

Bringing back the true wealth of Łódź



●● Łódź is a city with a great history dating back to the Middle Ages. Driving through its streets you realise it is an ancient town with strong marks of the industrial era of the nineteenth century, old streets with many former industrial buildings, many of which are currently in a state of decay.

Some parks exist and give the city a nice look. The city is a watershed with no big river. However, there are 18 streams which are polluted, canalised or buried underground. Industrialization and the need for more public space necessitated the covering of rivers. Recently the city has experienced floods. The wealth of the city of Łódź today lies in its tourism potential based on its long history and the ability for the city to revitalize its rivers which is its main resource.

The deputy mayor, Mr. Włodzimierz Tomaszewski observes, that the objective is to bring the wealth of resources back, restore river beds, create small retention systems to allow water to stay in the system, as well as to improve the existing water systems, guarantee its good quality and to ensure inhabitants have access and can afford the water, build reservoirs and create recreational areas.

Daunting challenges

The realisation of this desire is faced with daunting challenges. The watershed-related location of Łódź is exceptional and the water is going back to 2 watersheds. Rivers are disappe-

aring from the surface or water beds have dried out. In the past, financing of programmes to improve water resources and management of water resources was low and the municipality relied on funding from the central government. This has improved since the EU started investing in water management issues in the town. There are new initiatives to channel funding from the EU through the municipal authority as well as other separate interventions by the SWITCH project for example. The revitalisation process includes creation of new reservoirs, meanders and re-opening the concrete-covered rivers. Originally, this initiative faced some resistance by sections of the community living along the streams. With some reservoirs completed, the community attitude is changing positively, they love it now. This is another opportunity.

Increasing floods

There have been some floods in the recent past. There were hardly any floods in Łódź before ten years ago. According to the deputy mayor, these floods are exceptional cases related to global climate change: heavy rainfalls combined with strong winds and hail storm which tend to clog the inlets and provoke floods. The concrete around the inlets to the water streams is partly responsible for the floods when they get blocked.

Communities around the river streams deem the efforts of the municipal authorities about this situation insufficient. Aesreh Lucehi, a social activist, points out that in the 70's these places were looked after very well. No-

wadays, the authorities only collect the leaves, the reservoir is never cleaned.

The municipality is aware of this and taking action on the problem, according to Mr. Sławomir Turkowski, the Head of infrastructure in the municipality. There is a modernisation programme aiming at improving the systems. Some parts were modernised by the municipality through deepening storm canals and unclogging the inlets. 60 points have already been identified for unclogging. The municipality is cleaning the inlets, modernizing the inlets and infrastructures. Another problem is that the concrete blocks also create heat islands when the sun shines on the city's concrete surfaces, causing increase of temperature. The heat generated is absorbed by the city.

Integrated interventions

The modernization of the city through creation of green areas and improvement of the water resource management is important and provides a clear route towards Łódź bringing back its true wealth. The interventions, however, need to be integrated. The achievements of the various modernisation programmes and the success already registered by programmes such as SWITCH are important but must be promoted on a large scale. There is hope for better storm water management, water treatment improvement, more green areas, economic improvement, new jobs, sludge for willow plantations, biogas generation and use, and a general cycle from health to growth. ●

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