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Political attitude of inhabitants of Łódź in the light of socio-demographic structure

Basic research assumption

According to Domański (1995) „the city is a system of highly diversified structure”. It concerns also the city of Łódź which is not homogenous urban organism but is „a set of numerous settlement unites of various origin, history, morphological and functional features” (Koter 1986, 1989, 1990; Koter *et al.* 1991; Liszewski 1977, 1978, 1979).

Naturally, this diversification of urban space is reflected in the spatial organisation of its social system which determines people’s behaviour in their two basic roles: as inhabitants of a particular territory and as agents of socio-economic activities. In like manner, the electoral behaviour of inhabitants may influence the spatial structure of the city. The inverse correlation is possible as well: the spatial structure (or rather the way it is perceived by inhabitants) determines in a way their electoral behaviour.

Our research aimed at defining the relation between the spatial organisation of habitation and the electoral attitudes of inhabitants. In particular we focused our attention on the following questions:

- are there any regularities in spatial diversification of electoral behaviour of the inhabitants of Łódź and what models could describe them?
- what kinds of relations exist between the political options and such factors as the level of investment of urban space, the socio-demographic structure of inhabitants of particular neighbourhood, their financial status and their living conditions?

The proposition of the present paper is that the political diversification of the urban space of Łódź is relatively stable and hardly change in succeeding elections. This diversification depends on spatial organisation of the city, socio-demographic structure of its inhabitants, and their proper appraisal of living conditions.

In order to study these processes it is necessary to define precisely the spatial differentiation of political attitudes of inhabitants of Łódź. To this end we carried out an analysis of results of parliamentary and municipal elections in 1997. We chose the electoral district as a basic research unit. Their number in the 1997 elections amounted to 338.

Spatial differentiation of political attitudes of inhabitants of Łódź

The Łódź electorate can be divided roughly into two major camps: the partisans of the post-communists and the adherents of the „post-Solidarity” movements. The centrist option keeps in the background. However there is also a secondary axe of conflict between the non-communist Left and the Christian democrats together with the peasant party and the extreme Rights in the background.

Examination of the spatial differentiation of backing for particular political camps is based on an analysis of cartograms giving the results of parliamentary elections which took place on the 21st of September 1997.

Research indicates that the „post-Solidarity” movements represented by the AWS (Akcja Wyborcza „Solidarność” - the Electoral Action „Solidarity”) coalition (get much stronger support in outskirts of the city although they keep a high position also in the city centre. Inversely, the post-communist options were given a solid backing in the centre while in the city peripheries they did not flourish. Generally, the backing of the AWS were more or less evenly distributed all over the city whereas the support for the Democratic Left Alliance (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej - SLD) were markedly concentrated. However, this concentration covers a large, central and most important part of the city. Distribution of adherents of the Liberty Union (Unia Wolności - UW), the third major camp in this election, resembles to the repartition of post-communists. Nevertheless, this backing is weaker, discontinuous and less concentrated.

Besides the confrontation of the two major camps (SLD, AWS), another duel took place in the background between the Labour Union (Unia Pracy - UP) and the Movement for Restoration of Poland (Ruch Odbudowy Polski - ROP). This competition was also accompanied by a „third force”: this role fell to either Union for Real Politics (Unia Polityki Realnej - UPR) or to the Peasant Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe - PSL) in less urbanised areas.

The spatial representation of the confrontation of these secondary political forces corresponds with the distribution of followers of the main parties. The leftist Labour Union were given backing in the same areas as the post-communist SLD. The only difference is that this support, although concentrated in the city centre, is discontinuous and thus resembles rather the repartition of the support for the UW. The Labour Union got a weak backing in the city outskirts as it was the case of the SLD.

Analogically, the support for the ROP were distributed similarly to the support for the UW. A strong backing in the peripheries is also clearly visible. However, its relatively weak position in the city centre is by far more marked.

Generally, the spatial representation of backing for the alternative political forces in Łódź (not in Poland though) is a copy of the distribution of support for their homologues (in terms of the political programme) from the first range of the political arena.

The support for the Peasant Party (PSL), the „third force” among the secondary camps, assumes a very characteristic shape. This option was supported in Łódź practically exclusively by the part of population dealing with agriculture, it means the inhabitants of the peripheries. In the city centre its backing amounted almost to naught. On the other hand, the distribution of supporters of the Union of the Polish Republic's Right (UPR) is in line with the distribution of the AWS support but only in the northern and central districts of the city. In the southern part it is similar to the spatial representation of the UW support.

The support for the National Christian Democratic Bloc for Poland (Narodowo Chrześcijańsko Demokratyczny Blok dla Polski - BdP) is distributed similarly to the AWS support (obviously on much smaller scale) although the concentration degree in particular electoral districts resembles more to the one of the UW.

The backing for the Polish National Community - Polish National Party (Polska Wspólnota Narodowa - Polskie Stronnictwo Narodowe - PWN), the most controversial organisation on the Polish political arena, is not comparable to any other party and this confirms its exotic character.

Analysis of relations between the socio-demographic structure of inhabitants of Łódź and their political attitude

In order to establish the degree of durability of political attitudes of inhabitants of Łódź, we carried out an analysis of the results of parliamentary and municipal elections in 21 neighbourhoods. They were selected in consideration of their morphological (genetic and physiognomic) diversity (Kaczmarek 1992, 1996a, 1996b, 1997; Sasin 1995).

With a view to generalisation of the results, it was necessary to aggregate the data concerning both existing political options and results of three elections in question (municipal elections in 1990 and 1994 and parliamentary elections in 1997). We divided the local political arena into 6 main segments: post-communist, post-Solidarity, centrists, non-communist Left, peasant movements and extreme Right.

We aggregated also the data concerning the backing for particular options so as to obtain only one index, for each district, indicating the support level for a given option.

Difficulties related to the data transfer from the electoral districts to urban districts were overcome thanks to modern computer programmes (MapInfo Professional 4.0).

The analysis led us to the following conclusions:

- the post-communist and the centrist options find favourable conditions in demographically young districts. In old ones chances are even, although slightly better for the rightists, the centrists, and the non-communist Left. The post-Solidarity option dominates in middle-aged districts (twice more often than the post-communists and three times more often than other options) (fig. 1);

- in case of the post-Solidarity option, the passiveness of electorate is more important than its age: a passive society supports the post-Solidarity irrespective of its age structure. An inverse relation exists in case of the post-communists: the voters age turns out to be more influential than their activity level. It appears that only young communities declare for the post-communists while the old ones, even no less active, do not;

- in case of the post-communist electorate, the education level is a crucial factor (rather than activity). This option is favoured by medium-educated electors whereas the poorly educated ones generally reject it. Among the intelligentsia, politically active voters support the post-communist option and the passive ones are against it. Certainly, it is an evidence of a high discipline of this electorate. The electorate of the peasant option is composed of uneducated persons or medium-educated but politically passive ones;

- in case of post-communist electorate, the voters education level has greater importance than their age. Generally, the electoral success of the post-communists is guaranteed in districts of at least medium level of education. In a like manner, a high education level of electorate practically prevents the post-Solidarity option from succeeding irrespective of age structure. On the other hand, uneducated (or medium-educated but young) communities regularly give their backing to this option. Results of the centrist option is influenced by both education level and age structure. The Centre is supported by both young and old voters who have at least medium education. Middle-aged electorate hardly declares for this option. For the leftist option the age structure is of no importance; the key factor is a high education level. It concerns also the peasant party but in this case the backing is given by poorly educated electors. For the Right it is hard to find any relation of this kind except that medium-educated electorate did not support it;

- in case of the centrist electorate, the education influences political attitudes more than type of buildings occupying given area. This option finds adherents in highly educated communities irrespective of type of buildings. Inversely, in case of the post-Solidarity option the backing is given by low and medium-educated electorate irrespective of building type

inhabited by them. The peasant party is practically not able to succeed among well (or even medium) educated voters. The only exception is a group of medium-educated electors in the city centre which support it. It testify to a strong link which binds these people (who came to Łódź from country side a couple of dozens years ago) with rural environment. Generally speaking the education level seems to exert bigger influence on the political attitudes than the type of buildings;

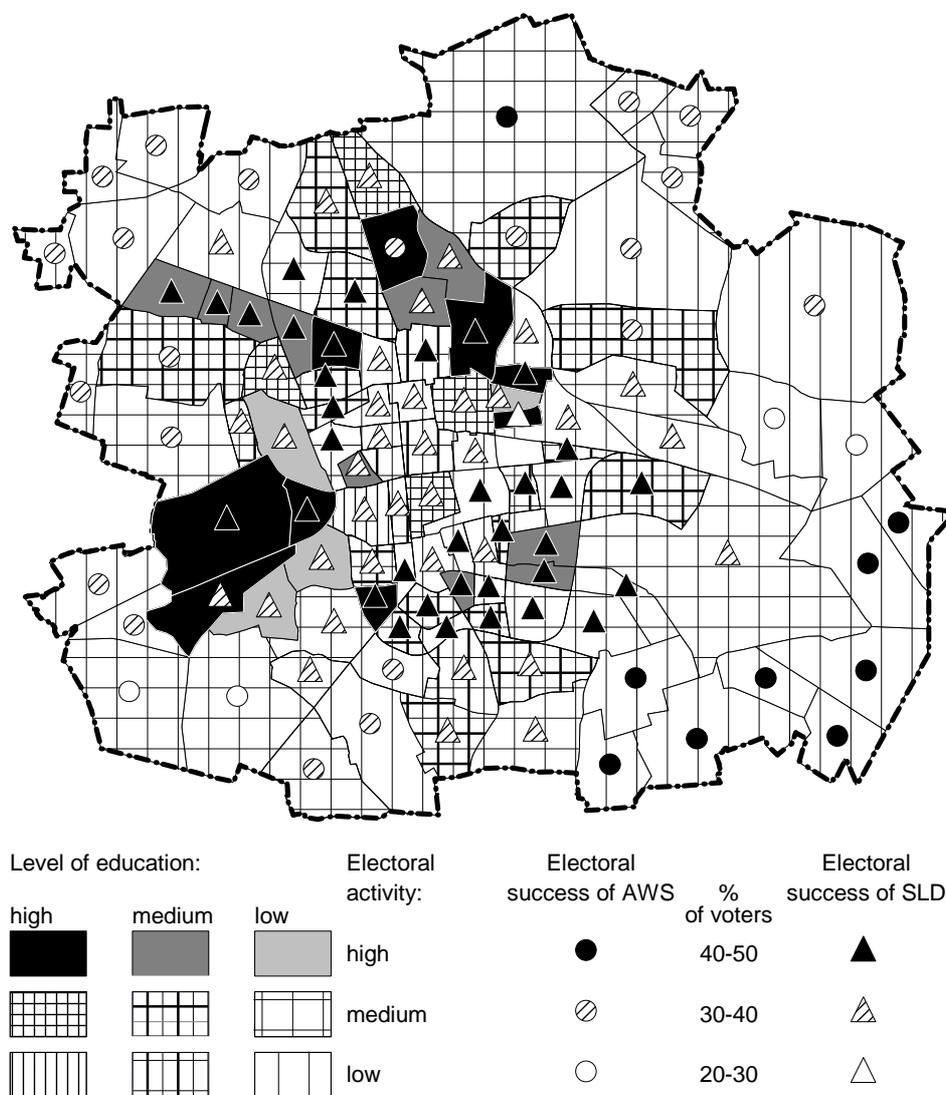


Fig. 1. Structure of education of Łódź inhabitants and spatial distribution of its political attitude in 1997 parliamentary election.

- in case of the Rights and the non-communist Left, the education level influences the political attitudes more than the living conditions: medium-educated electorate does not give its backing regardless of habitation standard. In case of other options the living standard is a determining factor;

- old, poorly educated communities with a low habitation standard show various political inclinations. 80% of them supported the post-Solidarity, 40% also the post-communists and the peasant option, 20% the Rights and the non-communist Left. None of them supported the Centre. Old, well-educated communities with good living conditions give their backing to the Rights, the non-communist Left, the Centre and also, in 50% of cases, the post-communists.

Young, well-educated communities living in very good conditions widely support the post-communists and the non-communist Left and in every other district also the Centre and the Rights;

- the main conflict on the Polish political arena between the post-communists and the post-Solidarity (which has lasted for over 10 years) is being sustained by medium or low educated voters who constitute a majority of the society.

Quantitative analysis of relations between the socio-demographic structure and the political attitudes

In view of a closer examination of the relationship between the socio-demographic structure of the Łódź inhabitants and their political attitudes we carried out an analysis of the correlation between support for particular parties and several variables describing social and demographic characteristics of inhabitants.

First, we analysed the education structure of inhabitants in relation to their political attitudes. A positive correlation with the elementary education characterises electorates of AWS, PSL, ROP, and KPo.ER and a negative one characterises the electorate SLD. Correlation with the basic professional education is generally much weaker: a moderate positive correlation characterises AWS, PSL, ROP, and a measured negative correlation characterises KPa.ER, SLD, UP, UW. In case of secondary education there is a visible correlation with the support for SLD and much weaker correlation with its satellite pensioner's party KPa.ER and UW and a negative correlation with the support for PSL, AWS, ROP, and KPo.ER. University education is positively correlated with the support for UW, SLD, and to a smaller extent, KPa.ER and negatively correlated with the support for AWS, PSL, ROP, and KPo.ER. The lowest level of education (uncompleted elementary education) is positively correlated with the support for the National Pensioner's Agreement, the Bloc for Poland, and UP and negatively with SLD.

These results give evidence of a relationship between the education structure of inhabitants and their political attitudes despite generally low correlation coefficient. According to main tendency the support for SLD, UW, KPa.ER and UP is higher in well-educated communities. Consequently, the support for other parties (AWS, PSL, ROP, KPo.ER) in these areas is relatively small. In case of support for UPR, Bdp and PWN there is no clear relationship with the education level.

The following two variables: number of children per 100 inhabitants and percentage of elderly people, are related to age structure of the inhabitants.

It appears that none of these variables gives evidence of any strong correlation with political attitudes of inhabitants of Łódź. The former index (number of children) is correlated positively only with the support for AWS, PSL, and UPR and negatively with the support for SLD and its satellite pensioner's party KPa.ER. The later index (percentage of elderly people) shows a moderate positive correlation with the support for KPa.ER, SLD, and a negative one with UPR. Despite a low level of the correlation coefficient, one can state that the communities with relatively bigger number of children declare for conservative camps (AWS, PSL) and in districts where this number is smaller the post-communists get better results. Besides, a high percentage of elderly people favours the post-communists and impedes the UPR. Surprisingly enough, it is out of accordance with former conclusions. However, considering that the level of the correlation coefficient is low, it would be illegitimate to shake the previous statements.

The feminisation index (number of women per 100 men in each district) was another variable taken into consideration (Jagielski 1987, p. 148). The strongest positive correlation with this coefficient is revealed in case of support for the SLD and KPa.ER and a negative one in case of AWS, ROP, and KPo.ER.

The economic charge coefficient characterises the economic structure of society (Jagielski, 1978 p. 159). This coefficient represents the proportion of post-active (retired) population in relation to professionally active population. Seemingly, in Łódź this factor has no correlation with political attitudes of inhabitants.

Conclusion

In the hierarchy of factors which influence political behaviour of inhabitants of Łódź, the socio-demographic structure of electorate takes its place behind the attendance at elections but is certainly more important than the type of habitation (buildings) or living conditions.

A numerous attendance at elections favours the post-communist and the centrist options whereas a poor attendance plays into the hands of the post-Solidarity and the peasant party.

The most significant factors which influence political attitudes are average age, feminisation degree, education level, and political activity of electorate while the economic charge seems to be insignificant.

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