

The role of culture as a stimulator of transforming industrial cities into creative ones. Case study of Lodz, Poland

Mariusz E. Sokołowicz¹, Jakub Zasina²

1. University of Lodz, Department of Regional Economics and Environment, POLAND, Lodz, Rewolucji 1905 street 39, E-mail: sokol@uni.lodz.pl
2. University of Lodz, Department of Regional Economics and Environment, POLAND, Lodz, Rewolucji 1905 street 39, E-mail: j.zasina@uni.lodz.pl

Paper presents the impact of culture for urban development in different stages, referring to the process of transforming urban economies from industrial to "creative". Case study presents contemporary changes in third largest Polish post-industrial city – Lodz. The role of culture and people's creativity was compared here with the results of the survey made among inhabitants of Lodz. Research revealed that despite many economic struggles, city is able to transform cultural offer to today's needs, referring to its territorial specificity. However, also some problems and challenges were identified, to which cultural policy must respond.

Key words – urban economics, creative city, cultural offer, economic transformation.

I. Introduction

In contemporary economic literature one can observe the growing interest in the issues of the role of human creativity in building competitive advantage and innovativeness, and the growing meaning of so called "creative sectors" or "creative industries" (e.g. advertising, art, fashion, film, publishing, R&D, etc.) for economic output. In consequence, more and more local and regional authorities attempt to implement various strategies, aiming at using the creative potential of the communities in order to stimulate development.

An evolution from industrial into a creative and culture-based city can be observed also in case of third largest city in Poland – Lodz. Although recognizable mainly by its post-industrial heritage and even more by post-industrial decline, Lodz has started coming back to its own specific cultural traditions, attempting to implement them in its development strategy. The aim of this paper is to present this transformation from the evolutionary perspective, especially by analyzing, to what extent these changes fix to cultural offer of the city. For this purpose, first section points to the role of culture in building a creative city, while second section is a case study of this aspect for the city of Lodz. Third part of this paper presents results of a survey study conducted among the inhabitants of the agglomeration of Lodz, concentrating on their acceptance of its cultural offer and the level of their participation in cultural events. Last section concludes.

II. Culture as a factor of urban development in the context of the "creative cities" concept

In recent years, one can observe a growing interest in the creativity and its role in local and regional development. Creative businesses, industries, cities or regions seem to be not only a new trend but simply a fashion among both researchers and policy makers. Since this tendency is correlated with the aspirations to build a knowledge-based ("smart") economy (on both the European and local levels), this perspective is an attractive approach for local and regional development strategies[1].

This idea started to spread on the ground of issues devoted to the development of cities and regions, especially in the context of the term of "creative cities" or "intelligent cities"[2]. Cities of its kind have in their forefront the function of innovation, which dominates over the traditional functions such as work, leisure, housing and mobility. If a given city manages to be "intelligent", it will translate into its economic success[3].

What is very close to the concept of "intelligent cities", it is the idea of "creative cities and regions", popularized at the beginning of 21st century by Richard Florida. In the contemporary post-industrial societies, human creativity is the basic factor of development of cities, regions and the whole nations[4]. What is important, human creativity is defined here as a primarily psychological feature of people[5].

In a similar vein, the concept of creative cities is currently popularized by town-planner Charles Landry, indicating that human creativity remains a key economic resource of contemporary cities, but its cultivation requires favourable urban environment[6]. In other words, urban economics success is not determined only by the presence of technical infrastructure, labour pool and industries, but also efficient communication and telecommunications systems, developed social infrastructure, conducive to a high level of quality of life, as well as political factors (e.g. competent authorities being open to the bottom activities and cooperation with urban activists), and cultural factors (e.g. openness). On the basis of these assumptions so called Creative City Index was constructed. [7].

Thus, creativity became important not only in the industry and high-technology related sectors, but has also arrived to companies and other organizations of the services sector. In this sense, also culture-related activities start to be defined as "creative sectors" – a part of "creative economy"[8]. As a consequence, the latter determine economics development on both national scale, and the scale of urban areas. What is important, this tendency occurred not only in highly developed countries, but also in developing and transformation countries.

In this context, Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift indicated many interrelations between culture and economy. First of all, signs, symbols, and desire, as a part of every culture, affect the structure of consumption. Secondly, "creative industries" increasingly power the economy. Interesting analysis of the growing role of "creative" and

“cultural” industries in cities’ development in Poland can be found in: Z. Przygodzki and P. Pożycka [9] or in case of Slovakia is in: K. Petrikova, A. Vanova and K. Borsekova [10]. Also, national business, technological and educational traditions shape competitive potential. Further, markets try to respond to variation in customers’ preferences, while these variations depend on culture. Finally, economic transactions are sustained by habits of trust and reciprocity, and even conventions of economic knowledge depend of culture, since they rely in more than incidental ways on fashions, and their performance by business schools, gurus and the media[1].

Above considerations and new insights into the cultural sector has led in consequence to more and more widespread belief, that today culture has a twofold role. On one hand, it is an important economic sector and on the other hand, it creates an environment for innovation and creativity[12]. In the latter context, what becomes widespread, it is a conviction of important role in the development of territorial units, evidenced by numerous scientific studies on this topic[13].

III. “Smart” evolution of Lodz from industrial to creative and culture-based city

City of Lodz grown on the medieval foundation, what is typical for Polish cities. However, its history turned out in completely different way than development processes of other big cities of the country like Warsaw, Cracow, Wroclaw or Poznan. When between middle ages and the beginning of the industrial revolution’s époque, those cities were growing up and were hosting important functions (e.g. economic, administrative, cultural ones), Lodz was still small, rural and rather sleepy town located outside of faster developing areas. However, though no one foresaw it, Lodz became huge textile centre in the 19th century, thanks to governmental investments, economic policy, geographical advantages and positive external factors. Lodz went from agricultural to industrial era just in few decades. The tempo of city development can be imagined by figures of population growth: in 1790 Lodz has 250 inhabitants; up to 1915 the number increased to 600 000 [14]. This fact has determined character of the city and its next phases of evolution.

Authors of the first plans of city development imagined Lodz as a middle-range industrial centre. Most of the plans were prepared and implemented in the middle of the 19th century and the city’s borders were not extended up to 1915. This limitation in combination with fast development and dynamic population growth, resulted in very dense and truly unique urban fabric, which can be characterised by mix of factories, tenement houses, villas and palaces. What is more, factory owners shaped their properties as so-called inner-cities: self-sufficient organisms highly linked functionally and structurally with the businesses. This phase of development took effect in the deficit of public spaces and cultural centres, what was also the result of lack of public investments in those fields.

Lodz got the administrative promotion in the interwar period (1918-1939), when the city became the capital

of the region and the abode of both the military and the church [15]. Also, the creation of democratic local government those times has contributed to better insuring of city’s needs. Sensible politicians decided to start new investments for educational and cultural infrastructure. Using contemporary nomenclature, this process could be described as a starting point of making the city more „smart”. This period of time was also very important for artistic society of Lodz, because the city became a significant centre of modern art movement, thanks to the activity of the „a.r.” group. Led by Władysław Strzemiński, Katarzyna Kobro and Henryk Stażewski, the „a.r.” created in 1931 a permanent exhibition of worldwide modern art. Some says that it was the second modern art museum in the world [16]. Another case was popularity of cinematography for city’s inhabitants, what resulted in quite big number of small cinemas in the cityscape.

The process of making the city and its inhabitants smarter continued in the post-war communistic reality. Attempts to creation of university in Lodz, which had been taking since 19th century, finally succeed. In 1950 six universities were already operating: University of Lodz, Technical University, Medical University, Academy of Fine Arts, Academy of Music and – probably most recognizable – Lodz Film School. City became an important centre of film industry. Worth to mention is the post-war activity of Oscar-winning SE-MA-FOR animation studio. The avant-garde character of the city luckily remained. One of its signs was the first edition of international “Construction in Process” exhibition, organised in 1981. Brand-new cultural institutions received their headquarters – like the Grand Theatre and the Music Theatre – or were located in existing industrial buildings – like Central Museum of Textiles. On the one hand the new city-forming functions appeared, but on the another hand the city centre was permanently underinvested. More money was spent on huge and mono-functional housing or industrial areas located mostly in the outskirts of Lodz. Spatial planning of the city followed directly the ideas of Athens Charter – was a doctrinal document of CIAM (International Congresses of Modern Architecture, fr. *Congrès International d’Architecture Moderne*) from 1933, focusing on modernistic urban planning. The process of core city’s abandonment, typical for most of industrial urban areas in the world, has started. In the same time Lodz was still developing mainly as a centre of textile industry with vestigial share of another economic functions, what had an strong impact in the next phase of city history: market-driven reality after breaking the communism in 1989.

Mono-functional economy of the city became a key problem for city government in 1990s and early 2000s. After bankruptcy of many factories, the unemployment rate was ranked as one of the highest in the country. In 2004 unemployment rate was 18,4%, decreasing to 6,8% in 2008 as the best result in contemporary history of the city. In 2012 the rate was 12,1% [17]. Shortage of workplaces, population decrease (from the peak of more

than 850 000 people in 1984 to 718 960 in 2012 [18]), city centre's decay, no help from the national government and general tendencies in global economy resulted in the situation, in which Lodz had to find new concept for itself. Services became the biggest element of local economy. The inhabitants of the city had to re-specialise themselves. The number of students (71 775 in 2012[19]) was growing constantly year by year similar to the number of tourists exploring mostly industrial heritage of the city. The main public space of the city – Piotrkowska Street – became a scenery for new events like techno parade and activities of Piotrkowska Street Foundation. The Four Cultures Dialogue Festival gained national recognition. The problem was still the bad condition of urban fabric and bad reputation of the city in general [20].

For many years Lodz did not have an official and complex strategy of development, what resulted in uncontrolled processes of economic, spatial and social evolution. In 2000s Lodz focused on successful strategy of obtaining new industrial investors. However, the end of the decade showed the paradigm shift: presence of culture and creative industries was boosted in the discussions about the future of the city. Interesting is that those elements were inserted into the discussions by non-governmental organisations (e.g. Lodz Art Center), usually led by young people. The key momentum for their popularity was the time of Lodz's candidate to the title of European Capital of Culture (ECC) in 2016. Social acceptance of this initiative and positive political atmosphere helped in underlining the role of culture and creative sector for the local economy. New investments and events appeared in Lodz strategic documents.

Although Lodz was not chosen as ECC in 2016, the ideas produced during the preparations have not been left. New initiatives, like Lodz Design Festival and Fashion Philosophy Fashion Week Poland, based on exogenous values of the city, became one of the most attractive events for tourists. The slogan "Lodz creates" started to promote the city officially. The new city's logo and visual identity relate directly to 1930s Lodz avant-garde movement. All those elements included in the PR strategy were established and highly linked with associations with the creative sector. City of Lodz Office started the promotion of the city as a good location for creative businesses of young people. Next former factories have been transformed into the spaces of culture. A good example is OFF Piotrkowska Center - operated by private company and located in the 19th century textile factory now hosts many of businesses of this kind. The OFF Piotrkowska Center's success was as big that the City of Lodz Office started to rent its premises located in the area of Piotrkowska Street with small prices for similar initiatives, what revived the space of the street.

All in all culture did not have an important role of Lodz development in 19th and 20th centuries, like in many other Polish large cities. It was rather the rank-and-file activity, which definitely was not driven directly by the local or national government. Although this political marginality, Lodz was important centre of avant-garde movement in art and film. In recent years this model has

been changed. Thanks to non-governmental organisations, culture and creativity have been included in city's strategic documents focusing on development and promotion. However, Lodz still does not have an architectural icon of this change, what is characteristic for other European cities, which decided to revitalise itself, like e. g. well known example is Bilbao's Guggenheim Museum designed by star-architect Frank Gehry. The model of Lodz redevelopment have been resulting rather in the reuse of former 19th century factories than in the creation of the new iconic buildings. The opportunity of creation the iconic symbol of revitalisation processes of Lodz may be the EC1 – the former power plant with contemporary parts – which will hold the interactive museum of power production.

IV. Cultural offer of the city of Lodz – does it contribute to making it a “creative city”?

In order to assess the potential of the cultural offer of the city of Lodz, as well to verify its relevance to the process (existing or not) of conversion into a “creative city”, at the end of 2011 a study among inhabitants of the city and the whole agglomeration was made by the Student Research Circle of Spatial Economy at the University of Lodz SPATIUM affiliated with the Department of Regional Economics and Environment at the Faculty of Economics and Sociology, commissioned by the city's authorities responsible for cultural policy. As such, it is an excellent example of cooperation between science and practice[21].

Having no sampling draw but aiming at ensuring representativeness of the results, research was conducted using the techniques of personal interview questionnaire, implemented in five sites in Lodz – popular public and semi-public spaces (shopping malls' plazas in both city centre and peripheries, as well as city's main street). This approach allowed to reach respondents reflecting the structure of the whole population. Group of respondents consisted of 490 people and reflected the structure of the Lodz inhabitants by age and sex. To get the objective of assessment the cultural offer of the city, research team decided to gather empirical evidence while guaranteeing the presence of representatives of different social groups with different characteristics, preferences and needs. For this reason, the survey has not been intentionally carried out in areas closely related to culture (like museums, theatres, etc.).

Questionnaire consisted of issues regarding both recognition and participation in the events and places of culture. In case of the latter, places were divided into theatres, museums, art galleries, music clubs, art cafés, etc. In other words, both big cultural city institutions and small (often non-formal) cultural places were taken into account. Additionally, methodology considered both closed and open questions. Details on respondents included such features as place of living by districts, sex, age, income, occupation, as well as intensity and directions of participation in cultural events.

An important element of the study were the most attractive and popular places of the city, indicated by the

respondents as related to culture. The aim of this part of the research was to answer the question, which areas of the city are the most recognizable, well attended and with which of them people identify with.

The general characteristics of the most frequently cited locations can be grouped into the “big four”, most associated with the cultural picture of the city (Figs.1-5). Among them one can mention Grand Theatre (city’s opera), Lodz Philharmonic Hall at fourth place and, what is interesting, Piotrkowska Street (main street), and market square of Manufaktura Centre – area of the former textile plant converted into a commercial and cultural centre with the semi-public spaces. The term “semi-public” in relation to open space is constructed due to the fact of their actual public availability. The prefix “semi” is an effect of their ownership state. Although from the legal point of view they are private, their “public” results from the way of shaping and use. This “public” concerns the possibility of implementing social contacts between different collectives there, including those associated with different styles of life, cultural circles, etc. [22]. These places are considered most characteristic and popular on the city map, guaranteeing, according to respondents, a good level of events and having adequately strong brand. Especially case of most recognizable public and semi-public spaces is interesting here, since it supports thesis disseminated by theorists, that this element of city structure, together with its users, is one of the key element of contemporary “creative cities”.

More detailed analysis showed, that some non-formal, private-founded places are much more popular than public ones. A good example is rather small art café called “Owoce i warzywa” (eng. “Fruits and vegetables”) located in the city centre, which provides cultural offer including movie screenings, discussions, concerts, sale of books, etc. The café is recognized by 8% of inhabitants, when almost all city’s official cultural centres located in different districts of Lodz have a recognition ratio on the level lower than 4%.

The core of the analysis of the cultural offer of the city of Lodz was however based on two other indices:

1. recognition ratio of events – showing the percentage of respondents who only heard of the event;
2. participation ratio in the events – showing the percentage of respondents indicating that they actually took part in the event.

The first important conclusion derived from the analysis of the results, is a relatively big discrepancy between the values of recognition rate and participation rate. It should be interpreted as some negative aspect, bearing in mind important role of societal behaviours in building “creative cities”. For example, in case of the most recognizable Four Cultures’ Dialogue Festival, almost two times less inhabitants of the agglomeration of Lodz knew this event than participated in it. Having at least few reasons of this situation (e.g. still low level of willingness to participate in high culture even at the level of the whole Poland), one should bear it mind that cost of participation is not necessarily a barrier in this case (most parts of this event is free of charge).

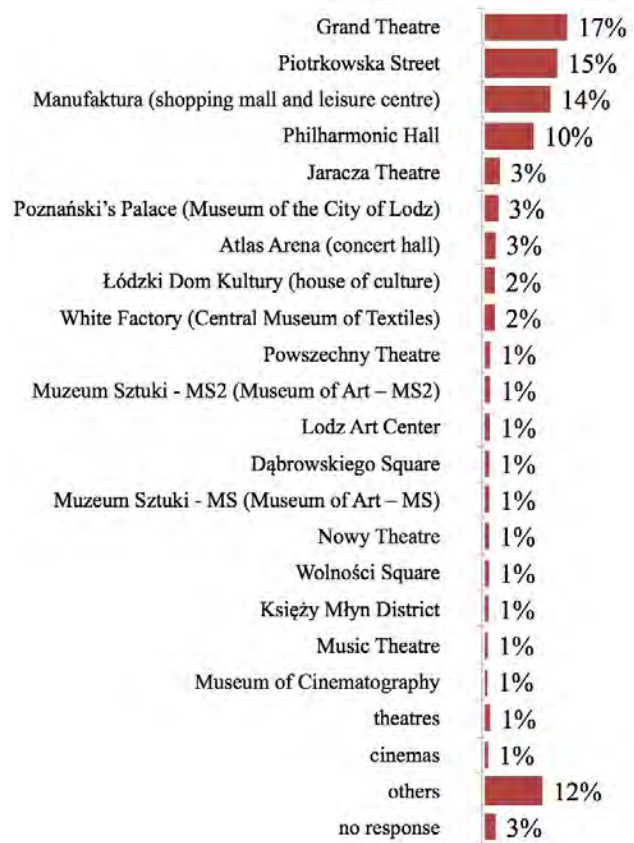


Fig.1 Most recognizable cultural places in Lodz by its inhabitants. Source: Results of own study



Figs.2-5 The „big four”: the most recognizable cultural places of Lodz, Poland: Grand Theatre (2), Piotrkowska Street (3), Manufaktura Centre (4) and Philharmonic Hall (5). Photos: Jakub Zasina, 2007-2011.

Another conclusion drew is that most recognizable events are at least partially reflecting the local specificity of a place (Fig.6). Four Cultures’ Dialogue Festival mentioned above refers directly to the multicultural past of Lodz, Rubinstein Piano Festival recalls the place of birth and education of one of most famous virtuoso, Film Music Festival is organised by most recognizable film

school in Poland, Lodz Design Festival refers to the growing activity of designers – alumni of Władysław Strzemiński Academy of Fine Arts, etc. In recent years the organisation of Fashion Philosophy Fashion Week Poland started also: the event not included in the survey, but highly related to the textile heritage of the city, the most important fashion event in the country.

As a consequence it can be stated, that cultural potential embedded in existing and most recognizable event is very high and gives a chance of building competitive advantage based on local endogenous resources. However, challenge for the future are the social changes leading to greater identification of the city's inhabitants with its culture and cultural activity.

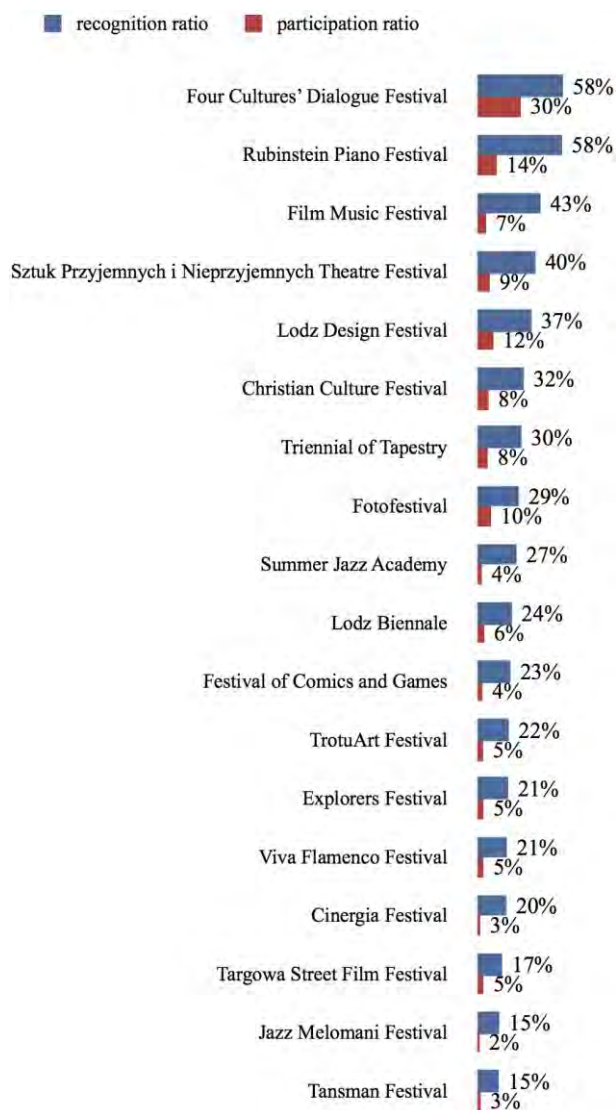


Fig.6 Most recognizable cultural places in Lodz by its inhabitants. Source: Results of own study

What should be mentioned here, is quite low participation ratio in cultural events of city's inhabitants. 26% of them do not participate in any event during the all year. 51% of Lodz's inhabitants participate in maximum 4 events per year. Combination those results with the previous ones (people recognize cultural places, but

do not use them) induce to the thought, that city's cultural policy for the next years should include some actions of promoting the participatory in public life.

Conclusion

Although transforming urban economies from traditional into "creative" ones is already a worldwide trend, each city should find its own way of performing this transformation. This seems very reasonable from the point of view of urban economics and management sciences, since seeking distinctive competences (as rare and hardly imitable local resources) is one of main condition for building competitive advantage. There is no doubt this rule concerns also territories.

In fact, this is especially difficult for cities experiencing problems resulting from economic monoculture and dominance of traditional industries. However, the case of the city of Lodz presented in this paper reveals that it is still possible. What is more, the use of culture in spite of the problems that affects it, when fixed to local specificity and local tradition in this matter, can be even presented as one best examples of "smart" cities' strategy. Finally, the above analysis reveals that often no big investments and activities, but bottom-up initiatives, inspired and carried out by young people and socially engaged activists, are much more effective economically that operations of large and often artificially inflated cultural institutions.

It does not mean, however, that the smart cultural policy to build creative cities is not needed. Not everything can be built on local initiatives. Even community involvement in cultural life – as our research revealed – still leaves much to be required. Building cultural city offer tailored to the needs of the local community, undertaking actions to promote participation in culture among inhabitants and even the flagship investment in cultural infrastructure, are necessary. However, one should always remember that at the very end, the success is not determined only by large scale investment, but to much more bigger extent, by the involvement of consumers and – most importantly – by making culture in line with its territorial specificity.

References

- [1] M. E. Sokołowicz, "Is the community of Lodz informed about living in creative city? City of Lodz' branding strategy and its perception", *Studia Ekonomiczne. Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego w Katowicach*, 149, 2013, p. 256.
- [2] N. Komninos N., *Intelligent Cities and Globalisation of Innovation Networks*, Abingdon-New-York: Routledge, 2008, p. 271.
- [3] J. Kwaśny, A. Mroczek, "Kraków jako miasto kreatywnych – adaptacja koncepcji R. Florydy"; in *Oblicza innowacyjności w regionie: Acta Universitatis Lodzensis Folia Oeconomica*, no. 290, M. E. Sokołowicz and E. Kina, Eds. Lodz: University of Lodz Press, 2013, p. 94.
- [4] R. Florida, *Whos's Your City?*, New York: Basic Books, 2009, p. 109.

- [5] R. Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, New York: Basic Books, 2004, p. 38.
- [6] Ch. Landry, *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators*, Taylor & Francis, 2012.
- [7] <http://charleslandry.com/themes/creative-cities-index/>. Access: 02.10.2013.
- [8] A. Jewtuchowicz, "Industries créatives – une opportunité pour le développement de Lodz métropolitaine?", *Studia Ekonomiczne. Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego w Katowicach*, 149, 2013, pp.188-193.
- [9] "Sektor kreatywny w polskich miastach – Analiza porównawcza Gdańska, Katowic, Łodzi, Poznania, Warszawy i Wrocławia", *Studia Ekonomiczne Regionu Łódzkiego*, No. IX, Lodz: Economic Society in Łódź, 2013, pp. 167-188.
- [10] K. Petrikova, A. Vanova and K. Borsekova, "The role of creative economy in Slovak Republic", *AI & Society*, no. 146, September 2013. Available at: http://download.springer.com/static/pdf/366/art%253A10.1007%252Fs00146-013-0508-5.pdf?auth66=1380876839_bc6eae601877a86a4229af7f218aafd9&ext=.pdf. Accessed 02.10.2013.
- [11] A. Amin and N. Thrift, "Cultural-Economy and Cities", *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2007, p. 143.
- [12] S. Zukin, *The Culture of Cities*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1995; D. O'Connor, "Popular Culture, Cultural Intermediaries and Urban Regeneration", in *The Entrepreneurial City: Geographies of Politics, Regime and Representation*, T. Hall and P. Hubbard, eds., Chichester: Wiley, 1998, pp. 225-239; A. J. Scott, *The Cultural Economy of Cities*, London: Sage, 2001.
- [13] A. J. Scott, "The Cultural Economy...", op. cit.; E. Strom, "Converting Pork into Porcelain. Cultural Institutions and Downtown Development", *Urban Affairs Review*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2002, pp. 3-21.
- [14] J. Dzieciuchowicz, „Ludność Łodzi do 1918 roku”, in *Łódź. Monografia miasta*, S. Liszewski, ed.: Łódzkie Towarzystwo Naukowe, 2009, pp. 113-115.
- [15] J. Olenderek, „Proces kształtowania przestrzeni w Łodzi II Rzeczypospolitej a awans administracyjny miasta”, *Zeszyty Naukowe Politechniki Łódzkiej*, no. 925, Lodz: Technical University of Lodz Press, 2004, pp. 40-46.
- [16] I. Kossowska, I., *Między tradycją i awangardą. Polska sztuka lat 1920 i 1930*, Instytut Adama Mickiewicza. Available at: http://www.culture.pl/pl/culture/artykuly/es_miedzy_tradycja_i_awangarda. Accessed 06.10.2013.
- [17] Bank Danych Lokalnych, Central Statistical Office of Poland (GUS), <http://www.stat.gov.pl/bdl/>. Accessed: 06.10.2013.
- [18] J. Dzieciuchowicz, „Ludność Łodzi do...”, op. cit., pp. 280; Bank Danych Lokalnych, Central Statistical Office of Poland (GUS), <http://www.stat.gov.pl/bdl/>. Accessed: 06.10.2013.
- [19] Bank Danych Lokalnych, Central Statistical Office of Poland (GUS), <http://www.stat.gov.pl/bdl/>. Accessed: 06.10.2013.
- [20] M. E. Sokołowicz et al. *Report: Łódź w oczach studentów łódzkich publicznych uczelni wyższych. IV edycja (2009-2010)*, Lodz: Katedra Gospodarki Regionalnej i Środowiska Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2010.
- [21] J. Zasina et al., *Oferta kulturalna Łodzi. Raport z badania. I edycja*, Lodz: Katedra Gospodarki Regionalnej i Środowiska Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2012: Available at: http://www.region.uni.lodz.pl/dokumenty/Raport_z_badan_oferta_kulturalna_lodzi_1_edycja_2011.pdf. Accessed 02.10.2013.
- [22] A. Hołub, „Współczesna przestrzeń publiczna. Terapia patologii czy rozwój nowych terenów – poszukiwanie przesłanek projektowych”, in *Przestrzeń publiczna miasta postindustrialnego*, M. Kochanowski, ed., Gdańsk: Technical University of Gdańsk Press, 2002, cited after *Problemy kształtowania przestrzeni publicznych*, P. Lorens and J. Martyniuk-Pęczek, eds., Series „Miasto-Metropolia-Region”, Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Urbanista, 2011, p. 9.