New emplacement of public cultural institutions in the cultural ‘ecosystems’ of Polish cities

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Since 2008 Poland is perceived as one of the largest cultural institutions’ construction site in Europe. The data clearly shows that the cultural sector in Poland was until recently one of the most important consumer of EU funds spent on numerous new buildings for cultural institutions: concert halls, museums, theatres, cultural centres, libraries newly emplaced in urban spaces. This emergent phenomenon raised the series of questions on chances and challenges for new cultural locations and the impact on its users, payers, employees, institutional competitors, local authorities, individuals or communities. The whole spectrum of this topic needs a multidimensional perspective, that could bring a clearer picture on cultural institutions as related to current issues of economic, environmental, social and cultural sustainability in European cities.

The lecture’s point of departure is a set of findings and recommendations from the 2016 research project conducted by the speaker’s academic team. The project was co-organised by the Union of Polish Cities and funded by the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. The researchers from AMU University in Poznan have qualitatively investigated 8 carefully selected cases of newly emplaced cultural institutions in Poland: Sheakspeare Theatre in Gdansk, post-mining location of Silesian Museum in Katowice, ICHOT Heritage Interpretation Centre in Poznan, Dialogue Centre in Lodz, “Stacja Kultury” library in Rumia located as the part of the railway station, Philharmonic Hall in Gorzow and two cultural centres in small size cities in central Poland. The research process in every institution has been oriented to deliver the content in 8 aspects: (1) the emplacement genesis, (2) the new object in the context of existing cultural ‘ecosystem’ of the city, (3) the aesthetics and functionality of the building for cultural purpose, (4) the social rooting and accessibility of the new cultural investment for local community, (5) value, image and social reception of the new cultural site, (6) the impact of the new cultural ‘organism’ on the city’s cultural ‘ecosystem’, (7) organisational cultures of newly located cultural institutions, (8) developmental perspectives of the new cultural space. The qualitatively collected data bring to light some intriguing conclusions. The set of 8 stories of newly emplaced cultural spaces in 8 Polish cities is in the same time the canvas for reflection and discussion on the relevance of cultural ‘ecosystem’ metaphor for urban, social and cultural studies.
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Marcin Poprawski is an expert of the Association of Polish Cities, member of the Urban Cultural Policies Council of Polish National Center for Culture, mastermind of professional trainings and research tools for public and civic cultural sectors. He recently was involved as an expert in international research projects, inter alia on audience engagement (coordinated by Fondazione Fitzcarraldo in Turin) or cultural and creative spillovers (coordinated by ECCE in Dortmund). In 2016 he was a Jury Member of the N.I.C.E. Award (European Award for Innovations in Culture and Creativity in Europe). Since 2013, he was twice elected Vice-president of ENCATC, a Brussels based leading European network on Cultural Management and Cultural Policy education & research institutions (www.encatc.org).