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Apparent Actions as a Degradation of Civic Culture?

Introduction

In recent years, the tendency of local authorities to undertake various types of ‘participatory’ activeness aimed at involving residents in the decision-making process concerning local communities has been growing.¹ It is a global trend, the symbolic beginning of which was the first (on a global scale) participatory budget created by the authorities of the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre in 1989. On the one hand, it results from the actual

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- 1 See, for example: P. Matczak, A. Jeran, K. Mączka, M. Nowak, P. Śliwa, ‘Aktywizacja społeczna wspólnot terytorialnych w Polsce z perspektywy ćwierćwiecza samorządu terytorialnego’, *Ruch Prawniczy, Ekonomiczny i Socjologiczny*, 2015, vol. LXXVII, No. 3; M. Freise, F. Paulsen, A. Walter, *Civil Society and Innovative Public Administration. Lessons Learned*, in: *eadem* M. Freise, F. Paulsen, A. Walter (eds.), *Civil Society and Innovative Public Administration*, Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2015; M. Mańka-Szulik, ‘Samorząd terytorialny jako czynnik rozwoju lokalnego i regionalnego’, *Zeszyty Naukowe Politechniki Śląskiej*, 2015, No. 79.

perception of the value of residents participating in decisions on key issues and the spheres in which they function (the idea of good governance²). On the other hand, it can also be considered as projects motivated by social expectations and 'trends' in the field of social life animation (in other words – as forced activities, in line with the 'it is necessary' approach).

The second approach is more and more often accompanied by a reflection on the apparentness of 'participatory actions': instead of being a tool for the real empowerment of citizens, they become a convenient instrument of apparent actions. Unavailable to a wider group of interested parties, illusory public consultations, civic budgets that are a way of implementing tasks that *de facto* are the responsibility of local authorities (for example, 'hard' projects regarding the development of road infrastructure, construction of pavements, installation of lighting) or recommendations of civic panels that are ignored can significantly deter citizens from (co-)participation in the national and local decision-making process. This may lead to the 'freezing' of social activity and involvement in local matters, among other things, which are the core and basis of civic culture.

Moreover, an analysis of the literature devoted to civic culture leads to the conclusion that evaluations and scientific research conducted in this field do not address the issue of its potential degradation and the mechanisms causing this state. There are many studies locating civic culture in the context of its relations with the political system (primarily democratic), pointing to the role of civic culture in shaping this system.³

2 The term 'good governance' denotes a method of management in the public sector involving, *inter alia*, the implementation of a decentralised, non-hierarchical organisational structure and network, distributed management. The decision-making process is based on the multiplicity of actors involved, as well as on the introduction of various entities through public consultations, among others. See, for example: D. Prokopowicz, A. Kwasek, 'Rozwój koncepcji good governance w instytucjach administracji państwowej', *Zeszyty Naukowe Uczelni Vistula*, 2017, No. 55 (4); A. Podgórnjak-Krzykacz, 'Wpływ governance i good governance na strukturę administracji samorządowej', *Acta Universitatis Lodzianensis. Folia Oeconomica*, 2016, vol. 3 (321); W. Rudolf, 'Koncepcja governance i jej zastosowanie – od instytucji międzynarodowych do niższych szczebli władzy', *Acta Universitatis Lodzianensis. Folia Oeconomica*, 2010, vol. 245.

3 See, for example: R.D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994; *idem*, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001; F. Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*, New York: The Free Press, 1995;

At the level of empirical research, manifestations and examples of civic culture are rarely analysed. General research on various aspects of the functioning of civil society and the public activity of individuals or social groups is the most common.⁴ We can observe similar regularities in the case of the research proposed by Jan Lutyński; in the available works of Polish authors dealing with the issue of apparent actions, it is possible to indicate threads concerning, *inter alia*, their occurrence in the areas of law, social policy, education, social communication and revitalisation.⁵

P. Sztompka, 'Zaufanie: brakujące ogniwo polskiej transformacji', Odra, 2009, No. 3; P. Sekuła, *Kultura polityczna a konsolidacja demokracji*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Krakowskiej Szkoły Wyższej im. Andrzeja Frycza Modrzewskiego, 2009.

- 4 The research by Edmund Wnuk-Lipiński, Piotr Gliński and Galia Chimiak is the most famous in Poland. See, for example: E. Wnuk-Lipiński, X. Bukowska, *Dwadzieścia lat polskiego społeczeństwa (nie)obywatelskiego*, in: B.W. Mach (ed.), *Jakość naszej demokracji. Społeczno-kulturowe podstawy polskiego życia publicznego*, Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 2012; P. Gliński, *Style działań organizacji pozarządowych w Polsce. Grupy interesu czy pożytku publicznego?*, Warszawa: Instytut Filozofii i Socjologii PAN, 2006; G. Chimiak, *How Individualists Make Solidarity Work*, Warszawa: Ministerstwo Pracy i Polityki Społecznej, 2006. Among foreign research see, for example: R. Andrews, 'Civic Culture and Public Service Failure. An Empirical Exploration', *Urban Studies* 2007, vol. 4, or Jan Germen Janmaat's analyses, based on empirical data, for example: 'Civic Culture in Western and Eastern Europe', *European Journal of Sociology*, 2006, vol. 47 (3). There is also extensive research on the individual components of civic culture, for example on participation in general elections (broadly understood participation), involvement in political life (membership of political parties, voluntary activity for specific parties/politicians), activities in the public sphere (activity in non-governmental organisations, informal initiatives, protest movements, etc.) and social trust.
- 5 See: J. Lutyński, *Nauka i polskie problemy. Komentarz socjologa*, Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1990. An entire issue of *Przegląd Socjologiczny* has been devoted to Jan Lutyński's concept (2009, vol. LVIII, No. 1). See also: M. Kwiatkowski, *Działania pozorne w systemie postmonocentrycznym*, in: J. Kwaśniewski (ed.), *Normatywność współczesnej Polski*, Warszawa: Instytut Profilaktyki Społecznej i Resocjalizacji Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2005; M. Dudzikowa, *Użyteczność pojęcia działań pozornych jako kategorii analitycznej. Egzemplifikacje z obszaru edukacji (i nie tylko)*, in: eadem, K. Knasiecka-Falbierska (eds.), *Sprawcy i/lub ofiary działań pozornych w edukacji szkolnej*, Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls, 2013; M. Dudzikowa, 'Blokowanie mechanizmów działań pozornych w systemie edukacji – wymogi jego rewitalizacji. Głos w dyskusji', *Przyszłość. Świat – Europa – Polska*, 2013, No. 1 (27); K. Parys, 'Zjawisko pozoru w systemie kształcenia uczniów niepełnosprawnych – próba identyfikacji i propozycje rozwiązań', *Interdyscyplinarne Konteksty Pedagogiki Specjalnej*, 2014, No. 4; S. Gwardys-Szczęśna, 'Pozór w edukacji ekologicznej', *Edukacja Humanistyczna*, 2014, No. 1 (30); K. Gadowska, 'Działania pozorne. Problem upolitycznienia procesu obsady wyższych stanowisk w służbie cywilnej w Polsce', *Przegląd Socjologiczny* 2009, No. 1; S. Jaskuła, 'Działania pozorne w ewaluacji w obszarze szkolnictwa wyższego', *Annales N. Educatio Nova*, 2019, vol. 4.

However, these are single, sporadic publications. On the other hand, apparent actions – as it might seem – are analysed in the sphere of local politics and civic involvement.⁶

The findings that are the subject of this article are of particular importance at the level of local self-governments and communities, as well as the aforementioned participatory management based on the idea of good governance. From the point of view of the shaping and functioning of civic culture, the local public sphere is the closest place for an individual. This makes it even more necessary to pay attention to the factors that may constitute a potential degeneration of activity and attitudes that define the area of civic activities.

In this article, I attempt to determine the impact of activeness taken by local government authorities on the shaping and functioning of civic culture, particularly the impact of apparent actions on civic culture. In other words, it is a question of whether – and if so, to what extent – activities bearing the features of apparent actions described by Lutyński in this area have implications for the manifestations of (local) civic culture. The hypothesis posed assumes that the so-called apparent actions have a negative impact on civic culture, devastating its individual manifestations and reducing the level of civic activity. In addition to citing the findings on civic culture that have already been described in the literature on the subject, I also refer to the results of my preliminary empirical qualitative research. Social trust – one of the main elements that constitute civic culture – is a special point of reference in this article. It should be emphasised that the presented findings are preliminary analyses. I will provide some possible areas for consideration and research issues rather than final, conclusive answers.

The article is in four parts. In the first, I recall the concept and mechanisms of apparent actions described by Lutyński, which occur at the level of local authorities. The second part is devoted to the category

6 Among those taking up this topic, there are articles analysing civic dialogue and strategic planning at the local level through the prism of apparent actions. See, for example: J.R. Stempień, 'Dialog obywatelski w Polsce jako przykład działań pozornych', *Przegląd Socjologiczny*, 2009, vol. LVIII, No. 1, and J. Frątczak-Mueller, 'Działania pozorne w programowaniu strategicznym jednostek samorządu terytorialnego', *Zoon Politikon*, 2016, No. 7.

of civic culture and its main manifestations. In the third part, I discuss the results of the preliminary research on a group of local activists and their perception of activeness that can be classified as 'apparent' and are carried out by local authorities. These results are analysed in the context of the phenomenon of social trust, which seems to play a significant role in shaping civic culture. The fourth and final part is devoted to summarising and presenting the conclusions of the analyses.

Apparent actions according to Jan Lutyński

In the 1970s, Jan Lutyński formulated the concept of apparent actions.⁷ Although it was created during the so-called real socialism and its aim was to describe the regularities observed by the researcher at that time, it can be said that its assumptions are also valid in the realities of the current system despite the passage of several decades and changes in the political system.⁸ It seems that, regardless of the existing political system, the features that continue to characterise the centre of power and political decision-making centres are a developed bureaucracy and efforts to maintain the desired, favourable image of power in society. According to Lutyński, apparent actions are those 'that do not pursue... their immediate goals, which they should pursue in accordance with the perceptions popularised in a given society and culture.'⁹ Importantly, this failure to perform the assumed functions is not accidental as it is in line with the intentions of the authors of the actions and is deliberate and conscious. In other words, these

7 See: J. Lutyński, *Nauka...*. A little earlier, in 1969, Sherry R. Arnstein also wrote about tokenism in her analysis of the levels of social participation. See: S.R. Arnstein, 'A Ladder of Citizen Participation', *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 1969, vol. 35, No. 4. When discussing Lutyński's concept, it is also worth mentioning the specific conditions indicated by some researchers, under which all the features constituting apparent actions can occur. See: B.K. Przybylski, N. Żuk, 'Problematyczność koncepcji działań pozornych Jana Lutyńskiego – na przykładzie badania organizacji studenckich Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego', *Przegląd Socjologiczny*, 2009, vol. LVIII, No. 1.

8 As evidenced by its implications in various, distant research areas (education, civil service, revitalisation). See: *Przegląd Socjologiczny*, 2009, vol. LVIII, No. 1, and also M. Kwiatkowski, *Działania pozorne...*

9 J. Lutyński, *Nauka...*, p. 105.

actions do not serve the interests of 'those for whom they are performed'.¹⁰ Apparent actions are a deliberate and conscious simulation, a fiction of performing specific tasks which, although implemented, do not lead to their assigned goals and objectives.

In order to illustrate the specificity of apparent actions, Lutyński has described the main features and mechanisms. In terms of features, the following can be indicated: (1) apparent actions are perceived as important for the achievement of a goal considered socially significant,¹¹ although (2) in fact they do not contribute to its achievement; (3) the knowledge of the small actual usefulness of such actions is common in a given community, however (4) this fact is not officially presented and made public, but is only present in the consciousness of members of a given community. Finally, 'the real function [of apparent actions – A. Z.] always involves [...] their existence'¹²; (5) they are therefore somewhat autotelic in nature: they serve no purpose except for creating the apparent importance and essence of a specific situation. The sixth and last feature is related to their compulsory occurrence. It results from the necessity of the 'top-down' justification of such actions, despite general awareness of their fictitious nature. Therefore, the existence of a certain 'pressure' and authority 'authenticating' such actions, the fictitious nature of which is common knowledge and awareness, is indispensable. This 'pressure' and the power of the authority's influence are somehow necessary to justify the social concealment of the existence of apparent actions. Lutyński also points out the four main mechanisms related to apparent actions. These are: organisational and decision-making, axiological, that of the obligatory execution of fanciful regulations, and an allegedly pragmatic mechanism.

10 *Ibidem*.

11 While it is assumed that apparent actions should achieve goals that are important from the social point of view, they in fact fulfil other functions. Lutyński mentions verification of official loyalty and reliability in the performance of entrusted tasks, emphasising topics important from the point of view of authorities/decision makers, building specific narratives in line with the policies and guidelines of those in power, providing premises justifying and authenticating the need for the functioning of specific institutions and their bodies, building the desired image of the authorities, convincing others of the preferred attitudes and values, and obtaining specific financial benefits. *Ibidem*, pp. 105–107.

12 *Ibidem*, p. 107.

The organisational and decision-making mechanism is based on a kind of institutional subordination, in which a lower-level body is obliged to implement a decision taken at a higher institutional level. In such a situation, it is impossible for a lower-level authority to challenge a decision taken at a higher level. Importantly, knowledge about this fact is available to both participants of the decision-making process and its observers.¹³ The author also notes that these imposed decisions can be made in a different (but not superior) organisational section, as well as by an informal group or a person having a considerable authority.¹⁴

The axiological mechanism concerns a set of values recognised in a given community. However, as is the case for apparent actions themselves, these values are not confirmed in actual decisions and the way in which specific organisations function and operate, and remain only in the sphere of declarations. This type of socially desirable (but in fact unimplemented) value may be, for example, making decisions and activeness based on expert knowledge and the results of empirical research. On the one hand, this kind of legitimisation of projects is socially valued; on the other hand, it has no real impact on the decisions and actions taken. What is important, however, as emphasised by Lutyński, is the common knowledge about the alleged recognition of these values.

The so-called compulsory execution of fanciful regulations is also responsible for the formation of apparent actions. It is necessary to implement measures that are unnecessary or even impossible to perform from a practical point of view. This may result, *inter alia*, from an incorrect assessment of the situation in which the actions are to be implemented, the lack of time necessary to undertake them or insufficient human resources required for their implementation. The result of such situations can be rudimentary, with incomplete actions performed only in writing, which can lead to 'overproduction' of unnecessary bureaucracy.

13 Lutyński gives the example of a nomination of 'a candidate brought in a briefcase' for a position, imposed by a superior body, whose rejection by a subordinate body would be quite difficult (if not impossible). *Ibidem*, pp. 109–110,

14 This can be compared, for example, to a leader (informal or official, such as a party leader) whose opinion, even though not formally established, is of decisive importance for the entire group.

‘An allegedly pragmatic mechanism’ is associated with the reluctance of the decision-makers to take specific actions (primarily those conducive to meeting important social needs or solving socially important issues), the implementation of which could lead to ‘undesirable [for authorities] consequences or would require the application of specific measures, which is either impossible or has been found to be pointless.’¹⁵ Real and authentic activeness aimed at the actual solution to a problem are therefore replaced by artificial moves. Importantly, each of the mechanisms described is accompanied by the common fictional and illusory nature of the actions taken. This applies to both social and ‘administrative’ levels (the so-called principals and observers). The apparent nature of these (pseudo)actions is therefore widely known, and the affected citizens are aware of the situation.¹⁶

Civic culture

The category of civic culture has been present in social sciences since the 1960s. This concept was introduced into a broad scientific discourse by Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, who analysed the phenomenon of political culture in their book entitled *Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*.¹⁷ According to this already classical approach, civic culture is a kind of result of three basic types of political culture, that is, the parochial culture, the subject culture and the participant culture.¹⁸ The interpenetration of these three basic types of political culture leads to

15 J. Lutyński, *Nauka...*, p. 113.

16 It is also possible, as Lutyński notes, to introduce a kind of gradation of apparent actions, *inter alia*, due to the scope of occurrence of such factors as the frequency of occurrence (constantly-periodically-sporadically), additional functions (side, additional benefits of their implementation), the degree of implementation of the assumed goal and the question of ‘rudimentariness.’ *Ibidem*, pp. 115–116.

17 G.A. Almond, S. Verba, *Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963. This concept appeared in Poland in the early 20th century. It was used by Józef Siemieński and was defined as the ‘highest form of government’ created by a specific nation. See: J. Siemieński, *Polska kultura polityczna wieku XVI*, in: *Kultura staropolska*, Kraków: Polska Akademia Umiejętności, 1932, available at: <http://www.polskietradycje.pl/artykuly/widok/452> (accessed: September 2020).

18 G.A. Almond, S. Verba, *Civic Culture...*, pp. 16–17.

the development of a civic culture in which the participant culture plays the dominant role.

Therefore, civic culture is characterised, among others, by the following features: (1) citizens' knowledge and understanding of the processes and mechanisms of a democratic state of law, as well as striving (also by following the accepted principles of the broadly understood social contract) to strengthen the principles that guide this state; (2) a focus on public order and security, which determine (but at the same time limit) the scope of statements and the participation of individuals in the public sphere; (3) reducing the main political activity of citizens to voting and other 'conventional forms of legitimising' power; (4) respect and recognition for authority manifested in various spheres of life, including in family life (respect for the 'head of the family'), professional and public life; and (5) a high level of social trust, at both individual and social or institutional levels.¹⁹

Thus, the central point of the classic definition of civic culture is the social approval of the rules of a democratic system, expressed, *inter alia*, by trust in state institutions. Any changes or corrections to the system are made using conventional methods, provided for and enshrined in the rules of law, that is, in general electoral law or participatory tools enabling participation in decision-making processes (such as public consultations and opinion polls). Citizens have the opportunity to become involved in the public sphere through membership of political parties and participating in the activities of third sector institutions. The institution of social trust which enables these activities and makes them predictable becomes indispensable for this.²⁰

Apparent activities towards local civic culture

The question should be asked, therefore, how apparent actions influence individual elements of civic culture and, above all, the level of local civic

19 R.J. Dalton, Ch. Welzel, *Political Culture and Value Change*, in: eadem (eds.), *The Civic Culture Transformed from Allegiant to Assertive Citizens*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 7–11.

20 See, for example: R. Hardin, *Trust*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006.

activity.²¹ The answer would be the hypothesis about the devastating influence of apparent actions on civic culture at the local level, as described by Jan Lutyński. This devastation primarily affects social trust, which is the core of civic culture.

Both Polish and foreign researchers emphasise the role of trust in social life.²² Being a special type of social relations, it is referred to, *inter alia*, in the context of research on democracy and primarily on the factors and conditions responsible for its formation and duration.²³ The proponents of this already classic approach include Robert Putnam and Francis Fukuyama. In Poland, these are Piotr Sztompka or Edmund Wnuk-Lipiński. Bearing in mind the hypothesis accompanying these considerations, attention should be paid particularly to the ideas of Putnam and Wnuk-Lipiński.²⁴

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- 21 In these considerations, I focus on the area of local politics because it has been, particularly in recent years, the basic and closest to individuals' area of their own public involvement. An example of this type of activity is the intensive development of the so-called urban movements – forms of activity focused on solving local problems. There is extensive literature on this subject. See, for example: J. Erbel, 'Ruchy miejskie jako nowa forma zaangażowania społecznego', *Władza Sądzenia*, 2014, No. 4, available at: <http://wladzasadzenia.pl/2014/4/ruchy-miejskie-jako-nowa-forma-zaangazowania-spoecznego.pdf> (accessed: September 2020); T. Sowada, *Ruchy miejskie w działaniu. Oblicza partycypacji*, Poznań: Bogucki Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 2019; A.M. Esteves, S. Motta, L. Cox, "'Civil Society" versus Social Movements', *Interface. A Journal for and about Social Movements*, 2009, vol. 1 (2); P. Kubicki, 'Polskie ruchy miejskie. Polityczne czy kulturowe?', *Przegląd Socjologiczny*, 2016, vol. LXXV, No. 65.
- 22 See, for example: N. Luhmann, *Trust and Power*, New York: Wiley, 1979; E.M. Uslaner, *Trust and Civic Engagement in East and West*, in: G. Badescu, E. M. Uslaner, *Social Capital and the Transition to Democracy*, London – New York: Routledge, 2003; R. Inglehart, *Trust, Well-being and Democracy*, in: M. Warren (ed.), *Democracy and Trust*, New York – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999; P. Taylor, C. Funk, A. Clark, *Americans and Social Trust: Who, Where and Why*, Washington: Pew Research Center, 2007 and the works by Polish researchers listed in this article. I consciously resign from making a detailed description of the issue of social trust because my goal is only to signal the presence of this thread in the area of social activity that interests us.
- 23 In this context, the trust of citizens, towards both themselves and public institutions, is a necessary condition for the formation of the so-called social capital – the building block of the democratic system. See, for example: M. Theiss, *Krewni, znajomi, obywatele. Kapitał społeczny a lokalna polityka społeczna*, Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2007; P. Sztompka, 'Kulturowe implikacje szybkich zmian społecznych. Zaufanie, lojalność, solidarność', *Studia Socjologiczne*, 1997, No. 4; R. Inglehart, *Trust...*
- 24 In addition to those already mentioned, other researchers also emphasise the role of trust in the democratic system. Paulina Sekuła reviews the determinants of civic culture in the

In his flagship work entitled *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, devoted to the civic community, Putnam points to a set of constitutive features for this community. In addition to political equality, solidarity and tolerance, he mentions trust as a fundamental factor in creating a civic community. He writes: 'Fabrics of trust enable the civic community to more easily surmount what economists call "opportunism", in which shared interests are unrealised because each individual, acting in wary isolation, has an incentive to defect from collective action.'²⁵ Trust is therefore a factor that mobilises people to take the 'risk' of acting for the common good, 'having a common goal' instead of focusing solely on individual benefits. As indicated by the results of the research carried out by this author, in order to create a civic community and social commitment, two conditions must be met: (1) a sense of empowerment among individuals to participate in public debates; (2) awareness that decisions taken with their participation lead to concrete activeness and effective policy.²⁶

Wnuk-Lipiński points out that trust is one of the factors determining the presence of high or low civic culture – next to openness, tolerance, a network of relationships between individuals and commitment to a community. The high level and intensity of these factors are responsible for shaping a high civic culture. In turn, a low civic culture consists of 'particularism, mutual distrust in society, exploitation of others and an escape into privacy.'²⁷ The effect of a low civic culture is a gradual

concepts of various authors, while pointing to trust (at both institutional and individual levels) as a necessary and conditioning element of civic culture (*Kultura polityczna a konsolidacja demokracji*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Krakowskiej Szkoły Wyższej im. Andrzeja Frycza Modrzewskiego, 2009). The author emphasises that 'trust in fellow citizens' is an aspect of political culture that is essential for the stability of the democratic system (*ibidem*, p. 79). She also points out that 'trust is a cultural resource that is the foundation of an active democratic society, and therefore a factor without which democracy cannot function properly' (*ibidem*, p. 137). She also indicates that it is one of the three (in addition to the so-called civic competence and readiness to undertake civic activity) main elements of an individual's orientation in the democratic system (*ibidem*, p. 119).

25 R. Putnam, *Making Democracy...*, p. 89.

26 *Ibidem*, pp. 88–89.

27 E. Wnuk-Lipiński, *Socjologia życia publicznego*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2008, p. 161.

degradation not only of political life, but also of the broadly understood social order.

In addition to the 'community' and 'systemic' context (that is, creating social relations and cooperation networks and supporting the development of the democratic system), trust can also be considered in the institutional aspect of civic culture. Therefore, one can speak of a lack of trust in the relationship between a citizen and an institution and in relation to civic organisations. Grzegorz Makowski, among others, points to the confidence deficits in the first type of relationship in his analyses of the sociological and legal determinants of informal civic initiatives. He indicates that one of the reasons for the non-institutionalisation of civic activity is a low level of social trust, particularly in its institutional dimension.²⁸ It manifests itself, *inter alia*, in a lack of trust of the state and its institutions in informal activities (suspicions of attempted fraud – primarily the economic aspect, for example, the attempt to tax 'time banks' and also the belief that there is no supervision and control).

The literature on the subject also mentions a decrease in trust in civic organisations (third sector institutions). Most often it is the result of the far-reaching bureaucratisation and formalisation of this sector.²⁹ Instead of focusing on solving real problems, non-governmental organisations are often forced to devote resources and effort to strictly comply with the regulations imposed on them. This situation is aggravated by the project's task implementation system, which is dependent on acquiring funds in the competition procedure and 'fitting' into the specific framework of the project guidelines (so-called grantosis).

28 G. Makowski, *Socjologiczno-prawne uwarunkowania nieformalnych inicjatyw obywatelskich*, in: S. Mocek (ed.), *Nieodkryty wymiar III sektora. Wprowadzenie do badań nad nowym społecznikostwem*, Warszawa: Collegium Civitas, Stowarzyszenie Centrum Wspierania Aktywności Lokalnej CAL, 2014, p. 75.

29 A. Bilewicz, *Odnowa etosu społecznikowskiego? O inteligenckim charakterze niezinstytucjonalizowanych inicjatyw społecznych*, in: G. Chimiak, K. Iwińska (eds.), *Krajobraz społecznościowy – Polska 2014*, Warszawa: Ministerstwo Pracy i Polityki Społecznej, 2015, p. 70. On the problems of the third sector, see also: A. Ziętek, *O polityce i nowej metodologii jej badań. Przykład nieformalnych ruchów społecznych*, in: W. Bulira (ed.), *Granice teorii polityki. Świat zachodni w stanie zagrożenia*, Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2018.

The negative effects of apparent actions carried out by local self-governments are indicated, *inter alia*, by researchers dealing with the issues of social participation at the local level. An example is the work entitled *Jak prowadzić konsultacje społeczne w samorządach? Zasady i najlepsze praktyki współpracy samorządów z przedstawicielami społeczności lokalnych. Przewodnik dla samorządów* [How to Conduct Public Consultations in Local Self-governments? Principles and Best Practices for Cooperation between Local Self-Governments and Representatives of Local Communities: A Guide for Local Self-Governments].³⁰ The authors point out that employees of local self-government institutions and participants in consultation processes on the social side often take apparent actions. As they note:

The observations and information provided by office employees, as well as the conclusions from empirical research, indicate the prevalence of apparent actions in social consultations. We see them in the activeness of people (professionals, officials, experts) and in the activeness of institutions carrying out consultations, as well as in the activeness of the consultation participants themselves – particularly people and social groups who gain nothing by attending consultation meetings, and introduce destruction and confusion.³¹

Examples of this type of action include so-called paper strategies, which are not implemented and exist only theoretically. These are undertakings that do not bring any real, expected results, as well as all the forced and imposed activeness as a result of social or institutional expectations or existing arrangements and obligations. For example, it is unnecessary and futile bureaucracy or forced (due to the aforementioned expectations as to the implementation of the idea of good governance) cooperation between local authorities and residents (groups, institutions, experts), during which a number of factors destabilising and eliminating the potential effects of

30 The authors of this book do not refer directly to the research of Jan Lutyński and his concept of apparent actions; they use this category in its general, commonly accepted meaning, which can be defined as 'simulating' illusory and pretended. See: A. Ferens, R. Kondas, I. Matysiak, G. Rzeźnik, M. Szyrski, *Jak prowadzić konsultacje społeczne w samorządach? Zasady i najlepsze praktyki współpracy samorządów z przedstawicielami społeczności lokalnych. Przewodnik dla samorządów*, Warszawa: Fundacja Rozwoju Demokracji Lokalnej, 2010.

31 *Ibidem*, p. 90.

cooperation appear (such as communication errors, lack of knowledge or insufficient skills of both cooperating parties).³²

It can therefore be assumed that the projects carried out by authorities at the local level, which show the features of apparent actions, negatively affect civic culture including, first of all, social trust in institutions and then interest in matters taking place in the broadly understood public space, the shape of local politics and, finally, the willingness to engage in activities for the benefit of the local community or participatory projects.

The adopted assumption about the negative impact of apparent actions on civic culture is confirmed by the responses of activists obtained during the initial empirical research which I conducted in March 2020.³³ Its purpose was, *inter alia*, to initially determine whether, in the opinion of the respondents, there are activeness at the local level that fulfil the premises of apparent actions, as well as to initially verify the assumptions about their negative impact on the local civic culture and its manifestations. The indicators of apparent actions were, *inter alia*, the respondents' assessment of the following activeness of local authorities³⁴: local authorities taking account of arrangements made with residents; cooperation of the authorities with the local community in making important decisions;

32 *Ibidem*, p. 91. Other examples of apparent actions can be found in the previously cited publications containing an analysis of the occurrence of such actions in various spheres of life.

33 I conducted preliminary research in Lublin in February 2020 as part of the preparation for a research project on the local conditions and shape of civic culture. They included 27 respondents: activists, social activists, people characterised by social commitment and activity in various areas of the local public sphere, in both formal (foundations, associations) and informal groups (informal urban movements). The respondents were selected using purposive sampling and the snowball method. The only qualifying condition for taking part in the study was involvement in the activities of a formal organisation or movement whose activities concerned the public sphere (broadly understood urban policies). It should be emphasised that the research and the performed sample are not representative, but they certainly reflect a particular picture of the studied community and may constitute the basis for further research.

34 The respondents' task was to assess the attitude of the authorities to the indicated issues. It should be noted that the presence of apparent actions is evidenced not only by the opinions of respondents and their assessment of local authorities' undertakings, but also by official messages and the narrative built by local authorities, which in this case speaks of the significant role of resident participation in the decision-making processes. It was therefore about comparing the official narrative of the authorities, which emphasises the importance of participation, with the actual activities in this area and their assessment by residents.

the need for public consultations; and the attitude of the authorities towards the involvement of residents in local matters and towards problems and matters reported by residents.

Responses to each of the above-mentioned items were dominated by the conviction of the respondents about the negative attitude of the city authorities to the indicated issue. Most of them, that is, 96.3 per cent (the sum of the responses 'somewhat bad' and 'definitely bad') negatively assessed the attitude of the authorities towards the need for real dialogue and cooperation with residents in making important decisions, as well as implementing the results of consultations with the local community. It turns out that, in the opinion of almost all respondents, the local authorities have a decidedly negative attitude towards participatory processes and the actual implementation of the arrangements developed with the residents.

The indicator of apparent actions in relations between local self-governments and residents was also the respondents' attitude to the following statements: 'Local authorities care about the high participation of residents in the processes of public consultations'; 'Local self-government is interested in the opinion of residents on local matters'; 'Local authorities try to provide all social groups with equal access to public consultation processes'; 'Local self-government sufficiently consults residents about its decisions'; 'Local authorities make efforts to implement the most effective public consultations'; 'Public consultations conducted by local authorities are an acceptable method of involving residents in decision-making processes'; 'The way in which public consultations are organised by local authorities does not raise any objections'; 'Public consultations conducted by local authorities create real opportunities and conditions for the active participation of residents'; 'Local authorities respect the results of public consultations'; and 'Residents are satisfied with the scope of participation in public consultation processes conducted by local authorities.'

Negative responses, such as 'rather not' and 'definitely not', to all these statements were definitely dominant. In some cases, they amounted to up to 90 per cent (statements such as 'Local authorities care about the high participation of residents in public consultation processes', 'Local authorities make efforts to implement the most effective public consultations', 'The way in which public consultations are organised by

local authorities does not raise any objections' and 'Local authorities respect the results of public consultations'; the first three statements received 92.3 per cent of negative answers and the last, 96.1 per cent).³⁵ The respondents disagreed with the other statements a little less frequently (more than 80 per cent of negative answers). This distribution of responses indicates a very clear negative perception of activeness taken by local authorities and related to the broadly understood participation of residents in decision-making processes.³⁶ Therefore, there is a far-reaching discrepancy between the official narrative built by the city authorities³⁷ and the actual implementation of activeness.

In the research, the indicator of the identified negative impact of apparent actions on civic culture was, *inter alia*, the respondents' attitude to the statement 'Residents have a lot of trust in local authorities and their decisions/activeness', as well as the statements regarding the potential effects of omitting the process of public consultations or not respecting their findings. More than one third of respondents (38.5 per cent) strongly disagreed with the first statement, and 53.8 per cent replied 'rather not'. Among the potential consequences of not respecting the arrangements made with residents, there are: a reduced level of residents' trust in the authorities; a reduced sense of agency and co-responsibility of residents for the decisions taken; and the limited involvement of residents in local matters and attachment to the city. Each of the above-mentioned presumed negative effects of apparent actions was indicated by the vast majority of respondents, with the greatest number of respondents indicating a reduced level of trust in the authorities and their activeness and a reduced sense of agency of residents (88.5 per cent and 92.3 per cent

35 These results are confirmed by other researchers. For example, Kazimierz Czerwiński writes that 'the authorities perceive voluntary civic activity as a competition, a threat'. See: K. Czerwiński, 'Kultura obywatelska w ponowoczesności. Wybrane aspekty edukacyjne', *Studia Edukacyjne*, 2019, No. 55, p. 194.

36 As has already been mentioned, the research and the resulting data are not representative and therefore the conclusions drawn cannot be generalised to a wider population, for example, to all city residents. Nevertheless, they show a certain direction of social needs and opinions in the studied area.

37 See the official website of the City Hall in Lublin on participation, <https://lublin.eu/mieszkanicy/partycypacja/>.

of responses, respectively, indicating that these situations are the possible consequences of a failure to consult with residents or a failure to comply with the arrangements made).

Conclusions

The presented preliminary findings on the impact of apparent actions carried out by local authorities on civic culture (understood, *inter alia*, as residents' trust-based involvement in the local public sphere) allow us to state that the assumption about their destructive influence is correct. It seems that such (pseudo)inclusive and apparently participatory activeness of local governments assume the implementation of the increasingly common and desirable tendency to take into account the opinions of residents in decision-making processes and procedures important from their point of view. On the other hand, many such enterprises turn out to be fictitious and simulated. It can be assumed that the inspiration for this type of action undertaken by local authorities is the increasingly common principles of extended (that is, going beyond the existing 'constitutionally' guaranteed forms of participation, such as general elections and referenda) participatory democracy resulting from the growing tendency to stimulate civic involvement, particularly in politics and local activity. As a result, local authorities often strive to build an image of an open self-government, taking into account the voices of residents, which, however, does not always translate into real and effective actions. Apparent actions carried out by local authorities, and described by Jan Lutyński, may ultimately lead to a kind of apathy and social anomie by favouring a low civic culture. The multiplicity and contradiction of coexisting norms and principles that appear in such situations, the lack of clear and transparent rules of conduct, their changeability and freedom of application, particularisms and the lack of social solidarity may lead to a gradual disintegration of social ties and the progressive destruction of a local community.³⁸

38 Cf. É. Durkheim, *Suicide*, London: Routledge, 2002. The possibility of manipulating with uncertainty and during any creation/reproduction of rules on the occasion of apparent actions also comes to mind. See Z. Bauman, *Globalization. The Human Consequences*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000.

Therefore, the question of the possible elimination of the phenomenon of apparent actions and counteracting it also becomes extremely important, particularly from the perspective of the application nature of the research.

One can also ask about the possibilities of transforming civic culture under the influence of apparent actions. Perhaps the answer will be a new form of civic culture, for example, the assertive civic culture described by Russell J. Dalton and Christian Welzel, in which institutional trust gives way to its individual dimension.³⁹

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Apparent Actions as a Degradation of Civic Culture?

In the 1970s, the Polish sociologist Jan Lutyński created the concept of 'apparent actions,' that is, activeness undertaken by public authorities at any level which, instead of achieving the set goals, only create a fiction of their achievement. The aim of the article is to answer the question about the impact of apparent actions on civic culture. In other words, it is a question of whether, and if so, to what extent, activeness bearing the features of apparent actions described by Lutyński are implicated in the manifestations of (local) civic culture. The hypothesis put forward assumes that apparent actions have a negative impact on civic culture, devastating its individual manifestations and reducing the level of civic activity.

Keywords:

CIVIC CULTURE, PARTICIPATION, LOCAL GOVERNMENT,
APPARENT ACTIONS.