

WARSAW: A CITY OF INNOVATION AND CHANGE

INNOVATIONS CASE NARRATIVE: WARSAW, POLAND

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Why Warsaw?

The answer is not as obvious as one might think. To understand why Warsaw is so high in the rankings of today's business-friendly cities, one must understand its history, see how its powerful transformation process is taking place, and get to know Warsaw's residents themselves—people known for their energy and perseverance.

I know several beautiful cities that at first glance seem similar to Warsaw. Most of these cities are better known than Warsaw and have an established reputation and position. However, if the world we live in is in fact ruled by pervasive change, then Warsaw is a city where you can see and feel the signs of the times in every area of life. This city is a powerhouse of evolution and revolution on both a micro and macro scale.

Several years ago, while working on the essence of the Polish brand, Saffron Brand Consultants chairman Wally Ollins pointed out that in Poland, especially in Warsaw, one finds a creative tension that keeps the city constantly at a boil, ever ready to act and create. I have personally observed this continuous ferment for several years and

can confirm that this atmosphere is extremely contagious, affecting all who have ever become involved in the life of this city. When people change their surroundings with the intention of improving their working conditions, education, and housing and adapt their immediate space to their needs, all this imperceptibly turns into a desire, and then the need, to jointly create and jointly decide on the introduction of new and better solutions.

Innovation is perhaps too grandiose a word to describe achievements that improve everyday reality, but the sum of such achievements and the innovative technological solutions they employ allow us to perceive Warsaw as a living, growing organism that changes every day. Warsaw's envi-

ronment has been one of continuous change during the last decade, and the next few years are expected to see post-industrial parts of the city transformed into new areas of development, a vastly improved infrastructure, lifestyle changes, and an explosion of new urban spaces filled with activity on an unprecedented scale. The creative spirit here in Warsaw has found a way to vent its energy, and that is the key to the city's success.

British physicist Geoffrey West has claimed that cities are the physical manifestation of their residents' relations—their individual interactions and groups that come together for mutual development. It is my view that in Warsaw and what is happening here—the ideas being generated and the decisions being taken—have charted new directions and often abrupt turns in the history of the whole region and the world. Today, what is happening in our city is the result of such action. There is a level of activity that native residents and newcomers alike are embracing in order to adapt the city to their needs and expectations. As I juggle my various roles in the business of the city, I am aware of how many activities one can get involved in and how satisfying work in many fields can be for those who join in the life of the city.

As deputy mayor I am responsible for economic development, among other things, and I see the conditions being created to

focus positive energy on the city's development. A key challenge in this area remains the mobility of the city's inhabitants, which will require not only modern transport and communications infrastructure but technological solutions in order to reduce the impact on the environment.

Technological solutions must also be found to help residents and activists make changes in urban spaces. Modern technologies clearly are reshaping traditional and proven solutions and helping us run our lives in clever new ways, but smart technologies cannot replace the creativity and activity of the residents themselves.

The entrepreneurial spirit involves acquiring and developing the attributes and skills needed to be creative and innovative. Although I am not an entrepreneur myself, I can appreciate the entrepreneurial spirit even just setting up my own home brewery. In Warsaw we have stopped merely talking about being innovative and have started to create the conditions that nurture innovation.

QUALITY OF LIFE AND MOBILITY

One big challenge in creating mobility in Warsaw is the city's relatively large area. To illustrate this, one can compare Warsaw to Paris, the most densely populated European

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capital. While the Polish capital is five times larger in surface area, its population is about 20 percent smaller (about 1.7 million compared to 2.2 million). Those who commute to Warsaw every day, which includes residents of the metropolitan area and people from towns up to 60 miles away, increase this figure to approximately 2.5 million. Until recently Warsaw had no motorway system and just one unfinished metro line, and the relatively dense railway network went practically unused. This explains why the last decade has seen a giant leap in the development of the city's transport network, including intensive expansion of the metro.

Warsaw's underground railway is no doubt the youngest in Europe, but it has stimulated urban development and promoted wiser use of urban spaces. We also have focused on developing the tram network by constructing new lines that connect to far distant districts, and on expanding the city's railways. This effort has created a link between the city center and Frederic Chopin Airport, which is now the largest regional hub for travelers on connecting flights within Central and Eastern Europe. During this transport development phase, we also have explored low-emission technologies; for example, alternative fuels power our entire urban bus fleet. Our single ticket system for all modes of transport, an intelligent traffic management system, and the steadily expanding "park & ride" network are other infrastructure elements that add to the city's quality of life.

Year by year, ever more Warsaw residents are also taking to their bikes, a form of transport that was not a strong factor in our city until recently. The success of bicycle transport is visible everywhere: the network of cycle paths has doubled, a public bike-hire system has helped to quadruple the number of people getting around the city by bike, and the city's Veturilo bike rental network is now the seventh largest in Europe.

Warsaw aims to implement mobility solutions that serve the greatest number of people possible within the metropolitan area. An efficient transport system contributes greatly to the city's quality of life, which is a crucial factor in attracting new residents and investors. Warsaw is able to provide a high quality of life by combining the attributes of a large city with those of smaller localities, and an urban environment with the natural environment. Warsaw still has untapped potential that we are working to develop. For example, the Vistula River flows through the city center, its untamed banks home to rare fauna specimens. In fact, 30 percent of the city is green areas that are ideal for recreation and relaxation.

PARTICIPATION AND CODETERMINATION

As a result of the planned destruction of our city during World War II, the greater part of Warsaw virtually disappeared from the face of the earth, most of its inhabitants killed or expelled. That image of a ruined Warsaw is the most tragic part of the city's history. But, it also marks the beginning of its new character. The city was rebuilt by those coming home after the war and those who came here from different parts of Poland. Together they formed a new society. The quality of this human capital enabled Warsaw to rise like a phoenix from the ashes of war, and today it is the core of the city's strength and potential. Of Poland's cities, Warsaw has the highest percentage of residents with a higher education, the greatest variety of cultural facilities, and the most companies, social initiatives, business environment institutions, and students who can boast high placement in competitions and international rankings. A society so rich in knowledge and know-how means that most of the population is interested in the city's development and wants to join in creating their own Warsaw. Promoting and implementing the partnership model is another of our main priorities in preparing for future city development. We realize that a

modern city must be open to the needs of the people living there; that is how we see Warsaw and that is how we are shaping it.

Residents contact each other using a platform that consolidates existing urban hotlines and functions as a center for information and intervention. The electronic platform has proved a boon to our everyday contact with local residents. It is the place people look for information on various consultative processes or to pose new questions. In recent years we have conducted an average of approximately one hundred consultations annually. Anyone can demand an intervention and about a thousand reports come in every day; the platform enables people to check whether and how it was resolved. Public consultation also takes place every day via the platform, even on something as complex as the large revitalization program underway in the city's Praga district, a much neglected 19th-century area now favored by the creative sector. The revitalization is currently expected to cost 350 million euros.

Since 2014, residents have decided how the money from the municipal participatory budget should be spent in their neighborhood. This is an extremely important project well-supported by the media, which has increased residents' participation in decisions regarding the public sphere, helped develop awareness, and created a sense of local community. We have more than 640 projects planned for 2016 at a total cost of 12 million euros.

We also are making use of crowd-sourcing mechanisms that reach residents directly through the Open Warsaw platform. Thus far we have gotten more than a thousand ideas from the nearly 17,000 registered users on how to improve life in the city. The most important change, however, is the one taking place not in the city but in the minds of the people. Our residents are no longer just passive observers and critics of the activities undertaken by the city council,

they are undertaking these activities themselves for the good of the city as a whole.

TECHNOLOGIES ON A DAILY BASIS

Virtually every city dweller today has a personal organizer that combines the functions of an informer, guide, advisor, planner, calendar, etc.—namely, an increasingly advanced mobile phone. Today, developing applications is not only a product for big business but something small-scale startups across Warsaw continue to build. In 2013, Warsaw began a large program for developing and providing public data that may be useful to our residents and improve the quality of life in the city. We also encourage gifted Warsaw programmers to build applications that use municipal data resources to solve everyday problems. For the last three years, together with telecom company Orange, we have conducted the Business Intelligence Hackathon API competition, which invites people to create innovative new applications or platforms using data on the locations of the city's ATMs, health-care clinics, hotels, urban transport, paid parking zones, tourist information, etc. Nearly 150 new ideas were submitted for the third edition, and the winning applications included Ecological Warsaw and Warsaw Ninja, which help people identify where obstacles and congestion might exist on their commute to work or school.

We currently are working to create a network of microtransmitters (e.g., beacons) to be deployed inside and outside Warsaw buildings, which we call Virtual Warsaw. Microtransmitters connected to smart phones will help to facilitate navigation inside buildings or travel around the city, and will serve up information and trivia about the passing scenery and tourist attractions. A significant feature of Virtual Warsaw is increased accessibility for people with impaired sight. This innovative project has been awarded a prize in the Michael Bloomberg Foundation's Mayor's

Challenge competition. We currently are conducting pilot tests in public transport and inside buildings, and the first comprehensive implementation is planned for the end of 2017 or early 2018. Municipal districts from the Warsaw metropolitan area will also be included in the project, and in the city's new care service support system for people living in social welfare institutions that is based on mobile phones. We also will be introducing a land-value calculator—a free application for estimating the value of city plots—which we hope will attract more investors to the municipal districts involved.

WE FOCUS ON ENTREPRENEURSHIP

In mid-March I read that the computer game *The Witcher*, which is produced by the Warsaw-based company CD Projekt, has received the third most awards in the world. This is great news, and I hope the city's growing creative sector (in a few years 50 percent of Poland's creative sector will be concentrated around Warsaw) will bring further successes. The possibilities for individual development attract not only future entrepreneurs but also international brands such as Google, which has established a campus in the heart of our Praga creative district. We are seeing strong interest from other international initiatives that are planning projects here, including a multifunctional innovative district that will offer support to technology startups. The emerging ecosystem has been cultivated and powered by our accelerator Alfa.ac program and our technology accelerator, the MIT Enterprise Forum Poland. We also are organizing creative mixers with the British Council, which will be devoted to various industries in the creative sector.

To effectively support the SME sector, we must know and react to the needs of entrepreneurs. Responding to the needs of the market, we have opened the Smolna Centre for Entrepreneurship—an incubator and

information and training center for SMEs—and we will open a second center dedicated to creative startups in mid-2016. Together with Startup Poland, a foundation representing Polish startups, we have appointed a chief technology officer to serve as our link between the city council and the world of technology startups, and we have established an innovation council to advise the mayor and coordinate the city's innovation-friendly policy. We also support events in the startup industry, such as Startup Weekend Warsaw, Bitspiration, and the Wolves Summit. These activities have been noted by *Forbes*, which placed Poland third in its ranking of startup-friendly places around the globe. Approximately 400,000 companies now operate in Warsaw and more than 10,000 new entities register here every year. Moreover, every fifth Warsaw resident owns a company. We also are home to 150 research institutions, and Warsaw has spent more than 600 million euros on research and development in the last eight years.

As Geoffrey West says, and it's hard to disagree with him, cities are like living organisms: the bigger they are, the more complex and complicated they become, but they also have more to offer. Warsaw offers a great deal and has a promising future that is hard to resist.