



Reflections on the Gdańsk Civic eState project meeting, October 2-4, 2019

Good practice?

It is always interesting to experience a city with which one is intimately familiar from a different perspective. The different perspective in this case was manifold: it was prompted by the presence of non-residential experts from various European cities and by local initiatives that presented their neighborhood activities.



For us it was interesting to learn about similarities in challenges between social initiatives that had completely different founding procedures. While in Dolne Miasto a company, consulted by the municipality, had solicited a local social initiative top-down after which the municipality provided support, in Biskupia Górka an active grassroots organization was awarded municipal support to extend its social activities. Despite the differences in procedure, in both cases the staff of the

neighborhood houses initially needed to actively get out of their premises to recruit and activate local inhabitants. In both cases only after an intensive first period a community started to emerge around the neighborhood houses. We started to wonder whether this approach to activate communities can be considered a general good practice.



Theory and practice

It was also fascinating for us to learn of instances where practice seems less malleable than theory would suggest. For instance, while theory requires that management of the common should be open and non-exclusive, we learned that in practice managers of social initiatives tend to create a decision-making monopoly for themselves. How could one avoid this tendency? And, if it occurs, how does one improve this?



Promising approach

The value of the concept of commons seems obvious. Empowering local organizations to forge local communities - by providing support to its most vulnerable inhabitants – enlarges neighborhood integration of the least privileged local residents, and gives them a voice. But, this approach seems insufficient to support the integration of the more privileged inhabitants that always move into districts that have been newly renovated.



The approach of the Dolne Miasto Neighborhood House seems to be an interesting answer to this challenge. By focusing on the history of the district a local identity is created that is open to all, both to the less privileged and to the more privileged, both to those living in the neighborhood for decades and to those who have just arrived. From now on we will follow this dual approach by the Dolne Miasto Neighborhood House – supporting the vulnerable while highlighting the district's history – with great interest.



Transfer Diary Gdańsk #2



We are also curious whether this approach might also provide an answer to another challenge, one that is being posed by the financial underpinning of these social initiatives. In order to survive, the social initiatives need to be entrepreneurial: they receive too little funding by the municipality to function smoothly. The entrepreneurial approach seems hard to square with focusing just on supporting the less privileged. But

maybe, by focusing on neighborhood identities too, the more privileged will not just integrate but will also be the beginning of a sustainable social business model.

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