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Lost in Transformation? Urban Governance and Urban Development Processes in Post-socialist Warsaw

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Introduction

The change of the socialist system in many Central and Eastern European countries at the end of the 1980s / the beginning of the 1990s can be divided in three main dimensions of transformation (Kostinskiy 2001: 453)

- the introduction of the market economy and the resurgence of private property and land rents
- the establishing of a multi-party system and the withdrawal of the central state (=the socialist party) as regulator of socio-political life and owner of economic enterprises
- The return of the local governments in politics

These dimensions of transformation not only led to changes concerning the whole society and the economic system in the Central and Eastern European countries but also altered the cities in this region. The changes in the built environment are certainly one of the most striking and visible of these changes. New elements like shopping-malls, skyscraper-like office buildings and new residential parks can be found in post-socialist cities (Tosics 2005: 64 ff). But in addition to these visible changes other changes exist, which are probably less apparent but as profound. The main issues here are socio-demographic changes, polarisation processes and also the transformation of the urban political sphere which is the main focus of this paper. The field of urban development is taken as an example to analyse the institutional framework, the processes and the contents of the urban political sphere. Urban development is defined as the act of spatial planning and the public strategies targeting at the development of the city. The aim of this paper is two-folded: First, I try to provide a research framework which allows analysing political processes, structures and contents in post-socialist cities. The theoretical background for this is based on the concept of Urban Governance, which is one of the main

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trends in the development of Western European cities (John 2001). The second aim of this paper is to analyse the urban development processes in Warsaw in the context of Urban Governance: Is the situation in Warsaw comparable with Western European Cities? Is the shift towards Urban Governance also happening in Warsaw or does the mode of steering urban development follows another path?

The paper contains three major parts: The main aspects of the political sphere of socialist cities are described and the role of cities during the socialist system is highlighted in the first part. Second, the concept of Urban Governance is introduced and governance in the three dimensions of the political sphere *polity*, *policy* and *politics* is defined. This is the basis for the third part, in which the urban development in the case study city Warsaw is presented. In the conclusion the questions how the situation in Warsaw differs from the theoretical governance concept and whether these differences are caused by the transformation process or have other influences is answered.

The political sphere in socialist cities

Even though there were differences between the socialist systems in the Central and Eastern European countries, it is possible to draw some general conclusions about the political sphere in socialist cities. The characteristics of socialist urban development were the strict state control and centralized, politically motivated planning procedures (Tosics 2005: 52). Thus, the main task of politicians in socialist cities was the implementation of objectives developed on the central-state level. Political processes were highly influenced through the local branches of central institutions. Sagan (2007: 4) describes this as the domination of vertical structures over spatial sector (=horizontal) structures. The linkages of different spatial levels in the diverse areas of activity were stronger than the connection of different areas of activity on one spatial level like the urban level. That led towards sector planning from the national down to the local level and not towards a sector-crossing planning on local level. In other words: Main issues of urban development like housing or the location of industries couldn't be decided on the local level but were in the responsibility of supra-local institutions. A result of this was that a long-term urban planning approach from the local authorities was neither reasonable nor possible (Häußermann 1996: 8). Therefore scholars argue, that the "highly centralist doctrine of the communist period left no room for local self government; local administration was subordinated to higher ties and branches of central government, and local discretion to decide on financial issues or modes of service delivery was next to none" (Swianiewicz 2005: 100).

With the political change in the Central and Eastern European Countries the system of a centrally planned economy had been abandoned and as a result the influence of the central state and sector-related approach on the local level has diminished. The current state the of the political sphere in post-socialist cities is therefore completely different than in former times.

The societal and economical organisation of the socialist countries determined another role for cities. In post-socialism this organisation has changed. The concept of Urban Governance seems to provide a tool to analyse the political sphere and the organisation of urban development in post-socialist cities. The main aspects and research perspectives are described in the next chapter.

The concept of Urban Governance

The use of the term “governance” increased in the last years but it seems that also the number of definitions what governance and especially Urban Governance is and what it is not has increased equally. The concept of Urban Governance was contested since its very beginning and until now, no single most important theory or definition of Urban Governance can be detected (Beaumont et al. 2006: 9). Depending on the point of view, Urban Governance can be seen as a theory, as a normative model or as an empirical study (Pierre 2005: 451ff).

Originally the concept of governance emerged in the Mid 1980s in economic theory, where it described the influence of hierarchical structures on transaction costs (Benz 2004: 15). But governance exceeded the field of economic theory very soon and became a truly interdisciplinary concept (Schuppert 2006). In political science the governance concept was linked to the steering discussion and the changing role of the state (Mayntz/Scharpf 1995). The classical steering theory divided clearly between steering subject (the state) and steering object (existing social systems including actors from the civil society and private actors). The idea of the state as the steering subject, thus the general concept of an active state was challenged. The state alone could not solve anymore the increasingly complex problems of society. Therefore the concept of the state changed from an active to a cooperative state. This means that the distinct division between steering subject and object disappeared. Steering subjects became also involved in designing societal rules and the regulatory framework (Mayntz 2004). This change of statehood can also be stated for the urban dimension. The classical steering model between municipality and society lost significance while new steering forms with a changing role of the local government and a stronger involvement of private actors came to the fore. This appearance of governance was stated as one major tendency in the political sphere throughout European cities and leads to various implications for cities, ranging from organisational issues to more general aspects like the character of local representative democracy in new governance arrangements (Denters/Rose 2005, Denters 2006).

Benz (2004: 19) sees as the main issues the question how collective problems are solved in a society and how political decisions are made. This implies a broad understanding of political processes. As Treib et al. (2007) pointed out in a recently published article, the division of the political sphere in the dimensions of polity, politics and policy provides analytical categories to describe the term governance. It is possible to define “the “universe” within which research

on governance may be located” (Treib et al. 2007: 2). Therefore Government/Governance can be divided into polity, politics and policy aspects:

- Polity describes the institutional aspects in which political processes take place. In other words, political and other actors act in a framework, which consists out of institutions, normative aspects and laws. This framework is described as the polity dimension. In the field of polity the shift from Government to Governance can be described as the increasing importance of an institutional structure, which combines elements of hierarchy, systems of negotiations and mechanisms of competition (Benz 2004: 21)
- Politics focuses on the actor perspective and the power relation between political and other actors (Treib et al 2007: 3). One question concerning politics is for example how political guidelines or urban development plans are made and in what way different actors interplay in this process. Also issues like conflicts and cooperations are part of the politics dimension. The shift from Urban Government to Urban Governance emphasise the rising importance of negotiations between public and private actors concerning the steering of a city.
- The last dimension is polity which describes the content of political actions. What are the objectives of the political processes and how should particular policy goals be achieved? In the polity dimension of governance aspects like the inclusion of non-public actors to reach political goals and the shift from universal planning approaches to a planning through projects-approach mark the difference to government.

The main differences between Government and Governance in the polity, politics and policy dimensions are described in table 1.

Table 1: Government and Governance contrasted

	Government	Governance
Polity		
Number of institutions	Few	Many
Bureaucratic structure	Hierarchical, Consolidated	Decentred, Fragmented
Politics		
Networks	Closed/Minimal	Extensive
Power relations	Public authorities as steering subjects, private actors as steering objects	Unclear division between steering subjects and steering objects
Policy		
Mode of policies	Routinized	Innovative learning
Steering mode	Regulations and Norms, Commands or prohibition	Agreements and compromises

Own source on the basis of Albers 1993, Benz 2005 and John 2001

The next chapter analyses Warsaw as one example of a post-socialist city and examines the three dimensions of polity, politics and policy. It is tried to figure out whether Urban Governance is a concept which is suitable for describing urban development in Warsaw or if another approach should be chosen.

Urban Governance in Warsaw

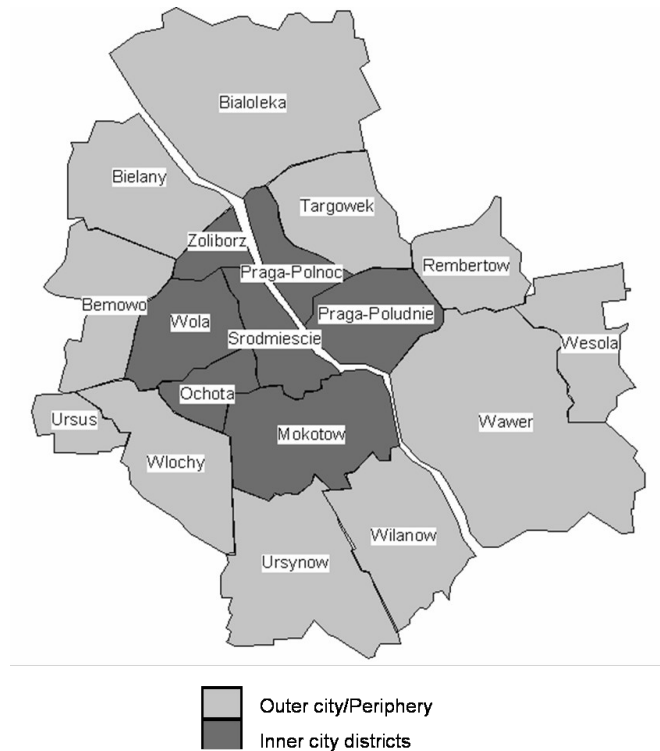
The transformation process of Poland has some peculiarities: Poland (like for example also the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Hungary) was one of the “fast-track” reforming states, where the transformation process started in the end of the 1980s/beginning of the 1990s (although the origins like the actions of the trade union Solidarnosc were much earlier). Poland chose a shock-therapy approach of transformation which meant that a rapid, comprehensive and far-reaching program of reforms to implement “normal” capitalism was realized already in 1990 (Sachs 1994). The rapid change of the political and economical system was first visible in the cities. Especially in Warsaw, the biggest Polish city, the transformation had enormous effects on the spatial structure but also on the political constitution of the city as it will be shown in the next chapter. Thus Warsaw is one of the Central and Eastern European cities where the shift from socialism to post-socialism is most advanced. The example of Warsaw can therefore give some hints about the future development of cities where the transformation process is developing slower.

Warsaw has 1.7 million inhabitants and is besides being the biggest Polish city also the capital of Poland. The city structure is highly influenced by the destructions of the Second World War. The neighbourhoods on the western side of the river Vistula were almost completely destroyed. Only in the Eastern districts Praga-Poludnie and Praga-Polnoc pre-war building structures remained. After the war Warsaw was reconstructed in large parts according to socialist city planning principles. With the fall of the socialist regime in the late 1980s, the political as well as the city structure of Warsaw changed enormously. Being the economic centre of the country the inflow of foreign direct investment was very high and resulted in a huge amount of new investments in the built environment. Skyscrapers emerged and became symbols of a modern, post-socialist Warsaw. The “North-Americanisation” of the city through skyscrapers as well as new shopping malls became one of the major trends in the Varsovian urban development during the 1990ies.

Another specific feature of Warsaw was and is the housing shortage. During socialist times state programs to increase the housing construction in prefabricated buildings were passed in order to provide adequate housing for the increasing population of Warsaw. A huge amount of new apartments were built, but the shortage couldn't be stopped. In the 1990ies and up to now this housing shortage still exists. Even though the population of Warsaw is increasing

only slightly, the decrease of the average household size leads to a growing demand for housing.

Map 1: The city of Warsaw



Own source

Polity

Urban Governance in the dimension of polity describes new forms of institutional structures, where elements of hierarchical and negotiational aspects as well as mechanisms of competition are combined. New correlations between different kinds of institutions gain importance (like for example interactions between institutions on different spatial levels as the European Union, the regional level and the municipalities). Simultaneously, the classical hierarchical institutional structures still exist but are generally more open towards processes of cooperation and negotiation with private and public actors and therefore less exclusive.

In Warsaw, the situation is different: The institutional formation changed very much in the time since 1990. Already in march 1990 the Polish Parliament adopted the “Local Government Act”. With this law a decentralisation of power from the state level to the communal (=gmina) level took place. Due to the size of Warsaw a special law was adopted in Mai 1990: Warsaw was divided into seven independent gminas (now the inner city districts of Warsaw, see map 1), which had the same power like all the other Polish municipalities and had insofar far-reaching independence concerning the developments within their boundaries.

This institutional formation provoked many critics; Letowski (in Judge 1995: 365) described the situation of Warsaw in the beginning of the 90ies in harsh words: “The city is dying before our eyes. It is not only the victim of the general collapse of the country, but also of the labyrinthine division of the city into independent communes. Above the communes is a mayor who is virtually powerless...”. The next change in the institutional structure of the city took place in 1994. With the new Warsaw act, the incorporation of the ten surrounding gminas, which form today the outer city of Warsaw (with the exception of Wesola, which was incorporated later) was decided. The institutional situation of Warsaw further complicated: The former seven independent gminas were merged into one big centrum municipality, but still had some legal powers, for example an own financial budget. Thus, Warsaw consisted of 11 independent gminas, with a further division of the biggest gmina Warsaw centrum in seven smaller districts. As a result of the new Warsaw act, the institutional structure of the city was splitted into three administrative levels, the whole city, the municipalities/gminas and the districts of the Warsaw centrum municipality. One of the main problems was as in the years before the far-reaching independence of the municipalities which made it almost impossible to realize goals for the whole city. In the field of urban planning the municipalities had all the competencies, in other words: They could decide without any further coordination with the city authorities or the other Varsovian municipalities what and where to build. Plans for the whole city like for example the *Warsaw Development strategy until the year 2010* existed but where almost powerless. The idea that the positive development of the eleven gminas automatically led to a positive development for the whole city, was wrong: The political processes of the gminas were very much focused on the gmina, and as a result the development of the whole city was neglected.

The big administrative reform of Poland in 1998 where the number of wojewodships was reduced and with the powiats a new regional administrative level was created, didn't had any influence on Warsaw. The next change in the institutional structure in Warsaw happened not until 2002. The role of the independent municipalities was heavily criticised and in 2002 a “re-centralisation” was adopted with the “Act on the structure of the capital city of Warsaw”. This act reduced the competencies of the gminas and merged the former independent gminas to one Warsaw municipality. Power was devolved to the administration of the Warsaw municipality. For example, they have now the full responsibility in the field of urban planning (creating plans or issuing building permissions).

The development of the institutional structure of Warsaw does not follow the concept of Urban Governance and leads in another direction. The element of competition, which was a characteristic of the polity of Warsaw in the 1990ies, has changed with the Act of 2002. The new structure is far more hierarchical organised. Elements of negotiation or of the inclusion of private actors don't play a role. Also other aspects like voluntary cooperation with the municipalities in the region or the formation of a Warsaw metropolitan region are not seen.

Therefore aspects of governance are not visible in the polity dimension. In contrast, it seems that during the post-socialist transformation period it took some years and different laws to create a functional Urban Government in Warsaw. Governance in the institutional perspective of the polity dimension was so far not a characteristic of Warsaw.

Politics

The concept of Urban Governance emphasises in the politics dimension the heterogeneity of the actors. In contrast to the government perspective the number of actors is higher. Public and private actors are involved in steering the city, thus the differentiation between steering object (which were the public authorities) and steering subject (which were the private actors) is less clear than in the classical government.

A quick analyse of the urban development in Warsaw supports this view: The housing market for example is now much more influenced through private developers and individual house-builders than it was in the 90ies. The share of the public authorities in the construction of new housing has gone down. Also in other fields of urban development like office and retail the private actors have a crucial significance. In these fields the number of actors has been multiplied in the phase of transformation as well. But this growing importance of private actors is not yet the new steering form of governance. On a formal level, the influence of private actors on steering urban development is low: The *Study of Conditions and Directions of Urban Development of Warsaw* from 2006 as well as the *strategy for Warsaw until the year 2020* have been created mainly by the city authorities. Private developers or other kind of enterprises were not involved in the creation of this document. Also the participation of the citizens cannot be called a new form of steering: There was just the formal participation like the disclosure of the Plans, but no further reaching kind of participation. Thus these two plans are products of the city hall and not the result of exchange of different public and private actors. In principle the objectives of urban development in Warsaw are defined by public authorities (steering subject) and have influence on the private actors (steering object) So far, we can speak as well as in the polity dimension rather of a governmental mode of steering than of governance.

But in contrast to the formal level of the urban development strategy, the influence of private actors in steering urban development is much bigger on the informal level. Especially the role of private developers on the politics of urban development can hardly be overestimated. The projects which are realised in Warsaw in the field of housing, office or retail have a big influence on the urban development and are heavily influenced from private actors. There are a lot of modes of cooperation between public and private actors which are not formalised, but which are necessary to realize new projects. For example, the number of plots which are not “planned” -which means that no local plans define the future use of these plots- is very high in Warsaw. But developers can obtain a building permission from the public authorities even for

these plots, “the present situation favours those who know how to negotiate effectively with local governments”, as one developer stated (Eurobuild 2005: 27). This leads towards high influence of private actors on urban development processes on the project level: New building projects depend on the negotiational abilities of the private actors, steering is thus not anymore an exclusive task of public authorities.

Further research to analyse the role of the developers in steering urban development politics is needed, but some first conclusions can be drawn: In the process of strategic planning hardly any form of cooperation between public and private actors can be seen. But on the project level forms of governance are clearly visible.

Policy

In the field of policy the content of political processes or the “mode of political steering” (Héritier 2002: 185, Treib et al. 2007: 4) is the main focus. Governance in the policy dimension emphasise the changing role of regulations and norms. In contrast to the government approach, the regulations and norms are more flexible and less rigid. The aim is not to govern through commands or prohibitions but through agreements and compromises which result through bargaining in networks with different actors (Benz 2004: 21). In urban development policies this leads to a different role of spatial planning. The legally binding plan, which determine the future development of the whole city loses significance and a more project-orientated planning approach gains importance.

Warsaw’s *Development strategy for the year 2020* names five strategic goals for the city: The amelioration of the living quality and of security, the strengthening of the cultural identity, the creation of metropolitan functions, economic growth and spatial order. The strategic goals are further specified in operational goals. While some of these operational goals have a city-wide dimension, also a project-orientation can be stated in the development strategy: The development of the area around the stadium, the future constitution of the palace of culture area as well as the location of the Kopernikus science center are among the main projects. Other important projects are the revitalisation of the central street Krakowskie Przedmiescie, the saxon axis and infrastructural projects. The exactitude of the description of the projects (architectural layouts) contrasts with the vagueness of implementation strategy. It remains open, how these projects are financed and how private actors, which are necessary to realize the projects (for example the establishment of a business center around Marzalkowska street) are involved.

In the polity dimensions some aspects of governance can be seen in Warsaw’s urban development²: The strategy includes aspects of a city wide steering approach as well as a project orientation. But the strategy is more a vision, which delivers a picture how certain

² The more comprehensive *Study of Conditions and Directions of Urban Development of Warsaw* contains a detailed analysis of the current state of Warsaw and many guidelines concerning aspects of land-use and spatial planning, but aspects of implementation are also neglected.

areas of Warsaw can look in the future. Insofar the strategy has more the character of a wish-list, than of a coherent planning document.

Thus, the trend towards a more flexible planning approach which steers not through commands and prohibitions is also a feature of the urban development of Warsaw. But the projects were not chosen in a negotiation of public and private actors, they are a result of exclusive public will. Compromises and implementation plan for the projects were not part of *“the strategy until the year 2020”*. To sum it up, in the policy fields are some element of governance visible, but other aspects like the creation of compromises to reach common objectives can not be stated for Warsaw urban policy.

Conclusion

Even though in this paper only a short description of the political sphere in Warsaw was possible, some concluding remarks can be made. The division in polity, politics and policy shows, that governance is a multi-dimensional concept. The shift from government to governance has institutional, procesual and content related dimensions. The situation in Warsaw has been analysed according to this analytical framework. The result is a rather unclear picture. It can be stated that the political processes in socialist cities were organized completely different than in post-socialist cities. We can see a shift from a centralised system with no freedom of action to a more democratized system with more power for the local level. But this shift has nothing to do with the shift from Urban Government to Urban Governance. The polity perspectives demonstrated that the institutional context of Warsaw was rather unstable. The independence of the city's districts resulted in a powerless city of Warsaw. As recently as in 2002 the city gained room for manoeuvre in the sphere of urban planning and other fields of activity. Polity governance aspects like an institutional structure not only based on hierarchy but also on bargaining and competition are not identifiable. By contrast, in the politics and policy dimensions do governance aspects exist like the increasing heterogeneity of private actors, the orientation towards a project based planning approach and the informality at the realisation of building projects. However, the situation is not so crystal-clear: Some important elements of governance are missing. The participation of private actors, the search for partners to realise urban development projects, bargaining in order to initiate and implement projects can not be seen in Warsaw.

Thus a clear difference between the political processes concerning urban development in Warsaw and the concept of governance as it has been described by authors like John (2001) for Western European cities exists. In Warsaw, different processes seem to happen similarly:

- The search and in 2002 finally the creation of a stable local government
- The growing influence of private actors on urban development due to their financial power and the attractiveness of Warsaw as a place to invest
- The need for a strategic document how Warsaw should be developed in the next years

- The growing interest in flagship projects with high symbolical and city-wide meaning like the Palace of Culture or the Krakowskie Przedmiescie street
- The transformation of the municipalities role from the lowest level of the planned economy during socialism to independent political actors in post-socialist times

The complexity of these processes as well as the interactions between these factors leads towards a different form of governance. On the one hand, the concept of governance seems somehow too limited to describe the complex reality of the urban development in Warsaw. On the other hand the governance concept gives an analytical frame which allows us too see Warsaw's political sphere in a larger context. To sum it up and to answer the initial research question: Yes, we can analyse Warsaw's urban political process with the governance framework, but a simple transfer of the experiences from western European cities is not possible. The synchrony of transformation aspects and capitalist urban development (increasing significance of private actors) result in a special, Varsovian form of Urban Governance.

Urban Governance in post-socialist cities is still a quite new research subject and therefore many questions remain open. Further analyses are needed to examine if Warsaw differs from other post-socialist cities or if common elements can be found. Also the future development of post-socialist Urban Governance is open. This touches the old question, how long the transformation period lasts and what will be at the end of this process. It is beyond the objective of this paper to give answers to these difficult questions, but as the differences between the theoretical concept of Governance and Urban Governance in Warsaw shows, there is no predestination or determination of the path, the direction and the length of the transformation.

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