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Subject:

**Social Media as a tool for involving users in city governance processes – a case study of  
the city Łódź**

Executive summary

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## **Introduction**

Involving citizens in the processes of co-governing attracted in recent years, increasing attention among theorists and practitioners of public management. In particular, if we take into account the representatives of New Public Governance. The concept of New Public Governance is currently dominant in the literature (Rudolf, 2016 Wrzosek, 2008). First determinant is the emphasis on social dialogue and the involvement of citizens in the decision-making process, as the elements that improve the quality of the adopted solutions. The role of the authorities in this perspective comes to the creation of standards and values on which the partnership is based. Participation here is important as an element enabling the incorporation of new users in co-governing. There has been a growing importance of the Internet and tools based on modern technologies. 21st Century Town Meeting is an example of a modern participatory tools allowing for participation of up to 4,000 people at a time (ProQuest, 2007). The meeting takes place in cyber space leveling many of the barriers present in traditional methods. In this way, the technology enables the realization of the New Public Governance concept, significantly increasing the number of citizens involved in the decision-making process.

Social media enjoy significant popularity among both private users and business sector (Swani et al., 2016 Schivinski et al., 2016). The reason for this feature low barriers to entry and short learning curve. Publishing content on websites or blogs, requires the user to possess basic knowledge of programming language and software. Compared with websites social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter are simple to use. Their users can publish any content, focusing only on what they want to publish, rather than how to do this (Ellison, 2007). This is emphasized by Benson and Morgan (2015), analyzing trends in communication using social media for private users. Social networking sites are also the first medium that allows direct communication of many with many, where each user is on equal terms and has the possibilities to publish content (Benson, Morgan, 2015). The interest of researchers with social media interaction on the Internet was in the initial period pragmatic and resulted from the observation of practices used by business entities. Hence a lot of work addressed matters related with consumer behavior. Only in recent years, a rise in the number of publications on social media, analyzed from the perspective of political science, and sociology. For example, Mamgold and Fauld (2009) in the context of market behavior argue that social media allows consumers to express opinions at their convenience. This provides an incentive for greater involvement and response to the content published by the company. The business sector sees this opportunity to build their image and brand awareness among consumers by engaging them in a discussion

about their products or brand (Mamgold, Fauld, 2009). Social media also allow to conduct constant monitoring of consumers, through the analysis of published comments about products and services. However, there is always a risk involved that a group of unsatisfied consumers will published negative content, which may result in a crisis (White, 2011). The crisis in social media can occur at any time, so it is necessary to monitor continuously and respond immediately to possible signs of problems. Literature gives many of examples of such crises, many of which had a negative impact on brand reputation, but this does not discourage the business sector from developing the interaction with consumers further (Czaplicka, 2013; Sadowski, 2012).

The municipal authorities use a different communication approach, involving the creation of one official city profile. The city offer is presented as a whole, without any kind of thematic division. This negates the very basic social media principles which value personalization and individual approach to communication at the most. It correspond with the trends observed for years in marketing (Kotler, Kartajaya, Setiawan, 2010). The initial query carried between 07/01/2015 to 07/31/2015 showed that all provincial cities in Poland, have a profile on Facebook, the largest social network in Poland in terms of number of active users (Sotrender, 2015). The level of user activity on these profiles is extremely low. Official profile of the City of Lodz on Facebook, has 74 175 subscribers (as of 11.09.2015, official statistics Facebook). However, only 14 999 took part in a discussion in the last 7 days (as of 11/09/2015). This means that less than 20 percent of the subscribers is active and respond to the content published on the site. Question must be asked, what is the purpose of maintaining this profile? Is the city, guided by the experience of the private sector should consider giving up the universal profile in favor of a targeted, personalized approach? Is City Hall interested in engaging citizens in the processes of co-governing through social media? These questions form the basis for discussion presented in the thesis.

## **Chapter I - Citizen participation as a component of governance – theoretical framework**

Social participation is often called the community based or horizontal. It describes the phenomenon participation within the communities that citizens live. This applies in particular in the creation and functioning of local civic groups, non-governmental organizations or voluntary workers for the benefit of such a group or organization. Such activity is a realization of the civil society concept, which very often is in this sense present in Polish literature and

discussions about social activity of Polish citizens (Lewenstein et al., 2010). Public participation is related to citizens taking part in governmental affairs and exercising their right to become an active force in decision making process. This involvement may be manifested, for example, through the participation of citizens in consultations organized by a public authority or to inform the latter about expectations of the community. Public participation is often replaced with terms like civic participation, participation vertical or participatory management.

In Polish literature the most common terms are civic participation (Piasecki, 2009) and social participation (Wygnański, Długosz, 2005). Public participation is not the same as political participation. The classical definition speaks of influencing the choices and actions of government institutions (Verba, 1972). This definition excludes behavior such as civil disobedience or civil mobilization against the public authorities from the scope of the definition. The problem arises when considering the impact of the said citizens on all public sector structures, including those who provide public services. In this sense, the differences between the public and political participation, cease to be sharp. It seems, however, that such approach suggests that where a citizen affects institutions providing public services grants the right to speak about public participation, which is a broader concept (Conge, 1988). Individual participation involves daily choices of individuals and their expectations for a society that he wants to be a part of. Examples of such choices are responsible consumption or participation in social movements.

The definition proposed by Stuart Langton shows four forms of active citizenship within the community: public action, public involvement and obligatory participation (Langton, 1978). Public activity of citizens refers to situations in which a citizen or citizens take action to persuade government officials or voters to change the decision or course of action. Examples of such activities are protests, lobbying, advocacy and public education. Citizens interested in success of such activities, must organize themselves in the communities, which will be able to obtain the resources and information necessary to carry out the action. It also means that individuals must acquire the appropriate competences. Usually in this type of projects involve members of local communities, functional or interest groups, less often individuals not previously associated with each other. This introduces the problem of democratic deficit in the participatory mechanisms, which may be dominated by representatives of interest groups pushing their own agenda. Participatory process in this situation is not a tool for involving citizens, which negatively affects the quality of solutions adopted and their acceptance among

the citizens.. The target may differ as various problems are tackled – from local communities, through local government to central government.

Electoral and obligatory participation were highlighted by S. Langton. The first of them is an essential element of democracy, which allows the appointment society representatives to exercise decision-making functions. This applies both to participation in the election of the central and local representative, as well as in referendums. Obligatory participation is about activities of citizens imposed by law. This applies to activities supporting public authorities, necessary for implementation of public policies. An obvious example is the obligation to pay taxes which are the primary source of income of the state budget.

Within the study of social activity you can be seen a lot of trends and positions. It is worth mentioning here the view Sherry R. Arnstein, whose ladder of participation is the most famous typology of this phenomenon (Arnstein, 1969). That the author assumes that in a society there is a certain amount of power (force), which citizens can use for their own purposes. Participation is a system of distributing that power among citizens including individuals that otherwise would have little to no impact on public affairs. Ladder of Participation by Sherry R. Arnstein had its beginning in the sixties of the twentieth century in the United States, where implementing the so-called community action programs, noted a significant gap between citizens powerless and those possessing power (Arnstein, 1969.) Ladder of Participation was developed to show these problems. It singled out eight levels of participation, with its typology refers essentially to the level of local participation and on the functioning of public services.

According to the definition of participation understood as involving citizens, typology by S. Langton contains the following elements (Creighton, 2005):

1. Participation is applicable only in the case of administrative decisions that are not made by a person appointed by choice.
2. Participation by definition cannot focus on just providing information.
3. Participation should not be an accidental action, but a deliberate and conscious process to involve citizens in the decision-making process, who receive a real influence on the final shape of the decision.

James L. Creighton defines public participation as the process of integration of public needs and values within the government and implementing cooperative decision making procedures. This is an interactive process, where the overall objective is to make better decisions that enjoy the support of citizens. From this point of view public participation can be seen in two ways.

Firstly, it is a set of procedures leading to the implementation of public policies. 3 phases of the process can be distinguished: preparatory or collecting information, analyzing information and preparing possible scenarios of action; decision and realization. In each of these stages, it is possible to involve citizens. The second view of participation is the degree of citizens' influence on the decisions and actions of public administration.

Engaging citizens is a kind of participation which takes its impetus from public authorities, which enable them to initiate and monitor the implementation of statutory tasks. The primary objective of these activities is to improve the quality of public services by improving the quality of decision making. Decision-making process should be based on consensus, which translates into higher acceptance by the citizens. The most common method of achieving that aim are all kinds of public consultations carried out through consultation groups, public debates or surveys. Institutions undertaking the consultations face two major challenges: how to motivate citizens to join this process and to what extent the collected opinions, comments and demands of citizens should be considered. Public consultations can be implemented at any level of public administration, depending on the needs.

## **Chapter II - Social media as an interactive communication medium**

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as a set of Web 2.0 applications that allow users to create and share content online. By registering on a social networking site user gets access to multiple sources of information, which, through a subscription can deliver the desired content directly on his profile. To be recognizable and easily find their friends or people with similar interests, you are encouraged to provide as many information about yourself as possible, including a picture of yourself. These steps are not required but recommended because they allow for full use of the functionality offered by the medium. This requirement also positively impacts behavior of the user on the network as he is signing every statement with his true identity (Bishop, 2013). The necessity to provide their data forces the user to think of what content he wants to be associated by others. In addition to access to sources of information, users gain the ability to connect to groups allowing them to talk with people from all over the world on any topic. The most important is the fact that all discussions are public and are typically seen by more than one person. Thus, each user is to some extent responsible for moderating the discussion and may verify the validity of the arguments presented. Each user can start a discussion on any topic, and the only condition for its duration is to arouse sufficient

interest among other users. In this sense, both the individual and businesses possess similar tools for starting and moderating discussions. Thus, all wishing to take part in a conversation on a given subject must perform a similar set of actions to which each party is already accustomed to a certain extent.

Social media blur the distinction between broadcasters (the creators) and consumers of content. Users within a social platform have access to a range of tools that allow them to easily create new content, comment and evaluate existing and participate in ongoing discussions. Theoretically speaking, each post can be a contribution to a large-scale debate, where supporters and opponents will abrade the arguments. The discussion begins to live its own life, which may be considered as an advantage or disadvantage, depending on the adopted perspective. Czaplicka (2013) emphasizes that this willingness to discuss each and every subject, may be the cause of a serious crisis, which could have far-reaching consequences for the company or brand. The previously quoted definition by Kaplan and Haenlein emphasizes the aspect of sharing created content. Any new content is automatically visible to other users of the social network, which is an incentive to send the message. If the message is a positive it is amplified, when the content is a negative, it is very difficult to stop further dissemination. This process is a significant distinguishing feature compared with traditional media. Social media allow instant communication on an equal footing, allowing individual users to easily interact even with major companies and public entities like cities or local governments. Moreover, the question posted by a single user is visible to a large group of people, thus ignoring the question carries with it certain consequences. The strength of social media is within its built-in mechanisms to facilitate users to connect into groups and support each other in disputes with big businesses, which previously held majority of advantages on their side. Users discovered that in numbers there is power that no entity cannot ignore (Bakshy E., Rosenn, Marlow, Adamic, 2012).

In the face of the growing interest in electronic forms of communication with the authorities and the popularity of social media, cities in Poland have begun to create their official profiles on social networks. Currently, all provincial cities have at least one official profile on Facebook. Most also has several thematic profiles, for example on the academic offer or dedicated work and internships. The choice of Facebook as the primary communication platform is quite obvious - this is, according to research company Gemius, the most popular social network in Poland with more than 20 million active users (Mobirank, 2015).

While the activity of the municipal government on the Internet in the form of running websites, or sending information to specified recipients is strictly regulated by Polish law, social media

exist beyond its framework. It should be noted that their usage is not prohibited, but their location on the communication map of the public administration is vague. Rafal Guzowski (2015) rightly pointed out that officials are invited by the Internet users to a completely different world - the world of social media. The emphasis on presence of these entities comes from the interested parties, who received a new tool allowing them to exchange their opinions on topics related with what is happening in their local environment. Social media is a universally accessible medium where everyone is a creator and recipient of the content simultaneously. In the case of websites, tools related to e-mail, blogs, newsgroups the public entity as the owner (administrator) of the communication channel have full control over the content of the message and, indirectly, over the messages from the audience. In case of social networking sites such control is impossible. Of course, in the technical sense, every social network gives the administrator the ability to manage access to specific content or blocking users from posting or even access to the entire profile. The problem arises from the very nature of social networking, which puts emphasis on communication that is transparent and unrestricted. New content published on the official profile of an institution, including the comments and reactions from users is automatically sent to all subscribers and available in search results. For example, the official profile of Łódź on Facebook now has 115 933 subscribers. New content is automatically sent to all those people and injected into their profiles directly. If for some reason the administrator would decide to remove the content it would be recognized by users almost immediately. The situation is similar with regard to the removal of comments or blocking users. This means that the public body has much less control over the flow of information and ongoing discussions. As pointed out by Monarch-Matlak (2008), one of the responsibilities of a public entity is to ensure the relevance and accuracy of published information. Websites, newsletters, or e-mails allow full control over the content. In social media full control of the transmission is virtually impossible as there is no easy way of controlling content published by users. It is possible to introduce a mechanism where the message needs to be approved by an administrator before it will be visible to the public, but this solution requires a lot of work on the part of officials. Moreover, this system of control could be recognized by users as a form of censorship which could negatively affect the image of the public entity. Therefore the cities decided to publish only the current information about events in their area, which to some extent overlaps with the content published on the official websites. This seems a sensible step, as it allows the information to reach a wider range of customers, especially for the age group 18-24 years, which, as the survey revealed *E-government in the eyes of Internet users in 2014*, don't use



official websites at all. This does not mean, however, it is the only possible use of social media by local governments.

Local authorities and the whole public administration faces the challenge of how to respond to the increasing popularity of social media. On the one hand, there is a clear trend of expectation on the part of citizens to have the ability to contact them via the Internet. This trend applies to both agencies at national and local levels. On the other hand, there are some difficulties both legal and technical in nature that prevent the full availability of government services over the network. There is a lack of confidence in quality of services offered by the public administration. A separate issue is the specific nature of social media. It is a dynamic medium that emphasizes fast, open and often unstructured communication, which to some extent is in contradiction with the specificity of the public office. Public administration as already mentioned should take care of the relevance and accuracy of the published information. Thomas Piróg (2013) argues that effective communication is important, but its accuracy is paramount. Speed and the dynamics of social media significantly hinders proper examination of published information. It is necessary to look for a compromise between speed and quality of the published answers. Cities in Poland generally realize that social media is not just a temporary trend and slowly incorporate them into their communication strategy. At the moment their approach is informative – publishing information about current events in the city. What is lacking is the interaction between the city (local authorities) and users. This may be due to the lack of competence on both sides and resources needed to conduct an effective dialogue. Interactive, instant communication was not available previously to public administration and their users. Thus, it is necessary to develop the principles of communication through social media on the basis of negotiations between the parties involved. When one party tries to impose its vision, the whole process will fail (Adamczuk, 2014). The problem is the lack of legitimacy of social media, making it difficult to use them for specific tasks. This prompts the question whether one should expect legal regulations concerning the use of new media by local government should even be introduced. The concept of New-Weberian State (Sześciło, 2015) by Christopher Pollitt and Geert Bouckaer entails the restoration of the dominant role of the state, with particular emphasis on administrative law as part of protecting the relationship between the state and the citizen. Following this line of thought, it is clear that the public domain has no room for spontaneous publishing of information, which is typical for the new media. The state should regulate the status of social media and the information made available through this channel. Here, however, one must ask the question whether the introduction of restrictions

will not result in a decline of interest. The informal nature of the communication through social media is its added value. On the other hand, the concept of the New Public Management assumes that local authorities should take the initiative and become a manager striving to maximize performance by adapting to the new reality (Krynicka, 2006). If public administration wishes to communicate with their users through the Internet, the communication model must meet their expectations. Regulations are not mandatory to achieve this. One must welcome the fact that cities are trying, despite these difficulties, to meet users' expectations and strive to exist in the social sphere. Statistics indicate that access to the Internet in Poland is at a high level and Poles are eager to use social networking sites. It is important to channel this energy and use it to establish a proper dialog between the government and people.

### **Chapter III - Social media as a tool for building engagement among city users**

The main objective of this study was to determine the extent to which social media are used to engage users in the processes of city governance. The motivation to explore the phenomenon came from significant popularity of social media among Internet users in Poland. In the previous chapter it was established that Web users expect to be able to attend to official matters via the Internet and interest in the use of e-government services is constantly growing. City authorities must answer a fundamental question - how to exist in this new space? If the local governments wish to be an active partner in the ongoing discussion about issues of local communities, a communication plan must be established to convince users that it is worth investing their time and effort.

Content analysis of the official profiles of provincial cities lasted three months in the period between 04/01/2016 and 30/06/2016 for all 18 profiles simultaneously. A tool was created to operationalize the analysis using the following criteria:

- City offer - services and products offered by the city to various target groups, allowing them to take advantage of the available local resources.
- Ongoing communication with users - reporting on developments in the city and beyond, including current events.
- Promotion – promotion of the city and products offered.
- User surveys - questionnaires addressed directly to users in order to explore their views on a particular subject.
- Content provided by users - information and materials provided by users.

- Participation support - information and promotional activities aimed at encouraging users to engage in governance process.

These criteria helped to assess what type of content is posted on profiles of the cities and what percent of messages are related to user participation. Analysis of results allowed to determine the perception of social media by the municipal authorities and assessment of the potential of new media to engage users in the governance processes.

The results of this study confirm the claims stated in Section II of this work. Provincial capitals are present on Facebook and try to build their position. Today, communication is based on the promotion of their offer and the city as a whole. These are typical characteristics of the initial period, and it seems that with time, the proportions will change. Currently, the city authorities are trying to find an effective strategy of utilizing new media. Gorzow Wielkopolski has been a leader in informing users about the processes of participation. It also adopted a comprehensive approach to promote this idea, by telling a story related to the execution of specific tasks. On the other hand, the city did not publish any material coming directly from users. It also has a fairly high rate of content presenting their products and current information. There are clear attempts to foster participation, while giving up interactive communications for a digital bulletin board approach. Bydgoszcz represents a different philosophy, encouraging users to publish their own pictures and constantly promoting new works. . It seems that the city authorities at the moment test different methods of communication, while trying not to harm their public image. The unregulated nature of social media makes it a challenging medium from the point of view of the local administration. Zielona Góra also presents a different case. In the analyzed period it published only 16 posts, which is insufficient to conduct any kind of reasoning. This situation, however, shows that the authorities of some cities do not fully understand the essence of social media. Łódź revealed a relatively high ratio of their own generated content at the level of 62% (including 55% of this being promotion) and very low levels of content generated by the users. This means that the city authorities are mainly interested in sending information. To investigate the reasons behind this approach a series of interviews was conducted.

The second stage of the study consisted of two components. The first is to conduct in-depth interviews based on a structured scenario with a quantitative component with the representatives of the city of Lodz. As already mentioned the lack data on the activity of cities in social media and the lack of studies on the potential of media in engaging users in the governance processes at the local level there was a need to utilize a variety of methods and

techniques. For the purpose of this study a number of units within the Town Hall of Łódź were selected. This choice was made on the basis of the job descriptions of individual organizational units of the Town Hall of Lodz.

The study in the City of Lodz and its subordinate units allowed to describe in detail the goals set by these institutions in social media. The Town Hall focuses on information and promotion, where the official profile of the city is to build a positive image of it. These activities are planned in advance according to a media plan. The respondents positively referred to the idea of governance and use of social media in a positive manner but the statements were fairly general. At the moment there are no plans to increase the involvement of users on the official profile of the city, although such attempts are made on some thematic profiles. Units subordinate to the city represent a completely different approach to social media. The initiative in this area came from the workers themselves who saw the chance of user involvement in the activities of the unit. All key informants were able to determine the benefits of presence in social media, both from a factual, image and communication perspective. The study confirmed the statements contained in Chapter II on engaging users: if the profile is guided in a consistent manner and the purpose and methods of engagement are clearly defined, users are very willing to get involved. In the case of an entity as large as the city is more difficult due to the greater number of services and stakeholders. It seems that a good solution is to create profiles on specific topics. General profiles should continue to function as a hub for directing the users to specific profiles.

#### **Chapter IV – User involvement in city governance using social media. The role of city authorities – a model approach.**

In the previous chapters the author has analyzed the nature of social media in terms of their usefulness to involve users in the process of city governance. The studies lead to the conclusion that they can play a significant role acting as an interactive point, mediating contacts between municipalities and users. Due to the unofficial nature of the profile on Facebook it can be a great first point of contact with public authorities. To this aim could be achieved, it is necessary to meet several conditions. As a starting point a model developed by Justyna Anders and Marta Hereźniak was used called the 5z model. (Anders, Hereźniak, 2006). It has been used in practice by the Polish public administration. On that basis a five stage relationship between users and the public sector can be extrapolated:

1. Spotting – entities are aware of their existence, but do not have sufficient information to start a dialogue.
2. Interest – entities are informed that each party has the resources useful for the partner. First benefits of a dialogue are perceived.
3. Understanding – the partners are aware of the nature of communication and understand the prevailing rules and limitations. They can also fully identify the benefits of dialogue.
4. Trust – partners understand mutual expectations and limitations, they believe that the parties involved act in a transparent manner in order to achieve the goals.
5. Involvement – full involvement of users and government entities in the communication process (the final goal).

These points can be applied directly to the process of communication between users and the city:

1. Spotting – entities are aware of their existence, but do not have sufficient information to start a dialogue. Governance is not possible due to lack of knowledge and competence on both sides.
2. Interest – entities are informed that each party has the resources useful for the partner. First benefits of a dialogue are perceived.
3. Understanding – the partners are aware of the nature of communication and understand the prevailing rules and limitations. Users and city authorities are able to identify the potential benefits of governance.
4. Trust – partners understand mutual expectations and limitations, they believe that the parties involved act in a transparent manner in order to achieve the goals.
5. Involvement – full involvement of users and municipal authorities in the process of governance (the final goal).

To achieve the goal the city must take the burden of the educational process in the field of communication through social media and explain the benefits associated with the process of governance. As mentioned earlier, each of the parties is limited by certain barriers related to lack of knowledge, competence or understanding needs of partners. For communication to run smoothly, the city must assume the obligation to carry out research to know the expectations and preferences of its users. Social media are a good tool for this purpose because of the informal nature of communication. No basis in law means that you cannot use Facebook or other portals as a tool for participation in the strict sense. But it is possible to use them as intermediary cells where officials can explain in an accessible way the benefits arising from the

inclusion of the users in the governance process. This was realized in practice by subordinate units of the Łódź Town Hall. Social networking has allowed them to reach a wider audience and involve them in daily operations. The main difference between the subordinate units and the city is the scope of the issues raised. The city provides many services simultaneously and the subordinated unit is focused on the realization of a single task. Thus, communication with users is easier to read, because it focuses on a specific set of issues. The city authorities should divide services offered into clear categories and invite users to collaborate. Official profile of Łódź in its present form may be treated as a hub that directs the users to specific profiles. Key informants from the Łódź Town Hall have rightly pointed out that the official profile of the city is a postcard of sorts and is not suitable for discussions. Thus the creation of sub-profiles is necessary. The role of local authorities in this case comes down to guide the user to the right place. The Łódź Civic Budget is a positive example of successful implementation of the model presented above. Communication is continuous and consistent constantly reminding users about the initiative. The projects, both those in progress and already implemented are monitored, which translates into an increase in transparency and confidence in the project.

## **Summary**

The aim of this study was to answer the question of whether social media can be used a tool for involving users in the processes of governance at the local level. The research and analysis revealed that the new media offer such opportunities, but it is necessary to fulfill some basic conditions. Analysis of the content published on the profiles of provincial cities carried out under the first phase of the study, showed that local governments want to be active in the social sphere of the Internet. The activity is very one-sided. Published posts are informative and promotional in nature. These profiles can be characterized as interactive bulletin boards, aimed at promoting a positive image of the city and to encourage users to take advantage of the city services. These conclusions were confirmed by interviews conducted in the Town Hall of Łódź. Officials were able to determine benefits of engaging users through social media, often referring to the example of the Łódź Civic Budget. They emphasized the fact that Facebook and other networking sites are a very important communication tool because of their popularity, especially among young people. Here, however, a certain dualism appears in the statements of the respondents. On the one hand, they stressed the importance of social media for the city as a whole – their role in building relationships with users, important feedback submitted by them and the growing quality of proposed solutions. On the other, the key informant asked for an

example, referred to the Civil Budget, which operates largely outside the official profile of the city. The initiative has its own profile and website, which is used to communicate with users. The Łódź Civic Budget from the perspective of communication of the city is treated as a separate entity. This facilitates a coherent narrative, focused on the implementation of a particular goal. This approach is similar to the communication strategy adopted by the subordinate units. These entities at their initiative decided to move into social media, having a detailed set of objectives to pursue. The interviews showed that people responsible for the profiles often instinctively met the expectations of users, which translated into involvement on their part. It was emphasized that the main factor for success is to clearly define the objectives and provide engaging content. The result of this approach was the inclusion of a wide range of users in the operation of these units, ranging from material assistance, through the forwarding of information and encouraging others to join. Respondents indicated that the latter form of involvement is very important because it extends the range of potential users willing to cooperate. The main element connecting subordinated units of the city of Łódź and the Łódź Civic Budget is a comprehensive approach to communication. The interested parties receive all the basic information necessary to get involved, but also current information on the progress and outcomes of their involvement. From the perspective of the City of Lodz, the biggest benefit coming from presence in social media is a positive image among users. The official profile of the city is mainly used to promote the city and its services. Lack of coordination between the different units of the town hall and underdeveloped e-services in Poland create a barrier that prevents the full utilization of social media by the local governments.

Social media can and should play a supporting role in participation. That support must take place at three levels: informing about a certain initiative, discussion about the initiative and action. At various stages of this process it is essential to ensure its interactivity – users must be able to contact local authorities at all times and discuss any problems. People will join the process only if they are convinced that it will bring tangible benefits. Social media allow to meet this conditions by providing regular updates on the results. It seems that the local authorities are aware of this potential and are trying to utilize it. What is lacking is consistency in these activities and support from state-based e-services that would enable fast and easy access to relevant information.

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