order to be able to recognise a project submitted within the civic budget as a revitalization microproject has to meet the following criteria:

- be situated in the area delineated in the *Gmina* Revitalization Programme as degraded area subjected to recovery actions;
- concern one of the activities regarded as revitalization projects, such as for example undertakings in the sphere of road infrastructure encompassing pavements, playgrounds, sports grounds (including school playgrounds), heritage and culture, urban greenery in the scope of revitalization actions carried out within parks, backyards, and town squares, riverside and pond-side areas and allotment gardens;
- ensue from the needs of residents of degraded areas and be submitted by them for revitalization.

Therefore, on the basis of the aforementioned information, for the purpose of the conducted study a typology of revitalization microprojects submitted within the framework of the civic budget may be drawn up. And thus it is possible to distinguish microprojects encompassing the regeneration of:

- backyards, allotment gardens and town squares;
- playgrounds and sports grounds;
- parks and green areas;
- areas surrounding reservoirs in the city;
- transport projects (in particular related to road infrastructure, pavements); and
- cultural heritage and reinforcement of local identity.

The carried out study consisted of three fundamental stages. The research purpose was attained not only by analysing the literature on the subject and official documents (the first stage of the study). Within the framework of the study the author drew up a typology of revitalization projects which are covered under the civic budget.

In order to find the answers to the questions formulated in the introduction: can the civic budget contribute to revitalization processes and what share do the projects of a regenerating character account for as regards all the projects intended for implementation in the civic budget, apart from conducting the analysis of the data concerning *inter alia* the number of projects in the civic budget which can be deemed as the projects of a micro-regeneration character (the second stage), the author of the article also carried out a research survey (the third stage).

By juxtaposing these two approaches, i.e. the one ensuing from numerical data and the other resulting from the public opinion held in this regard, the author of the article was able to take a broader and more complex look at the role and significance of social participation, one of its tools being the civic budget, in revitalization activities.

4. Results

The city of Łódź, also referred to as the city of tenement houses, has changed over the last few years beyond recognition. For over a decade it has been subjected to “permanent regeneration”, numerous revitalizations — first within the framework of the programme called 100 tenement houses (UM Łodzi, 2017) and now as part of the area-based regeneration (the Area-based Regeneration of the Inner City of Łódź). The implemented recovery programmes contribute to the gradual improvement of the situation of the city in terms of its visual and investment condition.

Additionally, the location of Łódź on the map and development in terms of infrastructure encourage new investors to allocate their capital in this area. Revitalization does not consist only in renovation and redevelopment. Its main goal is to restore to life degraded quarters of the city and to supplement them with new functions and, in simple terms, it is the introduction of such changes which will bring about better conditions to live, reside and work. Revitalization, first and foremost, consists in working with people, with the local community. Even though renovations of buildings and public places are very impressive, it is the comfort of the society that is of greatest importance. The effectiveness of revitalization depends on numerous factors *inter alia* on the residents of the city, entrepreneurs, non-governmental organisations, educational and cultural institutions, higher education institutions and offices. Currently Łódź has a potential to surprise onlookers with the extent of its change. Although there are still sites which can put one off, every year the City implements revitalization projects which improve the appearance as well as the infrastructure and the comfort of its residents. The undertakings in this regard are particularly cost-intensive (Table 1). The total budget of the regeneration undertakings carried out within the framework of the projects bearing the numbers 1–8 amounts to 981.08 million zloty, which accounts for 19% of the annual budget of the city. Therefore, every additional support is of vital importance. Apart from the means allocated

for revitalization activities within the framework of the revitalization budget, the projects consisting in regenerating degraded urban fabric may also be financed from the civic budget. Therefore, the involvement of stakeholders in this process is important. By means of informing, social consultations or dialogue with the society local authorities obtain very valuable information, which enables them to effectively and comprehensively carry out the process of revitalization, which is tailored to the needs and expectations of residents. In the years 2014–2021 the city used as many as 848 various forms of contact with the stakeholders of the said process (Ślebocka, 2021, p. 173).

In Łódź, which is considered to be the leader with regard to the civic budget and social participation, currently its 9th edition is implemented. The city is in the lead of the cities with the highest turnout as regards the civic budget⁴. As the sources indicate, “Łódź is in the lead in this regard and stands out in relation to all the other self-governments” (Ćwiklicki et al., 2013, p. 60). Turnout in every year in the period being the subject of analysis amounted to approximately 20%. The number of submitted projects fluctuated between 645 in the year 2016 and 1572 in the year 2017 during the 4th edition of the civic budget. The data were similar as regards the number of projects approved for implementation. A slight slowdown in the development of the institution of the civic budget was noted in Łódź in the years 2020–2021, which was undoubtedly connected with the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the zoning of the activities consisting in regenerating degraded urban fabric and their concentration in the inner city of Łódź, the civic budget in this area was analysed. The highest number of the projects approved for implementation were noted in 2017. Currently, following the decrease which occurred during the 8th edition, a slow growth in the activity of the residents of Łódź can be observed (Table 2).

Although the projects put forward within the civic budget do not limit the creativity of the inhabitants (the only requirement which should be met is compliance with the Polish law and the feasibility of cost estimation), in general, despite unlimited possibilities, the ideas submitted within its framework concern the implementation of typical outdoor investments, e.g. sports infrastructure, playgrounds, green areas. It is also the case in the inner city residential area (Table 3). The 4th edition of the civic budget constituted an exception to this rule where the projects considered as typical revitalization microprojects in the adopted typology accounted for only 4.7 % in the overall number of projects approved for implementation. The dominant type of projects that year were those of a soft character which consisted in further equipping of public use institutions. The budget allocated for revitalization microactivities imple-

⁴ Due to the turnout in Łódź the city may be called the civic budget leader. In the year 2018 as many as 16.40% of all the inhabitants voted on projects in the civic budget. Wrocław took the second position with the result amounting to 10.76% and Gdańsk came third with 10.50%. Poznań, Warszawa and Kraków were lower in the ranking with 10.31%, 5.11% and 4.52% respectively (cf. Miasto 2077, 2019, p. 3).

mented in the inner city accounted for on average 5% of the whole civic budget in the period being the subject of analysis (Table 4).

In order to find the answers to the hypothesis and to the research questions put forward in the introduction, apart from analysing numerical data, a survey questionnaire was also used. 107 randomly selected residents of Łódź took part in the conducted survey⁵. Women accounted for 73.83% of the respondents. The participants of the study were of different age groups, however most of them, as many as 48.59%, represented the 35–49 age group. The respondents aged 18–25 (12.14%) as well as people over 60 (14.01%) constituted a smaller section of the surveyed. The surveyed represented different levels of education. 57.96% of the respondents had a university degree, 34.57% completed secondary education and as few as 7.47% had a vocational qualification. The substantial majority of respondents have lived in Łódź for over 20 years. The said percentage amounted to as many as 79.43%.

In response to the question verifying civic awareness among the residents of Łódź, the substantial majority of the surveyed (90%) gave an affirmative answer. Such a high score may indicate to a wide distribution of information. Among the mentioned sources of information on the civic budget acquaintances and family members were ranked on the first position (67.4%), followed by social media (63%), leaflets, posters and broadcast advertising (52.2%), press (30.4%) and the website of the Łódź City Council (28.3%). Information programmes broadcast by the local TV station were positioned lower in the ranking (23.9%). The next question concerned participation in voting on the projects submitted under the city budget. As many as 76% of respondents declared their participation in the voting on the selection of the projects intended for implementation.

Subsequently, the respondents were asked about the active participation in information meetings concerning the civic budget. Unfortunately, the results gained in this regard were not satisfying. Only 4% of the surveyed confirmed their active participation. Thus, it is necessary to ask oneself a question about the reason for such a low level of interest on the part of the citizens in maintaining active contact with the city authorities. One of the possible reasons could be the situation connected with the COVID-19 pandemic and the constraints imposed on the society which resulted in strict limitations on every type of direct contact. Such restrictions could have exerted a negative impact on the level of involvement in social matters. And a lack of direct participation in the aforementioned meetings could translate into a lack of sufficient knowledge on the investments carried out in the region.

The respondents were also asked about the aspects of life which require recovery actions undertaken by the city authorities. In response the surveyed

⁵ For the purpose of the above study partial results were presented (the full study entitled *Tapping the Social Potential in Revitalization as Exemplified by Capitals of Voivodeships* is a result of the implementation of the research grant carried out in the Faculty of Economics and Sociology at the University of Łódź) which directly concern the civic budget with regard to the revitalization activities undertaken by the city authorities.

pointed to an unsatisfactory condition of the roads (87.86%) and a dire condition of buildings, including landmarked buildings (63.55%). Neglected common space (34.5%) and inadequate transport connections between particular sections of the city (33.64%) require, according to the public opinion, intervention on the part of the local government. Only 2 respondents indicated that the green areas in the city should be subjected to revitalization.

Another question posed to the surveyed concerned the activities which should be undertaken by the city authorities in order to restore to life degraded areas (Chart 1). Among the recovery actions the respondents indicated the following: the necessity to renovate buildings (85.04%), security (62.61%), securing parking spaces (55.14%), the deficit of which being so acute in the city centre, as well as arranging the common space (55.14%). As few as 18.69% of the surveyed declared that it is important to provide an access to cultural institutions. It means that improving the quality and comfort of life constitutes a priority, whereas the activities grouped under the category of “soft projects” are moved further to the background.

It was vital from the point of view of verifying the research hypothesis to answer the question whether the civic budget can constitute a tool for supporting the revitalization process. As many as 80.37% of the surveyed gave an affirmative answer to the said question thus pointing to the significance of this tool in revitalization activities.

The last question which was touched upon in the study concerned indicating the projects under the civic budget which fit into regeneration activities. The responses (Chart 2) covered the following: regeneration of parks and green areas (63.55%), regeneration of backyards, allotment gardens and town squares (60.74%), revitalization of playgrounds and sports grounds (54.20%) as well as reconstruction and renovation of landmarked buildings (51.40%).

When analysing the distribution of answers it can be stated that revitalization is still associated with activities consisting in “recovery actions” such as modernization, renovation or reconstruction of degraded urban fabric rather than with educational or activating undertakings targeted at the local community. Therefore, it is the issue on which the local self-government should put a greater emphasis.

To sum up, Łódź is a positive example of applying the mechanism of the participatory budget in the process of revitalization. A high turnout (in comparison to other cities in Poland) indicates that residents are interested in it and willing to change the public space. The projects which supplement the revitalization investments implemented by the City are dominant among the submitted projects

5. Conclusion

Revitalization is a complex process which entails particular challenges not only related to securing substantial financial resources or implementation of labour-intensive technical works but also to the interests of stakeholders at which

the undertaken recovery activities are directly targeted. It focuses not only on the technical aspect involving regeneration efforts carried out in the buildings but it also, in an effective manner, engages the local community with the use of disposable financial means.

In Łódź a systematic increase in the activation of the population residing in the degraded area has been noted. Thus, the awareness of the significance of the local community in the process of revitalization is growing, which makes participation the key and indispensable element of the said process. It enables dialogue and cooperation among all the stakeholders, which as a consequence leads to consensus and to working out the solutions which are satisfactory to all the parties concerned, ranging from the initiators of the process, i.e. the territorial self-government to the residents of degraded areas. One of the tools which induce citizens' activation in this regard is the civic budget. It is caused by the fact that the civic budget and the projects submitted within its framework are convergent with the undertaken revitalization activities, which was proven by 80.37% of the respondents in the survey conducted by the author.

In the time period being the subject of the analysis, the interest in the civic budget systematically increases and almost 50% of the projects submitted for implementation in Łódź within the analysed period of time and the spatial framework concern the activities aimed at regeneration of public space. This process is going to continue taking into consideration the fact that, in accordance with the draft law on amending selected acts in order to reinforce the climate-related dimension of the urban policy of 19 August 2021, the so called green projects should account for 30% of all the investments implemented within the framework of the civic budget, and they constitute one of the elements of the undertaken revitalization activities (Misiejko, 2021; 2022). The projects regarding public transport infrastructure, improvement of the condition of roads and pavements in revitalized areas or concerning green and recreational areas gain considerable popularity.

In the light of the carried out research, it seems to be distressing that the attention of both the residents and the city authorities is focused on the activities of a recovery and technical character and thus the significance of the educational aspect in revitalization projects is diminished ("soft projects", i.e. those which concern the residents of the degraded areas account for around 10% of the value of all the revitalization projects). The activities undertaken in this regard are important only for 24.29% of the surveyed. Perhaps a change in the approach and paying more attention to the participation of the residents in the process of planning recovery actions may constitute a recipe for successful revitalization in the true sense of the word.

To sum up, "the civic budget truly exists when residents are interested in it and actively support it" (UM Łodzi, 2015), and this is the case. Applying this instrument within the framework of revitalization activities by means of engaging and invigorating the local community may consolidate the effects of larger undertakings aimed at regenerating degraded urban fabric. However,

it is necessary to pose a question: should it be so? Is it not the role of the civic budget to serve the purpose of implementing those projects which do not fit into the catalogue of typical tasks of the territorial self-government which, undoubtedly, are the activities concerning revitalization? And finally, should the relevant bodies not pay more attention to the activities aimed at activation and thus enhancing the involvement of the local community in the revitalization projects undertaken by the city authorities?

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Appendix

Table 1.

Distribution of funds for revitalization measures in the context of the revitalization of Łódź (in PLN million)

Project number	Total value of the project	Financing		State public funds	
		State budget	ERDF	Own contribution	State budget/partner's budget
1	228,95	4,48	101,22	123,25	0,00
2	126,67	1,84	70,04	39,81	14,97
3	77,10	3,00	31,11	42,99	0,00
4	150,07	5,32	69,21	75,53	0,00
5	116,57	6,35	44,26	65,97	0,00
6	93,53	2,53	33,34	57,26	0,00
7	136,28	3,06	59,69	73,53	0,00
8	51,91	1,22	23,23	27,47	0,00
total	981,08	27,79	432,10	505,82	14,97

Source: Own preparation based on Rewitalizacja (2022).

Table 2.

Projects submitted and implemented as part of the ninth edition of the Civics' Budget in Łódź as a whole and the Łódź Śródmieście district

Edition	Total notified operations	Total projects accepted for implementation	Registered projects in the district of Łódź Śródmieście	Projects approved for realisation in Łódź Śródmieście	Number of persons entitled to vote in the civics' budget
2013/2014	908	759	87	7	130 000
2014/2015	871	751	44	7	174 834
2015/2016	645	531	34	21	135 277
2016/2017	1 572	1 188	121	85	224 203
2017/2018	1 131	730	67	31	134 522
2018/2019	1 295	837	59	17	113 490
2019/2020	1 027	984	114	21	154 745
2020/2021	868	601	32	25	69 014
2021/2022	1 097	984	46	19	145 564

Source: Own preparation based on UM Łodzi (2022).

Table 3.
Number of revitalization projects carried out in 2013–2021 during the ninth edition of the civics' budget in Łódź Śródmieście

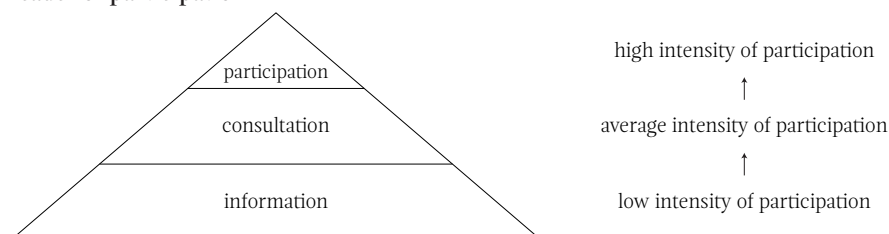
Edition	Courtyards, gar- dens and town squares	Playgrounds and playgrounds	Parks and green spaces	Communication projects	Cultural heritage	Areas around waters	Sum
2013/2014	–	2	1	2	–	–	5
2014/2015	–	–	1	2	1	–	4
2015/2016	1	2	4	6	–	–	13
2016/2017	–	2	1	–	1	–	4
2017/2018	–	3	5	6	–	–	14
2018/2019	–	–	5	2	1	–	8
2019/2020	1	2	3	2	1	–	9
2020/2021	1	1	9	6	–	–	17
2021/2022	1	–	10	2	–	–	13

Source: Own preparation based on UM Łodzi (2022).

Table 4.
The value of the micro-projects of revitalization carried out during the 9th edition of the Civics' Budget (PLN)

Edition	Planned civic's budget	Planned civic's budget for projects approved for implementation in Łódź Śródmieście	Budget for microprojects with a revitalization character in Łódź Śródmieście
2013/2014	20 000 000	2 997 418	2 932 700
2014/2015	40 000 000	5 999 000	5 453 000
2015/2016	40 000 000	5 993 251	4 915 605
2016/2017	40 000 000	1 430 000	1 360 000
2017/2018	40 000 000	2 390 000	1 906 763
2018/2019	40 000 000	2 370 000	936 640
2019/2020	49 870 000	3 843 000	1 921 880
2020/2021	19 400 000	1 214 000	1 142 400
2021/2022	26 000 000	1 302 000	1 079 240

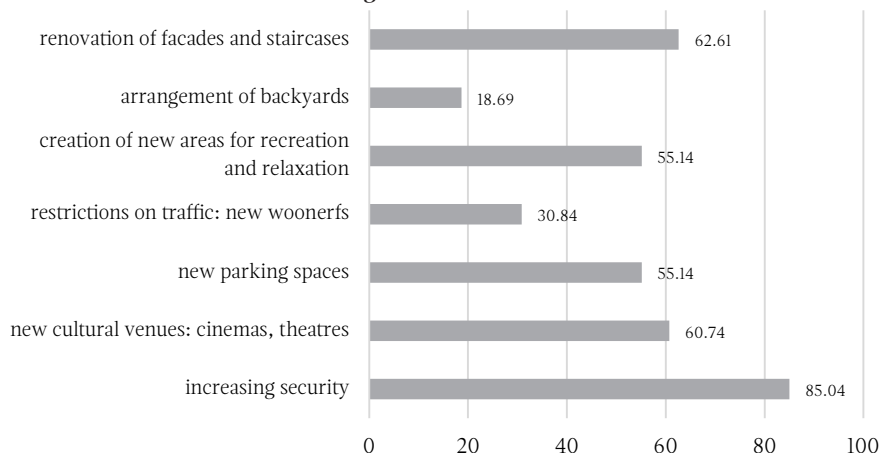
Source: Own preparation based on UM Łodzi (2022).

Scheme 1.
Leader of participation


Source: Own preparation based on PO (2022).

Chart 1.

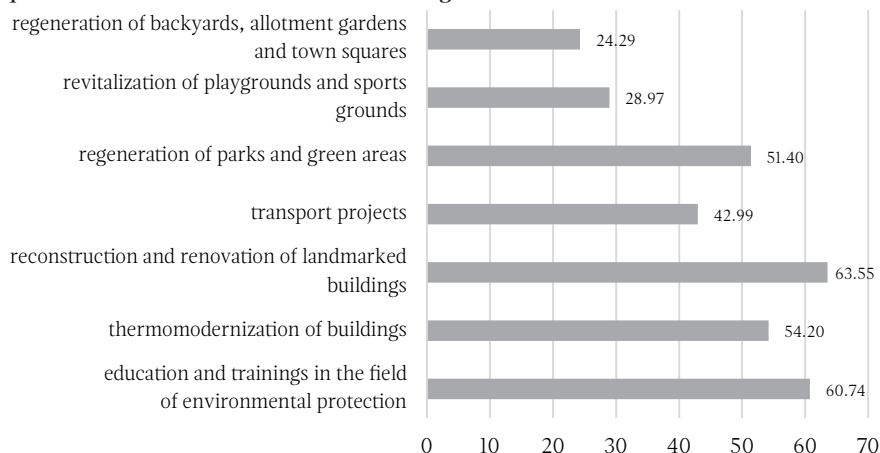
What activities, in the opinion of the residents, should be undertaken by the city authorities in order to restore a degraded area?



Source: Own research.

Chart 2.

Which projects under the civic budget could, in the opinion of the residents, be qualified as the activities which fit into regeneration activities?



Source: Own research.