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RIVER AS A COMMON GOOD – THE CASE OF WROCLAW

RZĘKA JAKO DOBRO WSPÓLNE – STUDIUM PRZYPADKU WROCLAWIA

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Abstract: Social participation is guaranteed by law; it enables citizens to decide on activities in a city. The article aims to examine the efficacy of participation in the decision-making process regarding river management in Wrocław. The author analysed to what extent the city's inhabitants are involved in river management and what opportunities for self-government are provided for it. The methods: literature and document analysis, deduction, and statistical methods. The article discusses: the assumptions of participation, possibilities related to river management in Wrocław, data related to the inhabitants' activity in the field of rivers and the forms of this activity. Results: residents are involved in river management if they are encouraged to do so; policy-makers are introducing tools that engage residents, but they are not always enough. The results may provide an introduction to research on participation tools that would encourage residents to engage in complex topics.

Keywords: Wrocław, river, participation.

Streszczenie: Partycypacja społeczna jest gwarantowana przez prawo i umożliwia obywatelom decydowanie o działaniach w mieście. Artykuł miał na celu zbadanie skuteczności partycypacji w procesie decyzyjnym dotyczącym zarządzania rzeką we Wrocławiu. Analizowano, w jakim stopniu mieszkańcy miasta angażują się w zarządzanie rzekami oraz jakie możliwości w tym zakresie daje im samorząd.

Zastosowano metody analizy literatury i dokumentów, dedukcji i metody statystyczne. Omówiono założenia partycypacji, możliwości związane ze współzarządzaniem rzekami we Wrocławiu, dane związane z aktywnością mieszkańców w zakresie rzek oraz formy tej aktywności. Mieszkańcy angażują się w zarządzanie rzeką, jeśli są do tego zachęceni; decydenci wprowadzają narzędzia angażujące mieszkańców, jednak nie zawsze są one wystarczające. Wyniki mogą stanowić wstęp do badań na temat narzędzi partycypacji, które zachęciłyby mieszkańców do zaangażowania w złożone kwestie.

Słowa kluczowe: Wrocław, rzeka, partycypacja.

1. Introduction

Social participation is an essential element of meeting social needs. There exist many various forms enabling citizens to co-decide about investments in their cities, which residents are more willing to use. According to Hausner (1999), there are five classic instruments of social participation:

- elections,
- referenda,
- administrative procedures,
- social consultations,
- direct actions.

In this paper, administrative procedures, social consultations, and direct actions are the most important.

In Wrocław, a significant element of the urban tissue is the river. Studies show (Adamiczka, 2016) that residents willingly use the opportunities offered by the presence of water. The paper aims to examine the efficacy of social participation in the decision-making process regarding river management in Wrocław. The definition of the term “efficacy of social participation” was taken from an article by Braun (2010): “The ability to achieve goals set by stakeholders within the decision-making process of development proposals”. The article’s specific goals were to examine whether the inhabitants of Wrocław are involved in the development of the river and what form these initiatives take, and also to show how the city authorities are encouraging the residents in their efforts to develop the river. The following research questions were asked to achieve the goals:

- Are the inhabitants of Wrocław involved in river development decisions?
- Do city decision-makers enable residents to participate in river management?
- What are the forms of social participation used in the river management process?

The article discusses the assumptions of social participation, presents the possibilities related to river co-management in Wrocław, shows the data related to the inhabitants’ activity in the field of rivers, and presents the forms of this activity.

Nowadays social participation is becoming an increasingly important element of urban policy. Residents are increasingly willing to comment on topics related to the

city where they live, and decision-makers are increasingly enabling them to do so. The river is an unusual subject – it covers a large part of the city while its management it is not always obvious. The research shows if and how the inhabitants of Wrocław decide what is happening to the river Odra. The river is an essential element of the urban fabric in Wrocław, and it is also a crucial resource, especially taking into account climate change. This research is essential for both urban development sciences and Wrocław authorities to increase the effectiveness of participation in the running of the city.

Social participation is becoming an increasingly popular tool for managing cities. Both the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 emphasized the importance of sharing governance with the residents. The 1998 Aarhus Convention stated that sustainable development could only be acquired through all stakeholders' engagement. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) adopted this Convention, and it ensures the right of access to information, social participation in decision-making, and access to justice in environmental matters (Braun, 2010).

Pretty, Guijt, Thompson and Scoones (1995) believe that the problems are so complex that they require all stakeholders' involvement to solve them. El Razak and El Ela (2011) distinguish four levels of participation:

- providing information to help residents solve problems,
- consultation and encouraging people to express their opinions,
- direct involvement of the people,
- permanent partnership with the community.

Co-governance encourages and strengthens residents to get involved in local politics and make decisions.

The river's role in the city depends on the socio-economic development of the city and the geographical location. In countries where the land infrastructure is low-lying, the river has mainly a transport function. In cities characterized by a dry and hot climate, the river is used for irrigation, while in highly developed countries with a moderate climate, the recreational, sport, tourist, or leisure function is important (Adamiczka and Adamiczka, 2016).

Wrocław has five main rivers whose total length in the metropolis is about 84 km (Statistical Office in Wrocław), and their smaller tributaries. At present, the Wrocław Water Junction is the most extensive system of this type in Poland – it covers over 25 km of the Odra River, its four tributaries, canals, and many watercourses with over 100 bridges and footbridges, 16 weirs, 11 locks, thus controlling the river and adapting it to the people's needs is not an easy task (Wrocław nad Odrą, 2020).

The next section of the article discusses materials and methods, then presents the results of the analysis of participation methods broken down into administrative procedures, public consultations, municipal budget, and direct actions. The results are presented in the discussion section, and the conclusion summarizes the article.

2. Materials and methods

The first stage of the work was to conduct a critical analysis of the literature on social participation world-wide and the documents regulating co-management in Poland.

Then, data on the share of Wrocław residents' participation in river-related decisions were collected. The activities were divided into four groups: administrative procedures, public consultations, municipal budget, and direct actions, as described in Table 1.

Table 1. Division and description of social participation procedures

Procedure	Requirement	Commitment of authorities and residents	Decision-making
Administrative procedures	Required by law	Decision-makers create the project, residents make comments	Comments can be accepted or rejected
Public consultations	Not required by law	Decision-makers ask the topic and organize meetings; residents share their ideas	Decisions and postulates should be taken into account, but consultations are not binding
Municipal budget	Required by local law	Residents create projects and vote, decision-makers ensure proper course and are responsible for the organization	Decisions taken by residents are binding
Direct actions	Not required by law	Residents are responsible for the idea and organization, decision-makers may be involved (but do not have to) in issuing appropriate permits or overseeing the security of actions	Actions are carried out by residents directly

Source: own study.

The next step was to check each of the procedures in terms of river management – are the decisions made at this level, whether city authorities involve residents, and whether residents want to get involved. Showing the summary in the table and the detailed analysis of the documents allowed to systematize data in the area of the subject under consideration and present the results coherently and succinctly. Based on this, the efficacy of social participation was assessed.

3. Results

3.1. Administrative procedures

In Poland, the most crucial act of local law in space planning is a local spatial management plan (lsmp). During the creation of a project, for each lsmp people can make formal comments (Ustawa z dnia 27 marca 2003). In Wrocław there are 31 local plans dedicated to the rivers, where ten of them only slightly concern the river – they apply mainly to other areas. A total of 222 formal comments were submitted to 15 plans, only 10 of them concerned the river. However, none of the comments were taken into account by the City Council. Eight plans did not provide information on the comments (Figure 1).

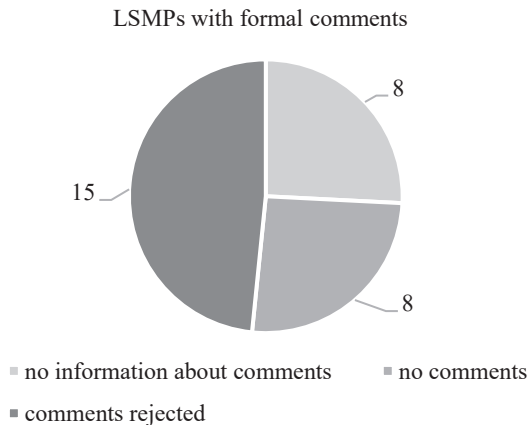


Fig. 1. Formal comments on local spatial management plan dedicated to the rivers in Wrocław

Source: own study.

The study of spatial development is a document defining the spatial policy of the municipality. Regulations are general and concern areas bigger than individual lots and buildings. Their main focus is the “Urban complexes” subdivision. The study may not be the basis for any administrative decisions, but it is legally binding during the creation of a local plan (Wrocław Spatial Information System). As with the plans, people can make formal comments during the creation of a study (Ustawa z dnia 27 marca 2003). In Wrocław, before starting the study of spatial development project, public consultations (not required by law) were carried out, taking the form of meetings, debates, and workshops. One of the meetings concerned the Odra river (Uchwała Nr L/1177/18 Rady Miejskiej Wrocławia, 2018). After that, 1120 comments were submitted, but only two of them concerned the river. Moreover,

one of them called for the removal of the point concerning the need for solutions according to sport and recreational connections with the Ślęza river (this comment was rejected) (Zarządzenie nr 8766/17 Prezydenta Wrocławia z dnia 20 grudnia 2017 r.).

3.2. Social consultations

The public consultation discussed in this section is optional, as opposed to the administrative procedures required by law (the procedures may take the form of consultations) (Zychowicz, 2014). Public consultation is one of the critical regulatory tools employed to improve transparency, efficiency, and effectiveness of regulation (Rogrigo and Amo, n.d.).

“It involves actively seeking the opinions of interested and affected groups. It is a two-way flow of information, which may occur at any stage of regulatory development, from problem identification to evaluation of existing regulation. It may be a one-stage process or, as it is increasingly the case, a continuing dialogue. Consultation is increasingly concerned with the objective of gathering information to facilitate the drafting of higher quality regulation” (Rodrigo and Amo, n.d., p. 1).

Public consultations are a process – multilateral and complex. Various entities that are recipients of the planned project have the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the planned activities and express their comments and suggestions as to the final shape of the solutions adopted (Podrażka, 2018).

As previously mentioned, public consultations were carried out before proceeding with the study of the spatial development project. However, only two comments concerned the river. There is an official website of Wrocław – *Wrocław Rozmawia* (Wrocław is talking), where information about public consultations is published. Since 2015 the subject of the river has appeared twice – during the creation of the city’s development strategy and when creating a climate change adaptation plan (Wrocław Rozmawia, 2020).

While working on the development strategy of Wrocław 2030, many meetings on the subject were held with city residents and experts in a given field. One of them was called the Wrocław Odra Forum and concerned the potential of Wrocław’s rivers (Wrocław Rozmawia, 2016b). Fifty-three proposals were made during the discussion (Postulaty z dyskusji Wrocławskie Forum Odry..., 2016).

Consultations on the plan to adapt Wrocław to climate change by 2030, took place between March and May 2019 and consisted in online surveys and six meetings (opening, closing, and four ‘thematic’ meetings). Forty-eight people attended the meeting on the subject of water. Discussions mainly focused on “recycling” water, but the issue of revitalizing the Ślęza tributaries and small watercourses was also raised (Wydział Partycypacji Społecznej UMW, 2019).

3.3. The Wrocław citizens' budget

A citizens' budget, or a participatory budget, is a tool operating between administrative procedures, social consultations, and direct actions. It is a process in the course of which citizens can decide directly where and for what a part of a city budget should be spent (Kraszewski, 2010). A citizens' budget is not required by law, but the local government establishes it. Unlike in the case of consultations, decisions made by citizens within a participatory budget are binding. The citizens' budget in Wrocław was launched in 2013 – it was a pilot before the first fully 'legitimate' project in 2014 (Wrocław Rozmawia, 2016a).

In 2014, 490 projects were received – two of them concerned the river:

1. Revitalization of the Odra waterfront area at Pasteur Street, between Zwierzyniecki Bridge and Szczytnicki Bridge.
2. Development of the J. Zwierzycki Boulevard using rocks from Lower Silesia.

None of them was chosen.

In 2015, 817 projects were received – six of them concerned the river:

1. ACTIVE KRZYKI: RECREATION, FUN and SPORT by the Ślęza river. A place of rest for the whole family – a playground, picnic stands, a green area for games and outdoor activities (pétanque field, volleyball court, badminton).
2. Revitalization and modernization of Słodowa Island. Hardening part of the surface, walk-on lawns, increasing the amount of city furniture – benches, seats, steps, both within the island and the waterfront.
3. Beach (near the Oława river – the author's note).
4. Revitalization of the Odra river recreation places. Cleaning up and development of recreational areas by the river within the Szczepin estate.
5. Revitalization of the Odra riverbank near Kożuchowska Street. Recreational development of green areas for servicing the marina and pedestrian and bicycle routes.
6. A recreational park on the Dobra river at the Zakrzów estate.

The first of them was chosen.

In 2016, 791 projects were received – two of them concerned the river:

1. The Green Beach by the Odra.
2. Construction of a waterfront with a slipway for the future municipal boat harbour.

First of them was chosen.

In 2017, 754 projects were received – two of them concerned the river:

1. The Green Beach by the Odra – II stage.
2. A ramp for bicycles and prams at the exit from Sopocka Street to Odra's embankment.

None of them was chosen.

In 2018, 645 projects were received – two of them concerned the river:

1. A beach on the Żeniki estate.
2. Leśnickie Ponds – recreation and leisure for residents (it is not exactly a river but it is recreational water and the end of the Leśna river – the author’s note).

First of them was chosen.

In 2019, 447 projects were received – four of them concerned the river:

1. A ramp for bicycles and prams at the exit from Sopocka Street to Odra’s embankment (repeated from 2016 – the author’s note).
2. Leśnickie Ponds – recreation and leisure for residents of Wrocław (repeated from the previous year – the author’s note).
3. Beach volleyball courts throughout Wrocław (one of the locations is by the Odra – the author’s note).
4. The Recreational Trail “Odra Valley” – stage I Biskupin estate, Sępolno estate, Zalesie estate.

None of them was chosen.

3.4. Direct actions

Direct actions take a form of a demonstration, happening, occupation, or blockade (Hausner, 1999). The purpose of the action is to express an opinion, protest, or support by a specific social group (Lauriusz, 2013). Usually, these are grassroots initiatives.

In 2013, Kamil and Stanisław Zaremba established the OnWater Foundation (Fundacja OnWater.pl, n.d.). They are the owners of a company which restores wooden constructions listed in the register of monuments. In 2005-2013 Kamil Zaremba was the owner, creator, and contractor of the first Polish “House on Water”. The project constitutes the current standard for this kind of construction (Open Eyes Economy Summit, 2018).

The Foundation organizes many activities related to water, which involve the inhabitants of the city. The periodic (at least twice a year) cleaning of Wrocław rivers is organized, as well workshops, regattas, walks, seminars, exhibitions, meetings, educational campaigns, and other events (Fundacja OnWater.pl, 2020).

In addition to numerous events organized by the OnWater Foundation, there are also one-off or cyclical events organized by grassroots initiatives, such as:

- The Odra River Cup is an international regatta organized by the Wrocław University of Technology since 1966 (Odra River Cup, n.d.).
- The Tumski Cup for dragon boats has been organized in Wrocław since 2010 and is very popular among residents. It has many additional events (Wrocław nad Odrą, 2019b).

- PolSailing – National Sailing Education Program organized by the Polish Sailing Association (Wrocław nad Odrą, 2017b).
- Regatta organized by various entities (Wrocław nad Odrą, 2016d; Wrocław nad Odrą, 2017a; Wrocław nad Odrą, 2017d).
- Various types of city games organized by various entities (Wrocław nad Odrą, 2017c).
- River cleaning (Wrocław nad Odrą, 2017e).
- Diving in the Odra river in a replica of a diving suit dating from 1797 (Wrocław nad Odrą, 2016b).
- River-related photography – competitions, exhibitions (Wrocław nad Odrą, 2016a, 2016c, 2016e).
- Free sailing and windsurfing classes for children (Wrocław nad Odrą, 2016h).
- An international helmsman motorboat course organized by WOŚP (Wrocław nad Odrą, 2016g).
- New Year’s Eve on kayaks on the river and in the harbour (Wrocław nad Odrą, 2015a).
- Santa Claus in dragon boats with presents for disabled children (Wrocław nad Odrą, 2015c).
- An event called “Acupuncture of the City” organized yearly by the Association of Polish Architects; in 2015 it was held under the name “City Flows” (Wrocław nad Odrą, 2015b).
- Lower Silesian Odra Carnival (Wrocław nad Odrą, 2015d).
- Odra escapade: a series of walks around the Odra valley for school children and teenagers organized by EkoCentrum (Wrocław nad Odrą, 2016f).

Most of the events are organized by the foundation, possibly with the cooperation of some residents, and a few initiatives come from other groups.

4. Discussion

As previously mentioned, effective social participation leads to strengthening local communities’ position and improving the quality of life of residents who want to decide what is going on in the city. The research shows that the river is a difficult topic for co-management – both for policymakers and society.

The first problem can be observed in terms of participation at the level of administrative procedures. It can be noted that people are reluctant to make formal comments on local plans. Moreover, if someone comments, it is not taken into account by the City Council. This is a severe problem indicating a lack of commitment, especially from officials. The number of comments (222) indicates an attempted action by stakeholders, while the number of comments on the river (15) may indicate lesser interest in this topic or the lack of ideas for spatial solutions regarding the river. It was different when projecting the study – decision-makers showed an initiative that

was to encourage residents to submit comments on the project. It is noticeable that the introduction of new, supra-statutory methods of social participation stimulates residents and encourages them to co-manage, however they are not aware of the river's potential – they are the first to postulate on other issues.

Public consultations are carried out so that people can directly suggest their solutions to given problems. They are an increasingly popular form of social participation in Wrocław. Nevertheless, of the 60 consultations carried out by decision-makers, only two concerned the river. However, the critical fact is that both of them concerned documents covering the whole city, not 'single point' activities such as renovation or revitalization of courtyards, squares, or streets. These consultations were carried out as part of crucial and strategic projects for the city – the rank and comprehensiveness of these activities were significant. This may indicate that the subject of rivers in terms of planning is a large-scale issue (this is not just a 'courtyard' matter) – it covers long sections and requires consistency between existing, planned and ongoing activities. Perhaps the inhabitants do not feel competent to decide on such an area, and the scale is too large for them.

As the decisions made during the Wrocław Civic Budget are binding, it is a prevalent view among the residents of Wrocław. Given the number of projects submitted in the period 2014-2019 (3944), those regarding the river represent less than 0.5% (18 projects). A total of 387 projects were selected, of which three concerned rivers. These projects represent less than 1% of implementations. This may indicate two things: allocating part of the budget to the river is not a priority for the inhabitants of Wrocław, or the river is so developed that it does not need any investment. However, the research (Adamiczka and Macalik, 2020) shows that the city's residents believe that the rivers' potential is only partly used.

Numerous events are organized on the rivers in which the inhabitants are involved, but it is the city authorities who initiate them. The most popular is the Odra's Day, an annual event organized by the local authorities, during which there are many accompanying attractions, such as cruises, workshops, regattas, games, and activities for children, visiting boulevards and Odra monuments, artistic performances and more. Additional attractions are organized by individual initiatives and attract many citizens (Wrocław nad Odrą, 2019a).

It can be concluded that few inhabitants are involved in the development of the river on their initiative. Many of them like spending time by the water and willingly take part in events or even engage in improving the quality of rivers (e.g. cleaning), but they must be 'pushed' to do so by the city authorities, or other organizers, or the problem/initiative should be shown to them.

However, city residents can organize themselves if someone wants to 'take away' their access to the river. For example, a 130-cm wall was erected on Dunikowski Boulevard; it obstructed the river view for children and the disabled. Social protests reduced it (Adamiczka, 2016).

5. Conclusion

Social participation enables residents to participate in managing the city. Citizens' involvement in specific matters shows these topics which are essential to them. The data demonstrate that the introduction of social participation measures limited only to those prescribed by law is inefficient (e.g. local spatial management plan). Therefore Wrocław's authorities are increasingly conducting social consultations or other forms of participation while creating strategic documents. This kind of participation allows more people to get involved, and their opinion is taken into account by decision-makers. Although most citizens believe that the city only partly uses the potential of the riverside areas and the city does not encourage enough to spend time by the river (Adamiczka and Macalik, 2019), they are not themselves involved in river-related activities. It was encouraged by the city authorities or other entities to 'remind' them about the river and engage in discussions or activities. However, an essential fact that encourages one to proceed with research, activities, projects, and raising awareness is that many citizens spend their free time by the river and, when asked, the issue of the river seems to be an essential matter for them.

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