



WILCO

Welfare innovations
at the local level
in favour of cohesion

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URBAN POLICY INNOVATIONS IN LOCAL WELFARE IN PLOCK, POLAND

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. Plock: Historical and Political Background	1
1.2. Main Sources of Information on Local Welfare discourse	3
2. HOUSING.....	4
2.1. Poor Access to Housing	5
2.3. Innovative Ideas and Solutions in Housing	7
3. EMPLOYMENT	9
3.1. Unemployment	9
3.3. Innovative Ideas and Solutions in Employment	11
4. CHILDCARE	12
4.1. Supply of Childcare Services in Plock.....	13
4.2. Changes of the Charging System of Public Childcare Institutions	14
4.3. Other Debates on Care in Plock.....	17
4.4. Innovative Ideas and Solutions in Childcare	17
5. MIGRANTS IN PLOCK.....	18
5.1. Problems of Immigrants in Plock.....	19
5.2. Innovative Ideas and Solutions on Migrants.....	21
CONSLUSIONS	21
ANNEX: PROGRAMS OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN PLOCK	25
REFERENCES.....	28

INTRODUCTION

Number of studies show that mechanisms of functioning of local communities are changing, that the traditional ways are more and more replaced by the new ones. Denters and Rose are asking: is it a move from local government to local governance? These authors claim, that

... beyond the uncertainties relating to the formal powers and fiscal capacities of local government, tendencies toward fragmentation of activity and responsibility also constitute a source of potential uncertainty. In large measure fragmentation is tied to the wave of New Public Management ... This development has taken a variety of forms, including everything from hiving off services and contracting out production to introducing contract-management and establishing municipal agencies or companies... (Denters and Rose 2005: 252).

In addition to these developments in the domain of the delivery of goods and services, new responsibilities have forced local governments to develop collaborative relationship with a variety of organizations of a local and regional character - public, private and quasi-private alike (Beck 1992). The traditional model of local democracy

has been based on general, undifferentiated relations between the community of local citizens and an elected council. ...New relations are characterized by a higher degree of functional differentiation.... many of new participatory channels, moreover target particular groups. The emerging system is characterized by a differentiation of the represented and the complexity of their relations with institutions of local governance (Judge 1999: 121).

The goal of the report is to show to what extent the changes described above in Western Europe take place in Plock.

1.1. Plock: Historical and Political Background

Plock is the historic capital of Mazowsze, located in the northwestern part of Mazowieckie Province (Ciechanowsko-Płocki Subregion according to NUTS-3 classification) at the distance of about 110 km from Warsaw. According to the Central Statistical Office, at the end of March 2012, the population of Plock consisted of 124 553 permanent residents (Central Statistical Office, National Census of Population and Housing 2011). Like many other cities, as a result of the Second World War, Plock suffered from substantial losses in terms of population. This resulted mainly from the Holocaust, as the Jews constituted more than 30% of the prewar population of the city. The most substantial economic growth and increase in the number of inhabitants was observed in the 1960s and 1970s. As a result of political decisions of communist government of the People's Republic of Poland, a petrochemical plant was established in Plock, as well as other industrial plants (such as the Harvesting Machines Factory, Textile Factory „Cotex” and the River Dockyard). This resulted in massive migration to Plock, mainly of young people from the nearby rural areas. In the early 1960s, prior to commencement of the industrial investment projects, referred to above, the population of Plock amounted only to 34 thousand inhabitants, while in the late 1980s it reached 122 660 (Central Statistical Office, National Census of Population and Housing 1988). Plock became a significant industrial center of the region of Mazowsze - the local labor market was shaped mainly by large, state-owned industrial plants. The economic crisis of the 1980s and the system transformation after 1990 slowed

down the development of Plock. Restructuring and change of ownership of industrial plants took place. The petrochemical plant was transformed into PKN Orlen SA (Polish Oil Company Orlen) and it has remained the dominant employer in the city. Other plants have been privatized and the employment rates have been significantly reduced. Some, like „Cotex”, employing mainly women, declared bankruptcy and discontinued operation. Nevertheless, the industrial sector is still of significance - in year 2010, those employed in industry and construction constituted 40% of all employees in the city (Kansy, Sierandt 2010: 75).

Plock is a city with county rights (NUTS-4), which means that the scope of its tasks is much broader in comparison with the communes or municipalities (see Plock City Report). Within the framework of administrative division of the city into auxiliary units, Plock is divided into 21 housing settlements. As in case of communes and municipalities, the local authorities of Plock are responsible for independent financial management within the scope of its budget. Among other companies mentioned above, the city includes also production plants of the American company Levi Strauss, as well as many other companies with a share of foreign capital: Hoppenstedt Bonnier Information, Bildau&Busmann, Adler Poland, A. Schulman, Dr Oetker Dekor. In Plock, there are several universities and colleges, including the branches of The University of Warsaw and Warsaw University of Technology (Plock City Hall).

Plock is run by the City Council and the President of the City of Plock, who is the executive body. The Plock City Council is a legislative, decision-making and control body of the city, which sets local by-laws, passes budgets and inspects their execution. There are 25 seats on the council, which are contested by the various political parties. Council members are elected every four years by residents of the City of Plock. The current composition of the Plock City Council was elected on 21 November 2010. The Plock City Council of the 6th term (2010-2014) consists of 25 councilors from five committees: Civic Platform (the ruling party at the national level, the center-rightist party, 7 seats), Law and Justice (the rightist populist party, 4 seats), Democratic Left Alliance (the leftist party, which has its roots in post-communist circles, 5 seats), “Poland Comes First” (the rightist party formed by the former members of Law and Justice and Civic Platform, 4 seats), The Association “Our Country” established by the local politicians and independent activists, 3 seats). Apart from that, there is one independent councilor (the former President of Plock, who used to be a member of Law and Justice) and one councilor from The Polish People’s Party (agrarian and Christian democratic political party). The current President of Plock is the representative of the Civic Platform Party. The Plock City Council is led by the chair and 3 deputy chairmen. The Council controls the activity of the President of the City of Plock. The sessions of the Plock City Council are open to the public. Most of the proposals that come before the City Council do not proceed there directly. First they are discussed by advisory commissions, also known as Council Commissions. The City Council elects from among its members permanent commissions and ad hoc commissions for special purposes, determining its subject matter and personal composition. These Commissions are made up of members of the City Council who specialize in a particular area of policy. In Plock there are seven of such commissions.

Programme differences between political parties in the City Council of Plock have been presented in the annex. These can be presented in short as follows:

- Civic Platform (PO) - a central-rightist liberal party, at present, as the ruling party, aiming at limiting the municipal budget expenditures and opting for verification of social privileges, often pointing out that social assistance is being used in a dishonest manner. A visibly pro-EU party.

- Law and Justice (PiS) - a rightist, conservative, populist party, opposing PO, opting for increasing of the municipal budget expenditures for the social policy, in particular, for supporting of the traditionally defined family, promoting the national and patriotic values.
- Left Democratic Alliance (SLD) - a leftist party, entering temporary coalitions with both Civic Platform and Law and Justice, opting for increasing the expenditures and activity of the authorities to support the poorest and the needy. It is characterized by pro-EU orientation.
- “Poland Comes First” (PjN) - a central-rightist, conservative liberal, political party in Poland. It was formed on the national level as a breakaway group from Law and Justice.
- The Association “Our Country” (NK) - a local committee including the local politicians, activists and independent experts.

1.2. Main Sources of Information on Local Welfare discourse

The debate analysis focused on local welfare in Plock was based on three main sources of data: protocols and legal acts from the City Council and its commissions; press articles; interviews with City Council members and civil servants, leaders or active employees of organizations and institutions representing WILCO target groups or working on WILCO areas of interest, local journalists, experts and other well informed observers. In case of the first data source two main types of documents were analyzed: minutes and protocols of the discussions of the City Council in Plock, including the specific commissions of the City Council on welfare, family and education, years 2002-2012; relevant resolutions and ordinances discussed in the city council in Plock, years 2002-2012.

In addition, analysis included national and local press articles related to childcare, housing, unemployment, immigrants and other welfare issues in Plock during the years 2002-2012. The analysis covered such media as „Gazeta Wyborcza“ (30 articles in total) and „Rzeczpospolita“ (25 articles in total), which are two most important daily newspapers at the national and local level. The former is considered as liberal and more leftist, while the latter represents more conservative and rightist orientation. Apart from that, the analysis covered also 59 articles from „Tygodnik Płocki“ (local biweekly newspaper distributed in Plock and its surroundings) and 20 articles from „Gazeta Płock“ (local daily newspaper connected with “Gazeta Wyborcza”, limited to Plock and its surroundings). Apart from that, the analysis covered the contents of „Refugee.pl”, monthly for refugees and other groups of foreigners in Poland issued by Polish Humanitarian Action, years 2006-2012.

The third data source constituted the interviews with City Council members from different political parties and commissions as well as with civil servants working in units or departments responsible for different fields of welfare policy. When choosing our respondents we took care of including representatives of all political groups. The report is based also on the interviews with the organizations and institutions, which represent one of three WILCO target groups or specify in WILCO areas of interest. Apart from that, we included the opinions of well-informed observers, such as local journalists (for detailed information on the respondents please see the list of sources at the end of this document).

The empirical data used in this report has been collected and processed with active participation of students of sociology of Warsaw University, participating in the research seminar conducted by Professor Renata Siemieńska (in cooperation with Dr. Ilona Matysiak, and Dr. Anna Domaradzka) in the academic years of 2011/2012 and 2012/2013.

2. HOUSING

The general rules of the housing policy of Plock and the means for financing it have been specified in resolution no. 372/XX/04 of the City Council of Plock of January 27th, 2004, indicating the President of the City as being responsible for the housing policy. The immediate guidelines for the housing policy can be found in the „Programme for management of the housing resources of the commune”, constituting Appendix to resolution no. 472/XXIV/04 of the Council of the City of Plock of April 20th, 2004.

Housing is one of the important issues in social policy in Plock. It's a topic of heated political discussions during the City Council meetings as well as press articles. Analysis of meetings of the City Council from the previous term of office has revealed a strong conflict between the councilors of the Democratic Left Alliance and the former President of the City, representing Law and Justice, on the mode of implementation of the housing policy by the city. The President was present during each council session, supporting the minority from Law and Justice. Particularly well visible was a conflict with a female councilor of the Democratic Left Alliance, very active in the field of housing, often criticizing the President for acting too slow and making bad decisions. These objections were usually commented upon as being purely political.

Problems associated with the housing policy of Plock are illustrated well by the statement of the Vice President during the extraordinary session of year 2006, dedicated to assistance provided to victims of fire, which left more than ten families without any property or a place to live. In the context of the discussion, there was a conflict between the Democratic Left Alliance and the president of Law and Justice, who criticized the immediate solutions proposed by the Democratic Left Alliance. In the context of the discussion on replacement apartments, councilors of the DLA criticized the housing policy of the president. The vice-president commented at a time:

It is very good that, regardless of the circumstances, the aspect of solving of the housing problems in the city has emerged. Whatever funds you propose today, I warrant we will not be able to deal with the housing problem. The problem pertains not only to those, who had been unfortunate enough to live in buildings that have been destroyed by fire, but also 2 thousand other families, often those, who have no permanent residence address. So, today, the attempt to provide 100 thousand, 500 thousand, one million zlotys will not do any good. Other than grasping yet another occasion to engage in a political conflict between ourselves.

This statement illustrates well the scale of problems associated with housing in Plock and the conflict between the DLA coalition, which was the ruling party, and the politicians associated with the former President, representing Law and Justice.

The respondents, including representatives of the City Council, underlined that in comparison with other parties, as for the housing problems, Law and Justice, Democratic Left Alliance and „Poland Comes First” could be distinguished are most active. They were more committed to the housing policy than the present ruling party - the Civic Platform. According to our respondents, the social policy of the city authorities was not focused on solving of numerous housing problems.

On the basis of analysis of protocols of the City Council sessions, press articles and the interviews conducted, it can be concluded that the discourse on housing in Plock was focused on two basic topics:

- Poor access to housing;
- Problems with social and communal housing.

2.1. Poor Access to Housing

A great part of respondents pointed to lack of apartments as being one of the most significant problems associated with housing in Plock, and requiring quick intervention. Young people, starting their adult life and establishing families, encounter particularly significant difficulties in access to housing. This is due to the fact that prices of apartments available on the market are very high, and thus they are inaccessible for those with low incomes. On the other hand, low income or lack of income is due to high unemployment rates in Plock. Most threatened by unemployment are young people, without any professional experience, and thus they are the ones suffering most from lack of access to apartments. Moreover, although new municipal flats are being constructed, their number is still insufficient, as the demand is very high.

According to one of the local press representatives: “Officially, there are 7 thousand families waiting for apartments in Plock. In fact, nobody really knows how many people really are waiting” [interview P.2_press].

The number of applications for municipal flats is also growing, which results in lengthening of the waiting time. This is due to greater interest in such flats among young people and young couples. Being unable to buy or rent an apartment on the free market results in a rather artificial increase in the number of potential beneficiaries of public housing. Adult children of applicants often file their own applications; as a result, a single family may apply for several apartments. As it has been commented upon by one of the councilors:

When a young couple starts their life together and they realize they are unable to become independent, and they live with their parents, they finally want to get their own apartment and start living on their own. The simplest way is to file an application for a municipal flat, but, in the present situation, the number of such flats is being reduced, unfortunately. [Interview P.7.City_Law and Justice]

In the context of these problems, our respondents underlined the need for a change in the broadly understood housing policy. The present City Council was criticized by the external observers for being passive and reluctant to make decisions, fearing of their political consequences.

One of the ways of solving of the deficit of housing in Plock was the “300 Programme”, passed by the City Council, aimed at construction and restoration of 300 apartments in Plock. It was approved in year 2002, at the beginning of the term of office, and it was announced to be a success in year 2004 - in total, 501 apartments had been reclaimed, and 267 were offered to the families.

The second significant initiative in the field of housing was establishment of the City Social Housing Society in Plock. The CSHS was established in 1996 by the local authorities, owning 100% of shares. The society was established to start construction of higher standard affordable apartments for the inhabitants of Plock. It is a commercial law company, responsible for construction of new apartments, which are then purchased by the city and rented as municipal flats. In year 2002, the decision was passed on construction of 1000 new apartments according to the CSHS formula. The President of the City commented upon the progress in construction in year 2006:

During this term of office, we can be truly proud of housing construction. During the first six months, almost 2 million zlotys was spent on construction of new apartments according to the CSHS formula, which is still attracting great interest... apart from construction of new apartments, we should put emphasis on renovations performed in older buildings belonging to the city. The

quantity and quality of the housing stock in the city is improving visibly.

The City Council of Plock established a relatively high rent for these apartments, which have rather high standard and modern character. The president promoted the policy of replacement of low-standard public housing with those built according to the CSHS formula. As a result, families with higher income can move to new apartments, which are more expensive, but of higher quality, releasing the cheaper apartments. This allowed for rental of the latter to families with lower income.

According to the summary of implementation of resolutions of the City Council, construction of CSHS apartments was successful - in the period of 2002-2006, 1000 new apartments were offered. Presented below is a comment of a councilor representing the Association "Our Country":

... according to our Club, there is no coherent strategy for development of the city of Plock, apart from some exceptions. These, surely, include the development of housing, where we have to admit, there have been measurable effects. Year after year, the number of flats is growing, and the forms introduced seem interesting and diversified.

Analysis of press materials shows, however, that the demand for housing in Plock will be growing. In the article „Returning to the city” of April 11th, 2012, the author refers to statements of specialists, members of the Association of the Real Estate Market of Plock, who believe it is no longer fashionable to buy houses outside Plock; young people once again are eager to buy apartments in the city downtown. The most significant criteria for purchase are not the price and the area, but the broadly understood comfortable location - the nearby kindergartens, schools, shops, family members or friends, as well as the time of travel to work. The most popular (most often selected) housing settlements are the relatively new and expensive apartment buildings with small flats (most inhabitants of Plock purchase small apartments of 35-40m²).

2.2. Social and Public Housing

Problems in terms of social and public housing are the same as the problems encountered in the field of housing in general - the number is scarce and the demand is growing. In Plock, the number of applicants waiting for social housing is several times greater than the available flats. In order to avoid controversial decisions, score-based criteria in distribution of flats have been applied to establish the waiting lists. The criteria examined such components as the income, number of children and the current housing conditions. This allowed for execution of transparent rules and avoidance of corruption.

Another issue are rent debts and the problem of eviction of those inhabitants, who fail to pay, as the city has no social flats, which could be offered to those evicted; as a result, eviction cannot be conducted. According to a city councilor representing Law and Justice: “... when someone stops paying, or we are dealing with eviction enforced by threat of collapse of a building, they still live there, because there are no alternatives. The same applies to eviction rulings, these are not enforced, because there’s no social housing” [interview P.7.City_Law and Justice]. The problem of unpaid rent is increasingly serious, as there are no enforcement mechanisms, and the debts are growing.

Another problem is creation of ghettos - the public housing and, especially, social housing buildings in Plock are not perceived positively. The greatest problem here is the learned helplessness of the inhabitants, their demanding attitudes, failure to care for the apartments and devastation of property. Our respondents argued that maintenance of flats in old buildings is often associated with higher costs than in flats of a much higher standard. Investing in new public housing and, especially, social housing, however, is

difficult because of protests of the inhabitants, who do not want to have potentially dangerous or problematic people in their neighborhoods. There have been many different concepts for dealing with social housing. The most significant proposal was based on selling these apartments to the renters at low prices. According to one of the local journalists:

In my opinion, all of these apartments should be sold for symbolic amounts. People, who become their owners, as they buy them, will change their attitudes immediately. Secondly, the city should have the basic housing stock and anyone, who is in a really difficult situation, should receive social benefits for two months, but then they should earn the money for a big apartment [Interview P.2._press].

In order to facilitate the buyout of public housing stock, the City Council has introduced discounts for tenants. The City Council of Plock, in a resolution of September 28th, 2004, agreed for sale of municipal flats at the discounts of 80 to 95% with a single-time payment, and 50 to 60% if the payment is based on installments. It means that tenants can buy the flat out for 5% of its market price. Moreover, tenants of apartments rented from the city could count on lowering of the rent amount, included in the monthly installments. The price could be lowered by 25 to 50%, depending on the income of the tenant.

Other proposed solutions include development of regulations for use of public housing, which would be available to all inhabitants in form of brochures. There have been proposals on participation of the city in a nationwide programme, offering funds for construction of lower standard public housing. The need for construction of public housing, preferably dispersed to avoid creation of a ghetto, has been underlined many times.

In the recent years, amendments to regulations on eviction have been made with regard to tenants failing to pay the rent. Formerly, to evict someone from their apartment, it was necessary that the city provided them with transitory apartment. Since November 2011, such limitations to eviction have been withdrawn. The only exception here are the disabled, children, pregnant women and the elderly, who always have to be offered a replacement apartment. As a result of these amendments, in November 2011, more than one hundred eviction decisions were issued without providing replacement apartments. The tenants were to be transferred to the direct access hostel or dormitory. Analysis of the press shows that the general public supports this solution, depending on the reason for the debts. One of the inhabitants commented on the issue in the local newspaper:

I think it all depends on honesty. If someone is in a difficult situation and it is not their fault, and they cannot afford to pay the rent, such people should get help. But, if someone fails to pay on purpose, because they know perfectly well nothing can be done about it, and they live for free and damage everything, there should be no pity for them.

2.3. Innovative Ideas and Solutions in Housing

The City Social Housing Society

An innovation in housing in Plock is establishment of the City Social Housing Society. The CSHS, a social developer appointed by the local authorities, is focused mainly on construction and use of apartment buildings on the basis of rents, purchase of apartment buildings and renovation and modernization of these. CSHS is the largest company of this kind in Mazowsze and one of the largest in the country.

The offer of CSHS is oriented at those with lower income, who cannot afford rental or purchase of apartments on the free market. Before the construction begins, the Society creates a list of persons willing to get an apartment. Prior to implementation of the investment, the so-called "participation" fee is collected as an investment in construction costs. When the flats are built, they are rented to all those participants. They cannot be purchased. The future tenants must return their current municipal flats to the city or pay the participation fee in the amount of 20-25% of the value of the flat. Before they move in, they also have to pay the deposit equivalent to 10 monthly rental fees. The rental fee contains also the service charge and the loan incurred by the Society for construction of the apartments.

The recent activity of CSHS also includes building flats for sale, to gather extra funds for further investments in social housing. However, as many press articles point out, current prices of apartments, offered by the company, do not differ much from those available on the free market, and their quality is highly questionable. In response to lack of interest in new apartments, since 2013, the possibility of purchase of apartments in installments is to be introduced: the purchaser is to pay the amount of 30% of the value of the apartment, while the rest is distributed over the period of 5 to 20 years, depending on the ability of the purchaser to make payments. It is significant that the first installment, as well as the interest rates, can be negotiated, and in the case of any further problems with repayment - it is possible to reach agreement with regard to temporary suspension of payments. Unlike banks, the CSHS does not require any property documentation and qualify for purchase those, who have their own funds (not from a bank loan) for the first payment.

Project "Together for revitalization"

The project „Together for revitalization” lasted for almost 15 months, encompassing more than 100 inhabitants of the Old Town of Plock. The project, funded mostly from the European Union funds, has been managed by the City Social Assistance Center. It was a pilot project - one of 20 of this kind, implemented in the country.

The aim of the pilot project was to develop a general model to be implemented by other cities and communes. Plock could participate in the contest for the funds, because it met the key prerequisite - since 2005, it has implemented its own revitalization programme with some social partners. The project was focused on inhabitants of the old town: the poor, marginalized due to low education levels, addictions, unemployment, crimes etc. Revitalization was to include renovation of old buildings, squares and streets, but also „bringing back to life” the local community, often marginalized. At least 100 people were direct beneficiaries of the project, half of them aged 15 to 25.

The entire programme had the budget of more than 1.6 million zlotys, divided, more or less equally, among the partners selected by the City Social Assistance Center on the basis of a contest. The two remaining partners were the Professional Development Institution and the Association “Innovation Center of Information Society”. Within the framework of these funds, the Social Assistance Center provided trainings on social competences and skills, including psychological education workshops and sexual education/ family planning courses, as well as a community center, where integration classes for the youth were organized. The second partner - the Professional Development Institution - organized professional courses, while the ICIS was responsible for activities for the youth (sports, arts, photography, filmmaking and dancing), including making of a film with the participants and painting of murals on old tenement buildings - some of these were designed by young people participating in the programme.

As for results of this project, several backyards have been renovated, small gardens, sandpits for the children have been established and the inhabitants take care about these

themselves. Moreover, several participants found jobs after the professional courses. The CSAC is searching for money to continue these activities.

3. EMPLOYMENT

As for employment, issues that are most visible in the public debate in Plock include:

- High unemployment rates, lack of jobs for young people;
- Professional activation based on projects financed by the EU funds.

3.1. Unemployment

Unemployment is considered to be one of the main problems in the city. In the recent years, a tendency of growth could be noticed in this regard - in December 2008, it amounted to 9.8%, in 2012, it was around 12%, while in January 2013, and it reached the level of 13.7%. Groups threatened by unemployment in Plock are, in particular, persons aged 18 to 24 and graduates of secondary schools. At the same time, the available data indicates that the conditions of living in Plock are better than in other cities of Mazowieckie Province - the earnings are the highest here. Nevertheless, especially young people increasingly often tend to leave the city. According to local press, there are jobs in Plock, but the people do not want to get them. First of all, it is because many people work abroad. Secondly, modern technologies are increasingly difficult to master and the number of people willing to face the challenge is decreasing - among other things, due to the long education process. There is also a visible mismatch of education and the labor market. While specialists and engineers in technical or IT fields are sought, the number of unemployed graduates of such specializations as marketing or management is growing. In year 2012, an opportunity to get additional financing from the European Social Fund emerged, allowing for organization of trainings with professionals. At the same time, it was stated that the means from the Labor Fund were not sufficient to stimulate the professional activation of inhabitants of Plock, and support for self-employment was also diminishing (from 8.5 thousand companies, which received additional financing in 2010 to 2.5 thousand in 2011). Also, the funds for active counteracting of unemployment decreased in this period by 60%.

According to our respondents, the bad situation on the local labour market is partially caused by the fact that persons from outside Plock occupy managerial positions in the key local companies. Large companies increasingly often bring specialists from other, larger cities. Therefore, those, who have the greatest impact on the labor market in the city are not too concerned about its future, and the local authorities have little to say with regard to the largest corporations, operating locally, such as PKN Orlen.

For instance, PKN Orlen was established on the basis of Petrochemia Plock. Petrochemia Plock purchased all gas stations and created a corporation, but, as for today, Plock has the least to say in the corporation. The management has its head office in Warsaw. It is like this with all companies, management of companies of Plock moves out of Plock, everyone's happy, living in the present, not caring about the future of Plock [interview P.2._press].

It has been mentioned that although the number of jobs is insufficient, most are still offered by industrial companies. These are mostly jobs for men not offered to women. The problem also concerns young people, who are unable to find jobs consistent with their qualifications - in particular, if they are graduates of arts, marketing or management.

In this regard, involvement of the City Council could help; however, according to one of the female respondents (representing Law and Justice), the local politicians are not particularly interested in solving of the problem of unemployment. Their activity may seem superficial - they discuss projects during the council sessions (in the presence of local media), while during the meetings of individual commissions, they tend to vote as quickly as possible, without in-depth discussions.

Within the framework of stimulation of investment projects in the city, in December 2011, a real estate tax relief was passed in the regional assistance programme for the City of Plock to support new investments for innovative entrepreneurs or companies engaged in research and development in the City of Plock. This relief applies to buildings or parts of buildings associated with business activity, belonging to companies engaged in innovation or research and development in Plock. The effects of this regulation is not yet visible, but gives hope for encouraging new business entities to locate in Plock and creating jobs here.

3.2. Professional Activation from EU Funds

In year 2006, the District Labor Office in Plock received more than 5.5 million zlotys from the European Social Fund to assist the unemployed in finding jobs. The funds were designated mainly for implementation of the „Start of the Youth” programme. In the same year, the District Labor Office introduced the „New Opportunity” action, allowing employers to get employees without any additional costs. In year 2006, the „Ladies stop” programme was continued, providing employment for women, assisting children in crossing the most dangerous pedestrian crossings in the city.

One of the most significant initiatives influencing the implementation of the professional activation policy in Plock was the idea of establishment of the Municipal Labor Office, proposed by the former President of the City, representing Law and Justice. This project was disapproved by the councilors representing the Civic Platform - mainly because of the associated costs; moreover, they believed the District Labor Office was able to deal with unemployment problems satisfactorily. The originators argued that it would be easier to get EU funds for an institution managed by the city. Finally, the Municipal Labor Office in Plock was established on January 1st, 2008. The justification stated: „Establishing of a new office will help in rendering services on behalf of the unemployed and the employers in a more effective manner, fitting the needs of the labor market”.

The Municipal Labor Office, criticized much by representatives of the Civic Platform, turned out to be more effective than the existing District Labor Office. Establishment of the office itself resulted in creation of 50 new jobs. The initiative was also associated with shortening of the period of payment of the unemployment benefit from 12 to 6 months, to motivate the unemployed to search for jobs. The main advantage of establishment of a separate local labor market institution, however, is the possibility of obtaining funds from the EU for activation of the unemployed in the city. In addition, establishing in 2009 the Professional Activation Center in the Municipal Labor Office increased effectiveness of those actions. In years 2010-2012, among other things, the Office implemented the contest-based project „Your own company - a concept for living in Plock”, financed from the ESF.

Another important project, implemented in 2008-2013 was „Active Plock - equal chances of the unemployed on the labor market in the city of Plock”, financed by the ESF. The beneficiaries were the unemployed aged 25 or less, long-term unemployed aged 50+ and the unemployed with disabilities. The objective of the project was to organize training and to provide a single-time financial support for establishment of economic activity. The trainees received a grant from the city in the amount of 120% of the unemployment benefit (953 zlotys). In years 2008-2011, 1043 people were employed thanks to this programme.

In years 2010-2012, the Municipal Labour Office implemented another programme financed by the ESF „Agent, consultant - specialist for the local labor market”, aimed at strengthening the Office’s potential in dealing with unemployment by additional financing for employment agents and consultants and raising of effectiveness and of quality of services rendered on behalf of the unemployed, the professionally passive, those searching for jobs, as well as employers. Within the framework of the project, the Municipal Labour Office employed 12 agents and 8 consultants, who provided assistance to employers in searching for employees having the appropriate qualifications and to the unemployed and those searching for jobs in adapting to the requirements of the labor market. Moreover, they maintained relations with employers already cooperating with the Office, and established cooperation with new employers and institutions of the local labor market. As a result of the project activities, 181 new employers were invited to cooperate and 4938 job vacancies reported by employers were registered. In addition, within the framework of EURES (the European Job Offers network), 1526 job vacancies were obtained, 7 job fairs and 3 training fairs were organized. Cooperation was also established with the coordinator for employment, representing the Platform for Integration of the Disabled, with the local media in terms of popularization of job offers and promotion of the activities and initiatives of the Municipal Labor Office. More than 2000 people benefitted from consulting within the framework of the project.

Apart from MLO, activation projects financed by ESF have been implemented by the District Labor Office and the Provincial Labor Office, as well as the City Social Assistance Center. The representatives of the third sector, interviewed by us, have been criticizing the projects implemented by the public institutions. The respondents complain that many projects do not translate in to real improvement of situation of the unemployed - this can be said mainly about trainings, which do not bring any measurable results.

What I don't like about the social policy is that the system-based projects are focused on CSAC, MLO, DLO... we have had this action for revitalization of Plock lately, and these people attended a training for, like, the fifth time. They have trainings for hairdressers, massaging, I don't know, not fitting anything at all. The consultants work with them, but that's on individual basis, in the projects. They go through the training paths, and nothing comes out of it. Perhaps it would be better to give them this money instead to start their own businesses, although this is not simple either [interview P.4._TSO].

3.3. Innovative Ideas and Solutions in Employment

The „Grant Fund for Plock” Foundation

The „Grant Fund for Plock Foundation” is a local initiative established in 2003 by the Municipal Office of Plock and two corporations operating locally - PKN Orlen SA (Polish Oil Company Orlen) and Basell Orlen Polyolefins. Cooperation with two large founders is based on corporate social responsibility. The main objective of the Foundation is to work on behalf of improvement of the quality of life of inhabitants of Plock. The Foundation announces cyclical grant contests for NGOs of Plock. According to the statute, it provides financial support for projects on behalf of: a) raising of the level of education of the inhabitants of Plock, b) counteracting social and economic exclusion, c) raising of public security, d) preservation of the historic heritage and development of culture and art, e) raising of the quality of social assistance, f) improvement of the condition of the natural environment and raising awareness of the inhabitants of Plock in this regard, g) raising of attractiveness of Plock in terms of tourism, social relations and economy, h) popularization of recreation and sports, i) supporting of the local economy and undertakings aimed at

economic growth of Plock, j) strengthening of European integration and international cooperation, j) acting on behalf of healthcare and its promotion.

The Foundation supports organization of workshops, trainings, lectures, seminars, exhibitions, reviews, trade fairs, concerts, meetings, contests, creation and operation of community centers, clubs, locations for meeting of local groups, publication of educational materials, including audiovisual materials, archiving of knowledge, creation of databases and other innovative activities aimed at integration and development of the local community. Although the Foundation is not focused on the labor market issues exclusively, it supports many actions strongly connected with fighting with marginalization and unemployment as well with promotion of entrepreneurship.

So far, five contests have been held; on 20.02.2013 last one was announced, in which organizations could compete for grants of up to 25 thousand zlotys; the total amount of funds available was 300 thousand zlotys. All non-profit organizations that have their head office or branch in Plock may apply for this money. The only restriction is that the projects must be focused on the city and its inhabitants. The projects may be related to various fields, including social and educational work, sports, and environmental protection. Every potential beneficiary may file an unlimited number of projects.

The Industrial and Technology Park of Plock

Another innovative idea, which was referred to very often by our respondents in context of labor market situation in Plock, was the creation of Industrial and Technology Park of Plock. Established in 2004, it was financed in 50% by the city budget, while PKN Orlen covered the other half. It was supposed to attract investors - local and those from other parts of the country. According to the respondents, its establishment was clearly associated with great hopes for creation of numerous workplaces. Initially, it was expected that even five thousand jobs could be offered: "Several years ago, we had this project of an Industrial and Technology Park, something like a special economic zone, but I think it's been developing very poorly. No jobs are being generated, at first we were told there would be 5 thousand jobs, and I don't even know if there's even several hundred working there right now" [interview P.3._press].

The main barriers hindering development of investments of this type include the low quality of available area, which does not attract new investors, and the inadequate division of land - the plots are too small for serious investors and too large for small companies.

The Industrial and Technology Park of Plock has been referred to very often in the local media. According to "Gazeta Wyborcza" and "Tygodnik Plocki", it contributes a lot to the economic development of Plock, it was said that in 2012, it generated a return of the expenditures. Moreover, the investment attracts interest of foreign investors, such as IBM, and it has been creating new jobs in Plock. However, broader local public still seems reluctant to call it a success.

4. CHILDCARE

In Plock, we can distinguish the following main topics concerning childcare in the local debates:

- Insufficient number of places in kindergartens and nurseries in relation to the demand;
- Changes in the system of calculation of charges for use of kindergartens and crèches;

Moreover, particularly in the interviews, both male and female respondents pointed to such issues as problems with care of the elderly. Below, we describe those three topics in greater detail.

4.1. Supply of Childcare Services in Plock

According to the analysis of press articles, the most significant issue associated with childcare in Plock is the insufficient number of kindergartens and crèches. In the case of kindergartens, like in Warsaw, this is not the problem of kindergarten places as such, but their distribution in the city. Insufficiencies are observed mostly in the dynamically developing neighborhoods located further away from the downtown, which are the preferred place of residence for young families with children, e.g. Podolszyce. In Podolszyce, the number of children aged 3-6 registered as residents is 516, while the childcare institutions offer places for 190 children (data as of March 2011).

In the recent years, the issue of lack of kindergarten care in the district of Podolszyce has involved actors other than the city authorities or the parents, such as the Catholic Church. In February 2009, upon request of the parents of small children from Podolszyce, Father J. Lawicki - the priest from local parish - made an attempt to improve the poor local preschool infrastructure. He proposed he would offer the parish buildings and land for educational institutions (such solution was applied, for instance, at Radziwie neighborhood in year 2005 under the rule of Law and Justice in the city). However, the offer was rejected as the city preferred to invest in its own land and not in the property of the Church.

The growing demand for preschool childcare is also indicated by the fact that the City Council has decided to amend the local spatial development plan - one of the land plots in Podolszyce is to be designated for construction of educational facilities (instead of detached houses). It is significant that this land plot is adjacent to the area, where the construction of the kindergarten has already been commenced („Gazeta Plock”, A. Dybiec, *Zmiana planów zagospodarowania przestrzennego z myślą o budowie obiektów edukacyjnych* [Change of the local spatial development plan aimed at construction of educational facilities], 24.03.2011).

The problem of institutional childcare in Podolszyce is also a component of the political game between the present President of the city, representing the Civic Platform, and his predecessor of Law and Justice. The latter proposed the so-called module-based childcare facilities (kindergartens and crèches), which are usually presented as cheaper and more flexible in responding to demographic changes in comparison with investments in “traditional” buildings. At the same time, this was a flagship project of the former President, who, during his last term of office, ordered evaluation of the construction costs for the module-based facility and conclusion of an agreement with the future contractor. The actual President ordered evaluation of various variants of the investment, aimed at ensuring institutional childcare in Podolszyce. In the light of these, the costs of construction of the module-based facility turned out to be much higher in comparison with the traditional one (16 million zlotys in comparison with 3.5 million), which, of course, resulted in withdrawal from the solution and discrediting of the political capital of the originator („Gazeta Plock”, A. Dybiec, *Rezygnacja z budowy modułowych obiektów edukacyjnych* [Withdrawal from construction of module-based educational facilities] 20.01.2011 r.).

The issue of supply of kindergarten places in Plock was also discussed in the interviews with representatives of the municipal office, responsible for kindergarten care. In their opinion, in the city in general, lack of kindergarten places is not a very urgent problem, since the city does not receive too many complaints from the parents, whose children have not been admitted. The civil servants are convinced that the present supply of institutional care more or less reflects the real demand, since not all parents want to place their

children in kindergartens. Moreover, the offer of public childcare facilities is being supplemented by the newly emerging private kindergartens. It seems that insufficient supply of crèche care is a more serious problem - there are only three public crèches in the city (and one under construction) for 210 children and two non-public crèches for the total of 54 children, whereas about 100 more places should be provided. In year 2003, the city wanted to close one of the three public crèches and use the money to build another kindergarten. As this concept was opposed by the parents, it was withdrawn.

4.2. Changes of the Charging System of Public Childcare Institutions

In year 2005, when the President of Plock as well as most of the City Council members represented Law and Justice, the Council decided to reduce the fixed charges for use of public kindergartens and crèches. The postulate was to introduce a reduction by about 60% of the existing costs; finally, the reduction amounted to 30%, which still placed Plock among those Polish cities, in which charges for public childcare services were the lowest.

In the subsequent years, the city council discussed increases in the charges for use of public crèches and kindergartens, proposed and passed in various contexts. In year 2007, one of the conflicts between the ruling party - Law and Justice - and the opposition - the Civic Platform - referred to increases to be applicable only to children, whose parents were not the inhabitants of Plock, but of the nearby rural areas. The increase for children of the parents, who were not registered as permanent residents of Plock, was finally passed by the city council. Representatives of the Civic Platform argued that such activity would result in hindering of cooperation between the city and the neighboring communes and that the city would lose the position of a potential leader in the region:

This resolution is seemingly justifiable... but, as it always is in such cases, the devil is in the details. I think that Plock should be a regional center. It should be a center, which is able to cooperate with the neighboring communes to achieve broader objectives, not only the immediate, local ones [councilor from Civic Platform, protocol on city council session, 26th of June 2007].

Law and Justice argued, on the other hand, that the city had to provide additional funds for childcare offered to parents not residing in Plock, while these expenses would not be covered by taxes paid by their parents in the neighboring communes. As a result, the inhabitants of the city pay for kindergarten care for their own children, as well as for those living outside the city:

Mr. Councilor has failed to notice that the cost of kindergarten care for one child is 7 thousand zlotys per year. This can easily be multiplied by the number of children who do not live in Plock, to determine the annual amount paid by the inhabitants of Plock from the funds that we have in our budget [councilor from Law and Justice, protocol on city council session, 26th of June 2007].

Since September 1st, 2011, the system of fees charged for public kindergarten services has been changed. Five hours of the child's stay at the kindergarten (8.00-13.00) is financed by the local authorities, while the parents pay for the additional hours. The provisions have turned out to be highly controversial, among other things, due to the need to calculate the number of hours spent by children at the kindergartens and the fees charged for the additional hours, as the decision concerning the fee amounts was left to local authorities. In year 2011, like in Warsaw, also raising of fees for public crèches was discussed, which was a project of the ruling party (Civic Platform). In the case of crèches, the changes were to include an increased flat-rate charge for up to 10 hours spent by the child at the facility. As a result, parents of the children attending crèches faced an identical increase

per child, while in the kindergartens, the increase depended on the actual time spent by the child at the facility. The councilors and the president of the city, representing Civic Platform, argued that the higher rates introduced were still among the lowest in Poland, and they were necessary as a result of the national-level legal regulations, they associated the costs borne by the parents with the expenditures of the city and that some reductions would be provided for families with more children and those with low income (according to the minimum wage criterion):

Moreover, please notice that, and this is worth emphasizing, we want to... introduce a system of reductions for everyone, who really needs a reduction. We are referring here to families with more children. We are also referring to families with lower income... So, on one hand, we verify the costs of the city and we want the parents to bear a part - I underline once again - a part of these costs, about 1/10th, for crèches and kindergartens. On the other hand, for those, who really need it most - who need the support, there are reductions. And we believe this is the right direction of management [President of Plock, Civic Platform, protocol on city council session, 19th of April 2011].

The changes were opposed most strongly by councilors of Law and Justice. In their opinion, making an association between the charge reduction and a minimum wage is superficial, since the minimum wage amount can be raised in the following years. In their opinion, the Civic Platform ruled the city by reaching into the pockets of the city inhabitants, raising the charges for various public services. The politicians of Law and Justice also accused their opponents of lack of social sensitivity, application of an extremely liberal policy and disregarding the opinions of the inhabitants (the argument of the former President of the City of Plock):

... a moment ago we talked about bus tickets, we have a 20% increase here, a 100% increase there, we have had a 25% increase of the charges for waste removal, the cost of tickets to the zoological garden has increased by 50%, the May session [of the City Council] is coming and we will be considering an increase in the price of the water supply, I guess. Gentlemen, will you finally consider the household budgets of the inhabitants, where, in many cases, many people have frozen budgets this year, without any raises? And you want to raise the charges, 20% here, 100% there. Is this really your method of management of this city, you really want to take everything from the inhabitants? This is not the way it should be, really. ... If we sum up all raises to be imposed upon the inhabitants of Plock this year, I am afraid, it will amount to several hundred zlotys for an average family. Do we really want to implement such extreme, liberal policy? This is really a great, dramatic change. I think that changes like this, such extreme changes, should be preceded by very serious consultations, and there have been no such consultations. Let me underline this once again, although I am convinced that the decisive role will be played by math here, and not by reflection and social sensitivity, but I want to point out the social aspects in this regard, the dramatic raises that we have imposed, as the Council of the City of Plock, to the inhabitants of Plock. I do not want to have anything to do with this [Councilor from Law and Justice - former President of the City, protocol on city council session, 19th of April 2011].

Resolutions were passed by councilors representing the Civic Platform, “Poland Comes First”, The Association “Our Country” and one female councilor representing the Polish Peasants Party. They were opposed by Law and Justice, while councilors of the Democratic Left Alliance and one person from the Association “Our Country” did not vote. During the following meetings, the councilors of Law and Justice provided drafts of resolutions to adjust the raises introduced, referring to complaints of the parents, concerning excessive charges for use of crèches and kindergartens in Plock. The councilors of the Civic Platform commented upon these as being a product of a purely political game in the context of the coming election for the Parliament. In their opinion, the city support should be provided for the most needy, as helping everyone means, in fact, helping no one. The stance of the club of representatives of the Democratic Left Alliance remained unclear - the councilors argued against both the Civic Platform and Law and Justice, blaming them for creation of a false image of reality and building of their political capital on the basis of the mediagenic issue of childcare:

It was said during one of the meetings that we would see what some of the councilors perceived to be leftist. This is where I would like to start. Leftist does not mean to give everyone, who has failed, on the global scale... My second reflection is as follows. We have chosen a nice topic to discuss, it is very mediagenic, very attractive in terms of sociotechnics, on one hand, you have the children, on the other hand, you have the poor mothers, and then you have the cruel councilors, because some of us here want to destroy the households... Please, let us focus on how to get the money for the budget, how to rationalize this budget, and not create an atmosphere of a poor city, inhabited by beggars, by the poor, by people, who are being cruelly robbed by this city [councilor from Left Democratic Alliance, protocol on city council session, 19th of April 2011].

In the light of analysis of press articles, in Plock, like in the entire country, a change in the mode of calculation of the charges has raised concerns of the parents. September 2011 was a month of uncertainty. The parents had no idea how much they would pay for what. They were also nervous, knowing that hours between 7.00 and 12.00 have been considered to be free of charge. Unlike in Warsaw, raises in charges for public childcare institutions did not result here in establishment of organized groups of the parents, interacting with the municipal authorities. Perhaps this was due to pressure towards more direct communication between the authorities and the inhabitants and the commitment of the public kindergartens and crèches to remain flexible in relation to the disoriented parents. It is difficult to estimate the actual impact of this communication policy on opinions of the parents concerning the raises; nevertheless, the image of the local authorities in the local media underlined the fact that the parents were not left helpless on their own:

A press conference has been organized on the initiative of the President of the City, concerning changes in the charge levels. It was decided that the kindergartens would support the parents in many ways. For instance, the parents could pick up their children at a different hour every day and sporadically they could be late. It was also underlined many times that the charges in Plock were probably the lowest in Poland. A breakdown of prices from various Polish cities was presented to prove this thesis [„Gazeta Plock”, A. Dybiec, Ustępstwa przedszkoli (Concessions of kindergartens), 13.09.2011].

It should also be added that the electronic system of recording of the child's stay at the kindergarten (chip cards) proved to be effective, which could also mitigate the concerns of the parents.

4.3. Other Debates on Care in Plock

Another problem associated with childcare is the fact that there are children, who are often left by their busy parents and not provided with proper care. This has been raised by one of the councilors of Plock The Association "Our Country". The respondent stated, that the parents, working for more than ten hours per day, left the children to themselves.

Another issue is related to the Roma children; however, this has not been a topic of the political discourse. In the subsequent years, the Municipal Center for Social Assistance implements projects aimed at this group (usually financed from EU funds). For instance, in year 2005, the project implemented was entitled "Kindergarten as the way to provide Romani children with proper conditions for development and to prepare them for school education". In year 2011, "The Romani education assistant" project was implemented for the first time, as well as "Textbooks and school aids for Roma pupils to overcome the financial barrier preventing them from graduation".

During interviews, the respondents (councilors, officers, representatives of TSOs) pointed also to the problem of care of the elderly. This issue emerges both in the context of healthcare and free time management for the seniors: "There are little organizations that would deal with healthcare of the elderly, their problems, their lives. Moreover, there is no overview of the situation, we don't know how many of them are lonely, whether they need some additional care" [interview P.8._TSO].

4.4. Innovative Ideas and Solutions in Childcare

In the examined period, ideas for alternative childcare have emerged in Plock. These include a small crèche, established by the mothers at home (2007) and declarations of the president of PKN Orlen, concerning the planned establishment of a company kindergarten for employees (2011). Both initiatives were described by the local media (in the case of the first one - the implementation, in the case of the second - as the activity planned for the future).

Moms of Plock, inspired by an Internet forum, have established the first home-based crèche in Plock. The children meet two times a week for now. The youngest is seven months old, the oldest - two years old. This initiative indicates that the childcare infrastructure of Plock is insufficient [„Gazeta Plock”, A. Adamkowski, Domowy żłobek (Home-based crèche), 04.11.2007].

An interesting solution, mentioned in one of the interviews, is establishment of sports club for young people. There is a sports club in Plock, which has specialized in martial arts for ten years. The author of the concept is one of the councilors representing the Association "Our Country", who admits that as an athlete representing Poland, he has been able to see how sports clubs for children and the youth functioned in various parts of Poland and the world. In Plock, there are also initiatives to offer psychological support for children and the youth. One of these is the concept of a street psychologist and the social therapy groups, which provide specialist care for children and the youth in their own community (they reach the homes of the children and treatment takes place outside the formal, institutional facilities). Another interesting initiative are programmes for children with autism, for deaf and dumb children, for the blind, financed by the Grant Fund for Plock - which is a joint initiative of the city and PKN Orlen SA:

Another project we have financed, related to the association that works with blind and visually impaired children, and we financed this project, on the basis of which the association created a database of the children, to find out where they studied to monitor their needs and help the teachers working with such children; on the other hand, we produced special maps for these children to teach them spatial orientation [interview P.13_TSO].

In the field of care of the elderly, we are also dealing with an innovative solution - establishment of the municipal council of seniors. The council is to initiate a number of undertakings for the elderly: involving them in work at the kindergartens or families, which need someone to take care of the children, helping school children with school work etc. "So, we have appointed 10 people, who had to meet these conditions, being aged 50 or more and be interested in this group, cooperate with seniors or represent them in some way" [interview P.8_TSO].

5. MIGRANTS IN PLOCK

Analysis of protocols of the City Council sessions and the political programmes of parties of the local political scene shows that the issues of immigrants living in Plock permanently or temporarily is, in fact, absent from the local political discourse. In years 2002-2012, the councilors of Plock referred to one issue associated with situation of the foreigners - the issue of employment of immigrants - mainly Belarusians and Ukrainians, who, due to the regulation of the Minister of Labor and Social Policy of January 29th, 2008 could work in Poland on the basis of an employer's declaration, that is, a greatly simplified procedure in comparison with the work permit. According to a councilor of Law and Justice, this has a negative impact on the inhabitants of Plock, who are being pushed out by cheaper employees from the Eastern Europe:

... during one year, a person from Belarus, Ukraine or other neighboring countries in the East may be employed for the period of six months without any supervision; in fact, they only get a temporary visa from the Voivod of Mazowieckie Province and this is it, in fact, this is not included in any of our statistics... Unfortunately, our employees, residents of Plock, have been replaced with the citizens of Belarus. Unfortunately, the employment rates are lower in comparison with those offered to residents of Plock, that is, about 300 euro [councilor from Law and Justice, protocol on city council session, 30th of September 2008].

In the light of analysis of the local press, the same issue - seasonal work performed by temporary immigrants from the Eastern Europe - was discussed from a slightly different perspective three years later - as saving the business of plantation owners from the region of Plock, unable to find the Poles to work during harvest. The demand for immigrant employees is so high that it leads to emergence of such pathologies as illegal trade of declarations of employers, who want to hire immigrants:

There has been a dramatic increase in the number of declarations, which allow the citizens of our neighbors from the East to work legally in Poland. For many plantation owners from the region of Plock, they are the last resort, as the Poles refuse to work in harvesting. One of the farmers has said he would have to liquidate his plantation without the workers from the east. On the other hand, the ability to bring eastern workers into Poland easily results in abuse. For some, issue of declarations has become a good

business, as they can charge the foreigners with the amount of several hundred dollars or Euro [„Tygodnik Płocki”, G. Szkopek: Handel żywym towarem? (Trafficking people?), 20.07.2011].

Immigrants living in Plock are rarely noticed by the local press. There are several basic contexts, in which they are presented. The first one is associated with various types of pathologies: illegal trade or prostitution, as well as criminal activity - trade in weapons or drugs, fights, being arrested by the police. A typical illustration of this phenomenon has been described by one of the articles of “Tygodnik Plocki” of year 2000:

A woman from Ukraine beaten in Nowe Rumunki [a village nearby Plock]; two seventeen-year-olds wounded with knives at a club managed by a foreigner, CDs with music and illegal computer games and utility software; possibly, trade in drugs and weapons. These are - or may be - the main fields of activity of some of the foreigners living in Plock and in the district. Two foreigners have been temporarily arrested by the District Court as they are suspected of crimes, 24 foreigners have been expelled from the country on the basis of the decision of the provincial governor. In our city, they engaged mainly in market trade -at least the men. The women engaged in prostitution. [„Tygodnik Płocki”, Płockie problem z cudzoziemcami - turystki i handlowcy, (Local problems with the foreigners - tourists and traders), 14.12.2000]

The second, distinguishable way of presenting immigrants in Plock in the local press pertains to individuals, presented as positive examples of persons living in Plock and doing a lot for the city, such as Anna and Wiktor Bramski from Latvia, founders of the choir Pueri et Puellae Cantores Plocenses, laureates of the prize “Plock inhabitant of the year”; Enkhbaatar Dambandarja (Mongolia), president of the 2nd League basketball team “Mon-Pol”; the Dutch president of CNH Poland co., manufacturing agricultural machines (the former Harvesting Machines Factory); Jurij Szyczkow (Russia) - a distinguished trainer, who has taught children and the youth to swim for many years. It is surprising that the so-called 2nd wave of female immigrants is usually disregarded by the local press - the female citizens of USSR, who came to Plock in the 1970s together with their Polish husbands, who were mostly engineers, sent to the USSR to work as representatives of the Petrochemical Plant. These women have lived in the city for several dozen years, some of them attend the prayers and meetings organized by the Orthodox Church in Plock. However, they do not constitute a visible immigrant community - most of them have been granted Polish citizenship. Little is being said about the Poles of Russian origin, living in Plock - children of Russians, who settled in Plock during the partition period (19th century). In the light of interviews with migrants - Russian and Ukrainian women, the most significant problems encountered by immigrants in Plock include the language barrier, difficulties in finding jobs and reluctance of the Poles to accept them.

5.1. Problems of Immigrants in Plock

Based on analysis of the interviews conducted with female immigrants of Russian and Ukrainian origin, it can be stated that one of the most significant problems, encountered by foreigners, is the issue of Polish language. Lack of ability to speak Polish is sometimes a cause of abuse by the Polish employers, and the city or other local actors offer no support in this regard. The only way is to search for a Polish language teacher on the free market.

Most immigrants that I have met, those, who come to work here for six months, they don't speak the language at all. They work for minimum wages, because they are unable to communicate. They don't speak Polish [interview P.12_TSO].

I always dream that someone in Poland will finally think that when somebody like me comes here, they should have access to the [language] school, well, sometimes the people do not have the money at once.. I don't have a job that would let me pay for a [language] school [interview P.9_TSO].

Immigrants find it difficult to get jobs in Plock. A female immigrant from Ukraine, with university education in management, has been searching for three years. According to the respondents, this is not due to the fact they are foreigners. In their opinion, both the Poles and immigrants are in a difficult situation as the Polish economy is in a poor condition. Moreover, a small city like Plock is unable to provide the sufficient number of workplaces. In terms of employment, following the legal regulations in force, the city authorities are focusing on helping the unemployed. Only foreigners having the Polish citizenship may take advantage of services rendered by the Municipal Labour Office, as well as refugees and persons with subsidiary protection or immigrants having permanent residence permits. "I know it's difficult even for the Poles, who have graduated from university here. But I think it is twice as difficult for the emigrants. They have no families, no support here" [interview P.9_TSO].

In the light of statements of the female respondents from Russia and Ukraine, the Poles show various attitudes towards the immigrants. Sometimes they are nice and supportive, in other situations, they show complete lack of tolerance.

Some are very positive, and others... they would humiliate me, you're from Ukraine, you're worse than us, we are the citizens of Poland, and you came from THIS country, and they [Ukrainians] come from there to work and they take away jobs from the Poles. The Poles would have better jobs and they would make more money if it wasn't for some Ukrainians who work for much less money and much better. And some, I have encountered such opinions, some said, well, you're from Ukraine, so, you came to work, you will be a cleaning lady here [interview P.12_TSO].

A female respondent from Russia mentioned a negative attitude towards Russians in Poland. Her friend, working at the prosecutor's office, was told she was either to change her citizenship to Polish or she can say goodbye to the job. She has experienced intolerance many times as well. Contacts with other immigrants from the East have led her to understand that incidents of this type are also encountered by other foreigners living in Plock.

So, she had to change [her citizenship]. But is she Polish now? Well, it's only the citizenship, she's still Russian. But she's no longer registered as a Russian. In fact, there's more of us. [interview P.9_TSO]

I thought I was the only one having this problem, but later on, when the association was established, it turned out that all of our members have had some conflicts with their neighbors. [interview P.9_TSO]

Both respondents point out that the issue of immigrants does not appear in public space. This does not mean, however, that the city does not support any initiatives of immigrants living in Plock (see next clause) - nevertheless, this support is insufficient and the city itself initiates no activities.

5.2. Innovative Ideas and Solutions on Migrants

Russians and Ukrainians living in Plock established an organization in year 2007. It is a branch of the Russian Community Association established in Warsaw for Russians living in Poland, as well as persons interested in Russian language and culture. The members include mainly Russians, Belarusians and Ukrainians, the citizens of Poland of Russian origin, as well as the Poles, although only a few; most of them have registered due to having spouse being an immigrant. The Association consists mainly of the elderly; the percentage of young people is very low. In year 2012, it had 25 members, including about 10 actively engaged. The symbolical fee paid by members is sufficient to cover the current costs of activity. The Association has no head office; however, the local authorities has proposed the organization's members free use of facilities belonging to the city. The Association performs many functions, which are of significance for the immigrants: it organizes cultural events (including the "Russian Days"), preserves the cultural traditions, often helping the newcomers in finding jobs or apartments, promotes tolerance, builds understanding and cooperation with the inhabitants of Plock, as well as positive image of the immigrants from the East. The city inhabitants have been informed of the Association's activities by the local press or directly by the members; nevertheless, the Poles show rather little interest in its operation. The future of this initiative remains unclear. The leader - a female immigrant from Russia - has moved to another city and there is no candidate, who could replace her on the position.

Some surprising activities associated with immigrants have taken place in Plock in years 2004-2006. On the basis of the decision of the provincial governor of Mazowsze, three families from Chechnya settled in the city, whose members had been granted refugee status. They were directed to Plock to implement their 12-months Individual Integration Programmes. In Plock, they received apartments and were referred to a worker of the Municipal Social Assistance Center, who coordinated the implementation of the integration programmes. This was an attempt to increase the spatial dispersing of refugees, who usually attempt to settle in Warsaw:

They said there was plenty of Chechens and many refugees from other countries as well. Probably this was the origin of the idea to solve the housing problems, as they also needed apartments in Warsaw. Therefore, the provincial governor probably decided to direct these families to other places, taking advantage of the ability to indicate the place of stay and Plock was among these locations [interview P.15_MSAC].

The undertaking did not bring positive results - the refugees from Chechnya did not want to stay in a small city, assessing their chances for finding employment in Plock as low. None of the persons directed to Plock completed the individual integration programmes, all families left before the end of the year.

CONSLUSIONS

They are following factors which influence local welfare policy in Plock: (1) economic and social developments under communist centralised system after World War II and, later, transformation connected with introduction of market oriented economic system and establishing political system based on democratic mechanisms after 1990; (2) present conflicts between governing liberal party Civic Platform and parties being in opposition: populist Law and Justice, leftist Democratic Left Alliance, and, to a lesser extent, rightist "Poland Comes First" and local Association "Our Country" present in the city council; (3) conflicts between local government and groups of citizens interested in solving some

particular problems in some ways; (4) citizens' initiatives to help people being in special needs (e.g. grassroots' initiatives directed to immigrants); (5) external financial support given by the European Union.

Transformations of local economy

After World War II several factories have been constructed in Plock. After 1990 many of them bankrupted due to changing economic mechanisms focused on economic efficiency. Number of unemployed people has grown. New economic initiatives supported by local government did not solve problems of local labour market. Many young people looking for a job are migrating to Warsaw or abroad.

Local conflicts

Some problems discussed in Plock are similar to those discussed in Warsaw but not creating so intense conflicts. For example, it was observed that the problems in childcare discussed in Warsaw and Plock were similar. These debates reflected the law changes on costs of public childcare services introduced at the national level. However, the protest groups organized by parents of small children were not visible in Plock due to, among others, better communication policy of local authorities. In terms of housing, it has to be emphasized that the situation in Warsaw is rather specific (see the report WP4 on Warsaw). In Plock, like in many other Polish cities, private properties were also nationalized, but not to such extent as in Warsaw.

Political coalitions

It seems that the main political coalitions in both cities are the Civic Platform and the Law and Justice with the Democratic Left Alliance in opposition. It reflects the structure of political relations at the national level. It was observed that the Civic Platform tries to push more conservative solutions in terms of privatization of local welfare and its connections with the rules of economy. The remaining two parties (Law and Justice and Democratic Left Alliance) are more shifted towards the idea of welfare state and public support accessible for more people on more equal terms. The present City Council was sometimes criticized by the external observers for being passive and reluctant to make decisions, fearing of their political consequences.

The urgent issues in Plock and ways of solving them

Housing. Young people, starting their adult life and establishing families, encounter particularly significant difficulties in access to housing. This is due to the fact that prices of apartments available on the market are very high, and thus they are inaccessible for those with low incomes. On the other hand, low income or lack of income is due to high unemployment rates in Plock. Most threatened by unemployment are young people, without any professional experience, and thus they are the ones suffering most from lack of access to apartments. Moreover, although new council flats are being constructed, their number is still insufficient, as the demand is very high. The most significant criteria for purchase is comfortable location - the nearby kindergartens, schools, shops, family members or friends, as well as the time of travel to work. The most popular (most often selected) housing settlements are the relatively new and expensive apartment buildings with small flats (most inhabitants of Plock purchase small apartments of 35-40m²). As for public housing, in order to facilitate the buyout of municipal flats, the City Council has introduced discounts for tenants. The need for construction of municipal flats, preferably dispersed to avoid creation of a ghetto, has been underlined many times. The undertaken innovative project "Revitalization of city" was to include renovation of old buildings, squares and streets in the area of old town in Plock, but also „bringing back to life" the local community, often marginalized. At least 100 people were direct beneficiaries of the

project, half of them aged 15 to 25. As for results of this project, several backyards have been renovated, small gardens, sandpits for the children have been established and the inhabitants take care about these themselves. Moreover, several participants found jobs after the professional courses. The City Social Assistance Center is searching for money to continue these activities.

Employment. The issues that are most visible in the public debate in Plock include:

- High unemployment rates, lack of jobs for young people;
- Professional activation based on projects financed by the EU funds.

Unemployment is considered to be one of the main problems in the city. Groups threatened by unemployment in Plock are, in particular, persons aged 18 to 24 and graduates of secondary schools. According to local press, there are jobs in Plock, but the people do not want to get them. First of all, it is because the local inhabitants work abroad. Secondly, modern technologies are increasingly difficult to master and the number of people willing to face the challenge is decreasing - among other things, due to the long education process. There is also a visible mismatch of education and the labor market. According to our respondents, the bad situation on the market is partially caused by the fact that persons from outside Plock occupy managerial positions in the key local companies. The projects implemented by local public institutions in the area of employment are having support of the European Social Fund. The local authorities and the Municipal Labor Office undertake different actions to increase opportunities of getting jobs for local people, e.g. the contest-based project „Your own company - a concept for living in Plock”, financed from the ESF, „Active Plock - equal chances of the unemployed on the labor market in the city of Plock”, also financed by the ESF. We have to point out here the innovative projects implemented in the area of employment in cooperation between local authorities and companies, e.g. the „Grant Fund for Plock” - the Foundation established by the Municipal Office of Plock and two corporations operating locally - PKN ORLEN S.A. and Basell Orlen Polyolefins. Cooperation with two large founders is based on corporate social responsibility. The main objective of the Foundation broadly defined is to work on behalf of improvement of the quality of life of inhabitants of Plock. Another one, the Industrial and Technology Park of Plock has been referred to very often in the local media. According to “Gazeta Wyborcza” and “Tygodnik Plocki”, it contributes a lot to the economic development of Plock, it was said that in 2012, it generated a return of the expenditures.

Childcare. In Plock, the main debate topics concerning childcare are:

- Insufficient number of places in kindergartens and nurseries in relation to the demand;
- Changes in the system of calculation of charges for use of kindergartens and crèches;

Moreover, particularly in the interviews, both male and female respondents pointed to problems with care of the elderly. Unlike in Warsaw, raises in charges for public childcare institutions did not result here in establishment of organized groups of the parents, interacting with the municipal authorities. Perhaps this was due to more direct communication between the authorities and the inhabitants and the commitment of the public kindergartens and crèches to remain flexible in relation to the disoriented parents. It is difficult to estimate the actual impact of this communication policy on opinions of the parents concerning the raises; nevertheless, the image of the local authorities in the local media underlined the fact that the parents were not left helpless on their own. In the examined period, the local innovations on childcare included a small crèche, established by the mothers at home (2007) and declarations of the president of PKN Orlen, concerning

the planned establishment of a company kindergarten for employees (2011). Both initiatives were described by the local media (in the case of the first one - the implementation, in the case of the second - as the activity planned for the future).

Migrants in Plock. Analysis of protocols of the City Council sessions and the political programs of parties of the local political scene shows that the issues of immigrants living in Plock is absent in the local political discourse. However, some innovative solutions on migrants were undertaken with different successes. Russians and Ukrainians living in Plock established an organization in year 2007. It is a branch of the Russian Community Association established in Warsaw for Russians living in Poland, as well as persons interested in Russian language and culture. Another project where on the basis of the decision of the provincial governor of Mazowsze, who settled in Plock three families - refugees from Chechnya. This project did not bring positive results - the refugees from Chechnya did not want to stay in a small city, assessing their chances for finding employment in Plock as low. None of the persons directed to Plock completed the individual integration programs, all families left before the end of the year.

To summarize, the reports on Plock and Warsaw show some similarities of the existing social problems that are mirroring the general problems of Polish cities. The discussions about the issues and ways of solving them are not so full of tensions in Plock as it takes place in Warsaw. But also in Plock we may observe some conflicts as well as several innovative initiatives how to fight some deficiencies. The developments in the last two decades show increasing number of activities oriented on solving local social problems undertaken by different local actors. The increasing cooperation in this respect between local government, its agencies, local corporations, *ad hoc* created groupings of citizens and NGOs is a good example of the processes which may facilitate social cohesion of local communities in Poland.

ANNEX: PROGRAMS OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN PLOCK

The program of Civic Platform combines liberal stances on the economy with liberal conservative stances on social and ethical issues, including opposition to abortion, same-sex marriage, soft drug decriminalization, euthanasia, fetal stem cell research, removal of crosses and other religious symbols in schools and public places, and to widen availability of in vitro fertilization. On the other hand, there is growing centrist "fraction" in the party favoring progressive modernization of country, social justice, social tolerance (especially civil pacts of solidarity), a social market economy, and environmental sustainability. The party also wants to criminalize gambling and supports religious education in schools. In the past, core proposals in the party program included privatization of the remaining public sectors of Polish economy, direct elections of mayors and regional governors, the first-past-the-post electoral system instead of proportional representation, labor law reform, independence over monetary policy by the National Bank of Poland, a 15% flat tax, and the decentralization of the state. In case of the local program for Plock, the party's main proposals included: provision of more places in kindergarten and nurseries, development of sport facilities and green areas in the city. In terms of labor market, the Civic Platform emphasizes the necessity of further investments in The Plock Industrial and Technological Park. It was also pointed out that mothers, who want to come back to work after giving a birth, should receive special support¹.

The Law and Justice party program is dominated by the anti-corruption, conservative, law and order agenda. It has embraced economic interventionism, while maintaining a socially conservative stance that moved in 2005 towards the Church. The party is soft Eurosceptic. It favors restrictions on abortion, which is already illegal except in extraordinary circumstances. It is also against euthanasia. It opposes same-sex marriages or any other form of legal recognition of homosexual couples. Law and Justice promotes itself as a pro-family party. Prior to elections, it promised to build 3 million inexpensive housing units as a way to help young couples get married. Once in government (year 2005), it pushed through legislations lengthening maternal leaves and offered qualified support to the idea of giving parents a grant for every newly born child. It favors shutting down large supermarkets on Sundays and holidays, so their workers can spend more time with their families. Like in the case of the other local political party programs, the party's documents doesn't include clear strategies related to social policy issues. The Law and Justice claims that all children of a pre-school age in rural areas around Plock should be provided with public institutional childcare. The program raises also the issues of local transport infrastructure and the role of tertiary education institutions in preventing unemployment².

The Democratic Left Alliance. Many of its politicians have their roots in the communist regime. Most of the members who established the party in 1999 had previously been members of the Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland and the Social Democratic Union, the two parties that were formed out of the remains of the Polish United Workers' Party ruling under communist regime. Democratic Left Alliance claims that Poland must guarantee civil rights and freedoms, including equality in terms of gender, race, age and religion. The state should be neutral in relation to religion. Education and healthcare should remain public and accessible for all citizens. The party claims to support the equal status of women and men through e.g. sexual education at schools, protection of women's

¹ http://www.mazowiecki.platforma.org/files/files/3/34523/Program_PO.pdf.

² <http://www.pis.org.pl/dokumenty.php>.

health, free access to contraception and abortion allowed due to important social causes. However, in reality, these claims remain rather theoretical ideas and promotion slogans than political practice. In terms of social policy, Democratic Left Alliance proposes the enlargement of public welfare, which should support more people in need. On the other hand, they claim that the rights to public support should be stricter so that welfare help addresses those, who need it the most. The local program for Plock includes the increase of workplaces on the local labor market, the increase of wages, the support of mothers and fathers, who want to come back to work after the maternal leave, the increase of women's activity at the labor market, the employment for university graduates³.

“Poland Comes First”. This rightist political party was established in year 2010 by the former members of The Law and Justice, later joined by several members of the Civic Platform. The party was formed from the Law and Justice's liberal faction. The party has criticized the slow pace of economic liberalization by the Civic Platform government, challenging both Donald Tusk's frequent distractions from economic issues and Law and Justice's dirigisme⁴. The party aims to reform the labor market, accelerate privatization, introduce a 19% flat tax, and equalize the retirement age between men and women. The party claims that each family in Poland should receive additional 100 EUR per month for each child, which would be possible thanks to changes in taxes accountancy. Apart from that, each Polish family should be provided with 50 EUR per month for each child's future education. The “Poland Comes First” proposes, that all mothers should receive about 125 EUR per month during 12 months after giving a birth. The retirement age of women and men is to be equalized and all retirement privileges are to be abolished⁵.

The Association „Our Country”. The Association operates in Warsaw and Plock. It was established in 2005 by the expert on local government W. Tkaczyk, doctor W. Tołubiński, composer P. Nagiel, the councilor in The Plock City Council J. Jasion and others (film director, two actors and several city councilors from Plock). The organization supports youth from children's homes, funds scholarships for young sportsmen and initiates sport and leisure activities. At the beginning of its existence, the organization wasn't related to politics. In year 2008, four of its members being Plock city councilors founded the club of the Association “Our Country” in the City Council. The Association “Our Country” emphasizes the potential of The Plock Industrial and Technological Park as a tool of preventing unemployment. Its local candidates propose also free and fast Internet available for all residents in the city. The Association stresses the common accessibility of childcare and pre-school education, free counseling for unemployed, the changes needed in local healthcare system, public security issues, the coherence between education and labor market, and the need of more cultural events in Plock. It is pointed out that the Association is supported by the other local organizations, such as The Alliance of Democrats, Youth “Our Country”, The Academy of Movement, The Angels of Fire, The Association of Extreme Sports⁶.

The Polish People's Party is an agrarian and Christian democratic political party in Poland. It is the junior partner in a coalition with Civic Platform. The party's platform is strongly based around agrarianism. Economically, the party advocates state interventionism (especially in agriculture), and “slower privatization” (although it is not against privatization in general). On social and ethical issues, the party opposes abortion, same-

³ http://www.std.silesia.pl/uploads/files/2079_Samorzad-Program-wyborczy-SLD-pdf.pdf.

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poland_Comes_First.

⁵ http://forsal.pl/artykuly/553190,polska_jest_najwazniejsza_zobacz_program_wyborczy_p_artii_2011.html.

⁶ <http://www.kaczy.pasik.pl/nasz-kraj/program-snk.pdf>.

sex marriage/civil unions, soft drug decriminalization, euthanasia and death penalty. It also supports mandatory public (state) education and publicly funded health care⁷.

⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polish_People%27s_Party.

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- 2) interview P.2._press - a leading journalist from the “Our Plock” Monthly, the former member of the Plock City Council, one of the founders of the Association “Our Country”;
- 3) interview P.4._TSO - a representant of the Innovation Centre of Information Society, a local TSO;
- 4) interview P.3._press - a leading journalist from the “Our Plock” Monthly;
- 5) interview P.8._TSO - a leader of Polish Committee of Social Assistance (Polski Komitet Pomocy Społecznej), a member of Plock City Council from “The Poland Comes First”; a member of Investment, Development and Public Safety Commission (Komisja Inwestycji, Rozwoju i Bezpieczeństwa Miasta), vice-chairwoman of Education, Health and Social Policy Commission (Komisja Edukacji, Zdrowia i Polityki Społecznej);
- 6) interview P.13_TSO - a leader of The “Grant Fund for Plock” Foundation;
- 7) interview P.9_TSO - a leader of the Russian Community Association;
- 8) interview P.12_TSO - a member of the Russian Community Association;
- 9) interview P.15_MSAC - a worker of the Municipal Social Assistance Center in Plock.

PROTOCOLS

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2. The protocols on meetings of Investment, Development and Public Safety Commission of the Plock City Council in years 2004-2006;
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2. Press articles from „Gazeta Płock“, local daily newspaper connected with “Gazeta Wyborcza”, limited to Plock and its surroundings, years 2002-2012;
3. Press articles from “Rzeczpospolita”, daily newspaper of conservative orientation, published on the national level, years 2002-2012;
4. Press articles from from „Tygodnik Płocki“, local biweekly newspaper distributed in Plock and its surroundings, years 2002-2012;

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