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The European University of Cities in Post-Industrial Transition

Public Participation in Urban Climate Change Adaptation Processes: A Comparative Study of Post-Industrial Cities – Łódź (Poland) and Cork (Ireland)

July 2026

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Contents

Public Participation in Urban Climate Change Adaptation Processes 4
Project Background 4
Building on Prior Learning 5
Łódź: Public Benefit Activity Councils & Other Participation Tools 6
Overview of Public Participation in Poland 6
Public Benefit Activity Councils 7
Urban Regeneration Committee 10
Civic Dialogue Committees 11
Use of Participation Tools – Case Study of Łódź 11
Łódź Public Benefit Activity Council 13
Łódź Urban Regeneration Committee 15
Civic Dialogue Committees in Łódź 17
Impact Assessment of Łódź's Consultative Bodies 18
Environmental and Climate Issues 20
Cork: National and Local Public Participation Networks (PPNs) 21
Overview of the National Public Participation Network Structure 21
Cork City Public Participation Network 23
Structure of the Cork City Public Participation Network 27
Assessing the Impact of the Public Participation Network 28
Public Participation Processes: Lessons from Łódź & Cork 30
Conclusions 33

Public Participation in Urban Climate Change Adaptation Processes

Project Background

The European University of Cities in Post-Industrial Transition (UNIC) is an "alliance of ten universities across Europe who are working with their cities and with one another to tackle urban challenges and develop shared, sustainable futures."[1] One of the key priorities for UNIC is to contribute to the "resilience and renaissance of Europe's post-industrial urban centres", by "fostering a new generation of students with the knowledge, skills and societal consciousness to act as change-leaders, active citizens and builders of our common European future, shaping the European Education Area."[2]

As part of the first phase of UNIC collaborations, in 2023 University College Cork (Ireland) and the University of Łódź (Poland) separately commenced projects examining elements of public participation and risk communication in urban environments. Both projects resulted in publications addressing aspects of good practice in public engagement and communication. In August 2024, academics in University College Cork, working in partnership with colleagues in Malmö University (Sweden) and the local city authorities in Cork and Malmö, published *Guidance on Risk Communication & Community Engagement Practices: Experiences from Cork, Ireland and Malmö, Sweden*.[3] Meanwhile, in April 2025, the Interdisciplinary Centre for Urban Studies at the University of Łódź published a report entitled: *Participatory Urban Adaptation to Climate Change: A Guide for the Effective Collaboration of Local Governments and City Residents*.[4] As a result of the UNIC network, representatives from Cork, Malmö and Łódź met at the UNIC annual conference held in Malmö in May 2025.

Reflecting their shared interests in promoting urban resilience and involvement of stakeholders in communicating climate and disaster risk, and in partnership with students at both institutions, Dr Ewa Boryczka-Kubiak (Łódź) and Dr Dug Cubie (Cork) developed a follow-on collaboration under the auspices of the UNIC initiative entitled: *Public Participation in Urban Climate Change Adaptation Processes: A Comparative Study of Post-Industrial Cities – Łódź and Cork*.[5] Building on the two reports, this shared project provided an opportunity for mutual visits between the two cities and an opportunity to discuss public participation processes relating to climate change adaptation in

[1] UCC, 'UNIC'. The UNIC university partners are: University College Cork (Ireland); Erasmus University Rotterdam (The Netherlands); Koç University Istanbul (Turkey); University of Deusto (Spain); University of Liège (Belgium); Ruhr University Bochum (Germany); University of Oulu (Finland); University of Zagreb (Croatia); University of Łódź (Poland); and Malmö University (Sweden). All hyperlinks were last accessed: 11 June 2026.

[2] UNIC, 'Our Mission'.

[3] UNIC, *Guidance on Risk Communication & Community Engagement Practices: Experiences from Cork, Ireland and Malmö, Sweden* (August 2024). This project was supported by the UNIC Engaged Research Seed Fund.

[4] Ewa Boryczka, Agata Burlińska, Kamil Brzeziński, Tomasz Jurczak, Klaudia Kamińska, Aneta Krzewińska, Aleksandra Nowakowska, Agnieszka Rzeńca & Anna Wasiak, *Participatory Urban Adaptation to Climate Change: A Guide for the Effective Collaboration of Local Governments and City Residents* (2024).

[5] The Agreement was concluded within the framework of the Science Hub Competition UŁ edition UNIC, for the period October 2025 to May 2026. The student partners in the project were: Niamh Guiry (Cork), Maria Olbert and Jakub Majewski (Łódź).

post-industrial cities. These discussions facilitated further exchange of information with a particular emphasis on the role of local authorities, social and voluntary organisations, and residents in shaping environmental and climate policies, as well as on the participatory tools used to support these processes.

In particular, the project team in Ireland undertook a case study of the Cork City Public Participation Network (PPN), while in Łódź the project team undertook empirical research to examine the Eco-Budget (*Ekobudżet*) process of the Łódź City Office as an example of an innovative ecological participation mechanism.

An important element of the project's work is the comparative analysis of consultative and advisory bodies in Ireland and Poland. The analysis focused on the Public Participation Network in Ireland and institutionalised consultative and advisory bodies in Poland, including Public Benefit Activity Councils, Urban Regeneration Committees, and Civic Dialogue Committees.

Building on Prior Learning

This collaborative project also provided an opportunity to reflect on the findings from the two previous projects undertaken in Łódź, Cork and Malmö. The two reports separately highlighted the important role of deliberative public engagement and effective communication in decision-making processes at the municipal level. A key priority identified in both reports was the importance of participation by a range of stakeholders, including those who are vulnerable, from marginalised communities and/or whose participation may be hindered by existing factors.[6] The role of cooperation and strategic partnerships also emerged as a common finding, and the significance of such partnerships in generating effective adaptive and disaster risk-related outcomes was highlighted.[7]

Reflecting the different national and municipal contexts, the two projects focused on different means of participation and community engagement, with the Łódź project discussing the benefits of a multi-stage "citizens' assembly" model,[8] whilst partnership between local authorities and stakeholders and creative activities incorporating art and storytelling were included as examples of good practice from the Cork-Malmö perspective.[9] In terms of potential challenges, the issue of limited resources and funding was observed by both projects. Reflections from Łódź included the importance of "securing adequate financing for climate change adaptation activities"[10] and the Cork-Malmö report considered the impacts of "[r]esource and staff constraints" on stakeholder engagement.[11] While evidently operating in different geographical, social and governance contexts, it is interesting to observe and consider these common themes, challenges and experiences in Łódź, Cork and Malmö.

[6] Boryczka et al. (n.4) pp.46-47; UNIC (n.3) pp.8, 21.
[7] Boryczka et al. (n.4) p.58; UNIC (n.3) p.8.
[8] Boryczka et al. (n.4) pp.49-59.
[9] UNIC (n.3) pp.10, 12-13.
[10] Boryczka et al. (n.4) p.47.
[11] UNIC (n.3) p.7.

Łódź: Public Benefit Activity Councils & Other Participation Tools

Overview of Public Participation in Poland

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Public participation in Poland was largely enabled by the political transition of 1989. Signs of a thaw had been visible a few years earlier, throughout the late 1980s, when the Foundation Act (1984) and the Associations Act (1989) were enacted — the first legal instruments to regulate the formal status of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). These laws laid the groundwork for organised civil society in Poland, though they operated in a context of significant political uncertainty and limited resources.

In its early years, the Polish NGO sector was more homogenous in terms of organisation size and financing.[12] Most organisations were similar in size, membership numbers, and funding sources, and civic energy was high following decades of suppressed associational life. However, this initial homogeneity gradually gave way to growing diversification – a process that would later affect the representativeness of formal consultative bodies designed to speak on behalf of the sector as a whole.

The EU accession process, culminating in Poland's membership in 2004, proved a decisive catalyst for the institutionalisation of public participation. Transposing European directives into Polish law significantly expanded participation requirements, particularly in the fields of spatial planning and environmental protection. Strategic environmental assessments, public consultations on development plans, and formal stakeholder involvement in programming the use of EU structural funds all created new channels – and new obligations – for citizen and NGO engagement. The 2003 Act on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work,[13] enacted in the accession period, represented the most comprehensive attempt to institutionalise the relationship between government and civil society, establishing formal consultative bodies at all levels of administration.

Despite this expanding legal framework, research consistently shows that participation tools in Poland are under-utilised in practice.[14] The gap between formal provision and actual engagement reflects a broader pattern: Polish law tends to create procedural requirements for consultation without establishing the resources, institutional incentives, or accountability mechanisms that would give those requirements substantive force.

The assessment below focuses on two obligatory and one non-obligatory public participation tools in Poland that are most relevant to the concerns of this study: Public Benefit Activity Councils

[12] Badania Klon/Jawor, *Kondycja organizacji pozarządowych. Trendy 2002-2022* (2022).
[13] The Act of 24 April 2003 on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work, Journal of Laws 2003, number 96, item 873. Unofficial translation available at ICNL database.
[14] Batory Foundation, *Narzędzia partycypacji lokalnej w Polsce w 2023 roku* (2024).

(PBACs), Urban Regeneration Committees (URCs), and Civic Dialogue Committees (CDCs). Together, they represent the main institutional channels through which organised civil society can formally engage with local government in Polish cities. The first two are the closest Polish equivalents to the Irish PPN structure in terms of their consultative function, multi-stakeholder composition, and formal standing in local decision-making.

The aim of the assessment is to provide insight into the social and economic context in which these tools operate, their legal environment, and their potential contribution to participatory climate change adaptation in cities. Each tool is evaluated against the same set of dimensions used in the assessment of Cork City PPN: legal basis and mandatory nature, composition and representativeness, scope of competence, mechanisms of influence, and institutional resources. Where data allow, the assessment also addresses actual activity levels and evidence of impact.

It should be noted at the outset that the following descriptions necessarily differ from the PPN assessment in one important respect: systematic monitoring data on Polish consultative bodies is sparse. Unlike the Irish PPN system, which produces annual national reports aggregating activity across all 31 networks, no equivalent national monitoring framework exists for PBAC or URC. The analysis therefore draws on a combination of legal sources, independent academic research, sector surveys, and – in the case of the Łódź Public Benefit Activity Council (ŁPBAC) and Łódź Urban Regeneration Committee (ŁURC) – original empirical material gathered through analysis of meeting minutes, formal opinions, and correspondence from the period 2017-2024.

Public Benefit Activity Councils

Public Benefit Activity Councils (PBACs)[15] are consultative and advisory bodies to public officials regarding cooperation with the non-governmental sector, established by the aforementioned Act of 24 April 2003 on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work (PBA Act).[16] A 2010 amendment allowed for the creation of PBACs to local government units.

Polish local government consists of 16 regional units (voivodeships, pl. *województwa*), 380 counties (pl. *powiaty*) and over 2,500 communities (communes, pl. *gminy*). There exists a national-level PBAC and PBACs for all three levels of local government. At all three tiers of Polish local government, PBACs are optional bodies whose establishment is contingent on a formal application from the non-governmental sector. At voivodeship level, a joint application from at least 50 organisations is required; at county and commune level, the threshold is at least 5 organisations. For all other local government units, PBAC are optional – Article 41e of the PBA Act states that a Commune PBAC "may be established", meaning its creation depends entirely on a motion submitted by a group of local NGOs. The initiative for institutionalising dialogue thus rests with civil society, not the local authority – making the council's very existence contingent on the organisational capacity and mobilisation of the local NGO community.

The composition of a Commune PBAC is determined by Article 41f of the PBA Act. It consists of representatives of the local council, the executive body (mayor or president),[17] and representatives of NGOs active in the area – the latter required to constitute at least half of the total membership. The statutory minimum is 8 members: 2 representatives each from the legislative and executive

[15] Public Benefit Activity Councils (PBACs) – pl. *Rady Działalności Pożytku Publicznego (RDPP)*.
[16] Act of 24 April 2003 on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work (n.13).
[17] For the communes with city status the executive power is referred to as *burmistrz* (mayor) or *prezydent miasta* (city president) depending on the city's population size.

bodies, and 4 NGO representatives. The procedures for appointing members and the rules of operation are determined by the local council through a resolution.

The scope of a Commune PBAC's tasks includes issuing opinions on draft development strategies, draft resolutions and local legislation concerning the sphere of public benefit activities and cooperation with NGOs, expressing views on the functioning of NGOs and the delegation of public tasks, and providing assistance in disputes between public administration and civil society organisations. Additionally, a PBAC is obligatorily consulted on multi-annual or annual programmes of cooperation with non-governmental organisations, prepared and implemented by local self-government authorities. The deadline for a PBAC to issue an opinion is 14 days from the receipt of the document. Compared to the 21-30 days provided for other consultative bodies in Polish law, this is a very short timeframe that in practice limits the possibility of in-depth analysis of the documents being reviewed.

PBAC have no separate legal status from their local government unit and no dedicated funding source. In practice, this means they operate without any financial resources of their own: members receive neither remuneration nor reimbursement of costs, and the body has no capacity to commission external services such as analyses, expert opinions or training. Their functioning relies entirely on the voluntary, uncompensated work of their members. No dedicated funding is provided for research, expert analyses, or administrative support outside the office structure. Unlike the national-level PBAC, whose operating costs – including travel reimbursement and administrative services – are covered by the state budget, no equivalent financial mechanism exists at the commune level. In the context of the PBAC's capacity — and the genuine present-day need — to issue opinions on plans and documents relating to climate change and urban adaptation, this gap has particularly significant consequences: assessing climate risks, reviewing adaptation plans, or analysing environmental data requires specialist knowledge that cannot realistically be mobilised without resources for external expertise.

Within a PBAC, the non-governmental sector is represented by various types of public benefit organisations. This includes non-secular entities such as church charities (up to one-third of a PBAC's membership). The local government is represented by elected members of the local council (up to one-third of the membership). Unlike the three-pillar model underpinning the Irish PPN structure, PBACs are organised around the concept of public benefit activity – an umbrella term for a range of voluntary activities that assist the Polish government in implementing policies and delivering social services. The 2003 PBA Act enumerates 34 such activities across various thematic fields, including social assistance, healthcare, the promotion of culture and national heritage, environmental protection, and ecological education.

In Poland, NGO functioning is governed by a series of acts introduced over several decades, each enacted under different socio-economic and political conditions: the 1984 Foundation Act, the 1989 Associations Act, the aforementioned 2003 Public Benefit Activity Act, and the 2016 Social Economy Act. The NGO sector must also comply with financial and tax regulations that are not tailored to its needs and capacities. Such fragmentation renders civil society organisations structurally vulnerable and places them in an inferior position relative to both public administration and the private sector.[18] The complexity of NGO legal requirements discourages citizens from organising and joining organisations' governing bodies. Studies show that although the number of volunteers is rising,

[18] Maciej Kunysz, Dawid Puszko, Justyna Kalina Ochędzan & Piotr Stec *Nihil novi sine communi consensu - Nic o nas bez nas - podsumowanie cyklu 16 Okrągłych Stołów* [expert panel at XIX edition Open Eyes Economy Summit – ICE Cracow 19-20 November 2024].

NGOs are struggling to find successors to current leaders.[19] Younger generations prefer flexible, project-based engagement over formal institutional membership. This trend may result in the further marginalisation of PBACs, which were designed to network public administration with a well-organised and institutionalised non-governmental sector.

The national government does not systematically monitor PBAC functioning. Several independent studies have been conducted on their operation and effectiveness, but a comprehensive national assessment comparable to the Irish PPN Annual Report system does not exist. The Voivodeship PBACs are generally regarded as the most active tier, likely because regional-level NGOs tend to be better resourced and more professionalised than those operating at the commune level, and because voivodeship bodies are mandatory regardless of local political will.

PBACs are an institutionally weak body.[20] The transparency of their work depends on the genuine will for cooperation between civil society and local government. Key structural problems identified in the research literature include the following:

1. The broad scope of PBAC competence: since, by law, these bodies may opinionate on matters concerning the functioning of NGOs, and the range of NGO activity is extremely wide, almost any local regulation could technically fall within their remit.[21]
2. A low public profile: PBACs are not widely recognised even among those active in the NGO sector.[22] Many councils do not publish their outputs or opinions, and their work has little public visibility.
3. A lack of representativeness: a 2015 survey in major Polish cities found that over one-quarter of NGOs were unaware of the existence of a PBAC in their city, indicating low participation.[23]
4. An imbalance of power: since the organisation and election procedures of PBACs are regulated by the local council itself, the rules frequently maximise the influence of the council and the mayor – for example, by stipulating that both the chair and deputy chair of the PBAC are appointed by the mayor rather than elected by members. Such was the case with first regulation on Łódź PBAC formation.[24]
5. The risk of a sham PBAC: even where a council is formally established, the local government may effectively nullify it by failing to submit relevant documents for review, not convening meetings, or ignoring submitted opinions.

[19] Badania Klon/Jawor, *The Capacity of NGOs in Poland - Key Facts 2024* (2025).
[20] Judyta Pasiut, *Voivodship, poviat and commune Public Benefit Activity Councils as a form of the civic dialogue and their impact on the intersectoral communication* (2018) [text in Polish].
[21] Katarzyna Łotowska, Katarzyna Sztop-Rutkowska, Monika Falej & Eliza Szadkowska, P*oradnik. Model współpracy międzysektorowej w zakresie dialogu obywatelskiego oparty o ciała konsultacyjno-doradcze, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem rady działalności pożytku publicznego, (PDF) Model współracy międzysektorowej w zakresie dialogu obywatelskiego oparty o ciała konsultacyjno-doradcze, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem Rady Działalności Pożytku Publicznego* (2015).
[22] Badania Klon/Jawor, *Kondycja sektora organizacji pozarzgdowych w Polsce 2015 Raport z Badań* (2016).
[23] Badania Klon/Jawor, *Wspierane, ale bez wpływu? Organizacje wobec samorzgdu*.
[24] Resolution no. C/1849/10 of the Łódź City Council of 3 November 2010.

Urban Regeneration Committee

The Urban Regeneration Committee (URC)[25] is a mandatory body for public participation under the Act of 9 October 2015 on Regeneration (Regeneration Act).[26] The establishment of the Committee is not dependent on the local government's discretion. A municipality or city carrying out urban regeneration activities inscribed in a Municipal Regeneration Programme (MRP) is obliged to establish an URC. This is a feature that distinguishes the URC from most Polish participatory tools (including, in particular, consultative and advisory bodies), which are optional in nature. According to data from the Central Statistical Office (GUS), by the end of 2023, 1,290 municipalities were carrying out regeneration activities, i.e., 52.1% of all municipalities in Poland, of which 344 had a Municipal Regeneration Programme. At that time, there were 414 Regeneration Committees operating across the country. The number of Committees exceeds the number of valid Municipal Regeneration Programmes, which confirms that some municipalities decided to establish more than one committee – the Act permits the creation of separate URCs for individual sub-areas of regeneration designated within a single programme.

The Act defines an Urban Regeneration Committee as "a forum for cooperation and dialogue between stakeholders and municipal authorities on matters concerning the preparation, implementation and evaluation of revitalisation", performing "an advisory and consultative function for the commune head, mayor or city president."[27] The stakeholders in Regeneration are – in accordance with the provisions of the Act – residents of the regeneration area, property owners, businesses, NGOs and informal groups, as well as local government bodies and public authorities.

It should also be emphasised that urban regeneration is not strictly speaking adaptation to climate change, but the two areas are closely interlinked. The regeneration of degraded areas addresses the same environmental and social challenges that lie at the heart of climate policy in post-industrial cities. The definition of a degraded area contained in the Regeneration Act explicitly includes environmental and adaptation issues as one of the statutory grounds for intervention.

The URC has three formal tasks set out in the Act:

1. Issuing an opinion on the assessment of the relevance and degree of implementation of the Municipal Regeneration Programme (MRP) – carried out by the mayor at least once every three years.
2. Issuing an opinion on the monitoring report concerning the implementation of the MRP.
3. Issuing an opinion on the draft MRP at the stage of its preparation and amendments.

In addition to its advisory and consultative functions, the scope of the URC's activities may be formally extended by the municipality through a resolution of the municipal council, which sets out the detailed rules for its appointment and operation.

Polish regulations do not, however, limit the list of matters on which the committee may issue opinions. The URC may comment on other plans, documents or issues whenever the local government deems such an opinion necessary and needed. The scope of the URC's tasks is therefore open-ended and is flexibly shaped in accordance with local needs and the conditions of the regeneration process.

[25] Urban Regeneration Committee (URC) - pl. *Komitet Rewitalizacji (KR)*.
[26] Act of 9 October 2015 on Regeneration, Journal of Laws 2015, item 1777.
[27] Ibid.

Despite its broad range of advisory and consultative tasks, the URC does not have the right to initiate formal draft resolutions of the City Council, access to its own financial resources, independent administrative support, or a mechanism binding municipal authorities to respond to the URC's opinions and recommendations. Participation is of a voluntary nature – no remuneration, allowance or reimbursement of travel expenses is payable for participation in the Committee's meetings and work. Thus, the Act created an obligation for the body to exist without providing it with resources, institutional independence or instruments to enforce its recommendations. However, it is worth emphasising that climate challenges – which require long-term, multi-year engagement of stakeholders in adaptation planning – precisely require institutional sustainability and its effectiveness.

Civic Dialogue Committees

Civic Dialogue Committees (CDC)[28] are a further form of consultative body in local government, designed to facilitate structured cooperation between municipal offices and NGOs around specific thematic areas of public policy. Unlike the broad, cross-sectoral mandate of PBACs, each CDC operates within a defined policy domain – such as culture, housing, social services, or environmental protection – and serves as a standing forum for dialogue between NGOs active in that field and the relevant city department.

Their formation was derived from the 2003 Public Benefit Activity and Volunteering Act,[29] which provided the general legal framework for civil society cooperation with public administration. However, unlike PBACs, whose structure and minimum composition requirements are determined directly by national legislation, CDCs are implemented exclusively through local law. This means their existence, design, and rules of operation vary significantly between cities, and no national standard governs their functioning. Only a small number of Poland's largest cities have established this participation tool, making it one of the least widespread formal consultation mechanisms in the country.

The thematic structure of CDCs means that, in principle, a commission dedicated to environmental affairs, green infrastructure, or climate policy could provide a focused and expert forum for participatory planning in these domains. Unlike broader consultative bodies, the CDC model allows organised civil society to engage with the specific administrative units responsible for environmental management and climate-related programmes.

Although there was initially a great deal of optimism regarding the CDCs, in practice it turned out that local authorities were unwilling to cooperate and effectively ignored the commissions, resulting in low levels of activity and a lack of engagement.

Use of Participation Tools – Case Study of Łódź

Łódź is the fourth-largest city in Poland and the capital of the Łódź Voivodeship. It has a population of just over 650,000, although as recently as the early 1990s this figure exceeded 840,000. The sharp decline in population is a consequence of a deep structural crisis: for over a century, Łódź was one of Europe's largest centres of the textile industry, and the collapse of this industry after 1989 led to mass unemployment, an exodus of residents and the deterioration of significant areas of the city.

[28] Civic Dialogue Committees (CDC) – pl. *Komisje Dialogu Obywatelskiego (KDO)*.
[29] Magdalena Furdzik, *Civic dialogue in local government - present or absent?* (2018) [text in Polish].

The industrial heritage – factories, workers' housing estates, the historic city centre – became, on the one hand, a burden requiring costly regeneration, and on the other, a source of unique cultural and tourist potential.

The 2010s were a period of intensive strategic restructuring and urban regeneration for Łódź. The city adopted an ambitious regeneration programme, secured significant EU funding and began to rebuild its identity as a post-industrial creative metropolis. At the same time, a social transformation took place towards a socially active city. The non-governmental sector developed, and Łódź consistently built up a set of tools for civic participation. In 2010, the Łódź Public Benefit Activity Council was established; in 2012, the city implemented regulations enabling the creation of a Civic Dialogue Commission; and the Regeneration Act passed in 2015 imposed an obligation to establish an Urban Regeneration Committee – which was set up in Łódź in 2017. This chronology shows that Łódź belonged to a group of cities that were among the first and most extensive in utilising the available instruments of participation in local government.

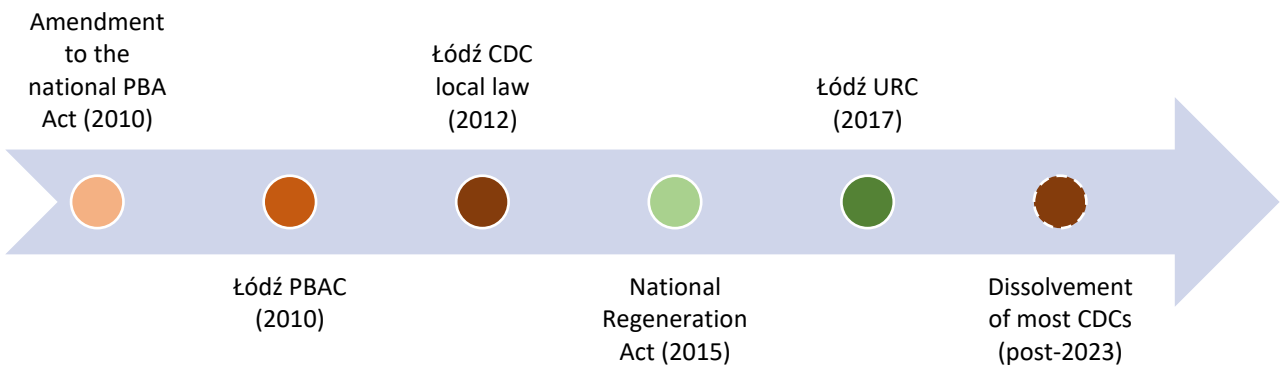


Fig 1: Timeline of the Łódź participation bodies formation (source: own work)[30]

However, the experience of the last decade indicates that these tools are under-utilised, following the nationally observed pattern.[31] The participatory bodies described below serve as a platform for communication between local government and local government institutions and representatives of civil society, enabling the development of positions on current issues and the creation of urban policies that respond to local needs. However, the extent to which this potential is realised depends largely on the willingness of local authorities to cooperate, as well as the capacity for dialogue on both sides.

It should also be emphasised that Łódź grapples with numerous environmental problems and the effects of climate change in a manner particularly characteristic of post-industrial cities. Heavy rainfalls cause flooding in areas with degraded infrastructure, the lack of urban greenery exacerbates the urban heat island effect, and the poor technical condition of the housing stock translates into low energy efficiency and high heating costs borne by the most vulnerable groups of

[30] Orange-brown gradient indicates PBA Act legal basis; green gradient – Regeneration Act legal basis. Darker colour indicates development of an institutionalised body.

[31] Ewa Zielińska & Dariusz Kraszewski (Batory Foundation), *Narzędzia partycypacji lokalnej w Polsce w latach 2014–2017* (2019), partycypacjaobywatelska.pl/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/narzedzia-partycypacji-lokalnej-w-polsce-w-latach-2014-2017.pdf

residents. Adaptation to climate change in Łódź is therefore inextricably linked to the process of regeneration and social policy – which gives the participatory tools analysed particular significance in the context of this study.

Łódź Public Benefit Activity Council

The Łódź Public Benefit Activity Council (ŁPBAC)[32] was established in 2010 as an advisory body to the Mayor of Łódź on matters relating to the City's cooperation with NGOs.[33] Łódź was among the first Polish cities to take advantage of the statutory opportunity introduced by the amendment to the Public Benefit Activity Act in the same year. The initiative to establish the Council came from the NGO community, which is in line with the statutory model, under which the burden of institutionalising the dialogue rests with the civil society sector.

There are 20 Council members: 10 representatives of NGOs selected in special elections, 7 representatives of the Mayor, and 3 representatives of the City Council.[34] The elections for the NGO section are open – any NGO operating in Łódź may vote for three candidates from the list of nominees, and those with the highest number of votes are elected. Administrative support for the ŁPBAC is provided by the Office of Urban Activity (a unit of the City Office responsible for civic engagement affairs). The term of office lasts three years; to date, the ŁPBAC has served five terms, and the current, sixth term has just begun in 2026.

Since its establishment, the Council has developed a stable rhythm of operation. In earlier terms (I-III, 2010-2019), the ŁPBAC focused primarily on co-creating the City's annual cooperation programmes with NGOs – a document setting out the priorities and funding principles for the third sector for a given year – and on providing opinions on successive draft resolutions regulating the conditions for NGOs' operations in the city. During this time, the Council issued opinions on, amongst other things, cultural policy, the rules for the provision of municipal premises to organisations, as well as strategic documents such as the Plan for the Sustainable Development of Public Transport for the City of Łódź. This activity highlights the Council's established position as a permanent consultative partner on matters regulating the functioning of NGOs in the city and cooperation with Łódź's local government.

The fourth term (2019-2022) saw a marked broadening of the Council's remit. The Council was involved in consultations on the update of the Municipal Regeneration Programme, which for the first time clearly highlighted the presence of regeneration issues in its work. The fifth term, which began in May 2023, was characterised by a marked increase in the intensity of work. The current, sixth term has only just begun, so it is too early to assess its activity.

The topics of meetings during this period cover a wide range of issues: issuing opinions on successive editions of the City's Cooperation Programme with NGOs, rules for the use of premises in revitalised properties, social and health policy, as well as documents related to the new EU financial perspective. Among the acts reviewed are documents concerning sustainable public transport, urban greening programmes, and the principles of cooperation with organisations active in the field of environmental protection. Climate issues do not, however, constitute the Council's central focus – its activities concentrate on the operating conditions of the NGO sector as a whole, and

[32] Łódź Public Benefit Activity Council (ŁBAC) - pl. *Łódzka Rada Działalności Pożytku Publicznego (ŁRDPP)*.
[33] Łódź City Council (n.24).
[34] Resolution no. IX/318/19 of the Łódź City Council of 8 May 2019.

environmental issues appear as part of broader strategic documents rather than as a separate area of interest.

In view of its limited formal powers of action and impact, the ŁRDPP increasingly plays the role of a networking body, bringing together resources and people, including representatives of the business sector. To this end, the Council organises joint breakfast meetings for NGOs devoted to specific themes, at which representatives of different organisations can get to know one another, as well as events resembling "business dating" sessions, designed to connect NGOs with companies. In this way, the ŁRDPP indirectly seeks to build social capital, which may in turn contribute to strengthening the resilience of the community.

For an overview of the structure of the Łódź Public Benefit Activity Council, see Figure 2 below:

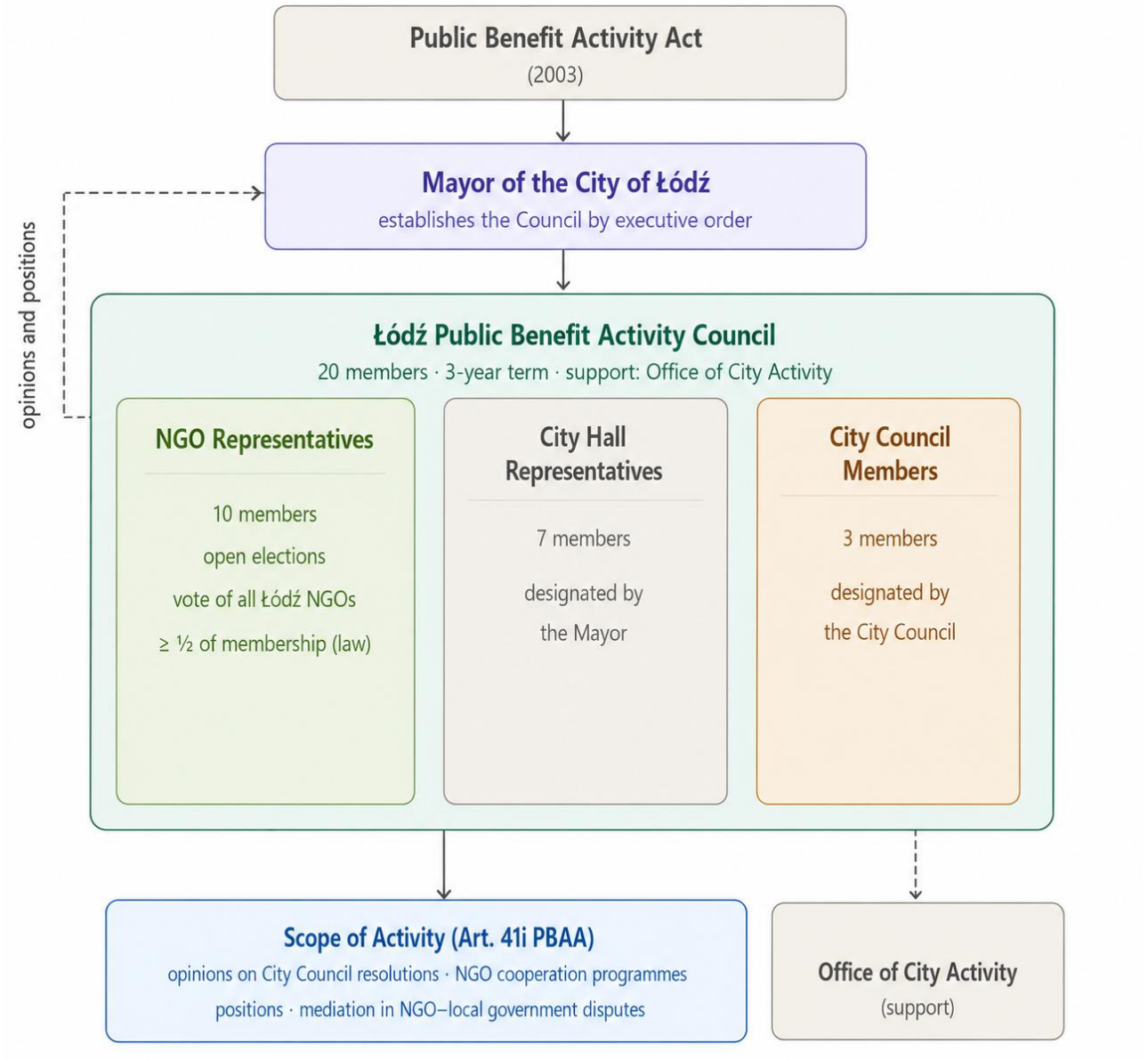


Fig 2: Structure of the Łódź Public Benefit Activity Council (source: own work)

Łódź Urban Regeneration Committee

The Łódź Urban Regeneration Committee (ŁURC)[35] has been in operation since 2017, when the Mayor of Łódź established it by Order No. 6212/VII/17 of 12 June 2017, pursuant to Resolution No. XXXIX/1035/16 of the Łódź City Council of 28 December 2016. Łódź was one of the first Polish cities to implement the provisions of the 2015 Regeneration Act.[36]

The first term (2017-2021) began with a 34-member panel comprising a broad spectrum of stakeholders: NGOs, entrepreneurs, housing communities, property owners, residents both within and outside the regeneration area, universities, cultural institutions, schools, economic self-governments, network operators, subject-matter experts, City Hall staff and City Council members. It is worth noting that in none of the recruitment rounds – neither in 2017 nor in subsequent ones – did any representative of neighbourhood councils apply, which meant a persistent absence of this category of stakeholders from the membership. The composition of the Committee underwent significant changes during the term of office. The term ended in June 2021 with a 25-member panel; throughout its duration, only a dozen or so people were actively involved.

The scope of the first term was broad. Alongside the standing agenda item of monitoring the implementation of the Municipal Regeneration Programme and the progress of ROCŁ[37] projects 1-8, the Committee addressed issues such as dedicated leasing and the Model Community model, transport and parking policy for the city centre, new tools for public participation including a citizens' panel, rules for issuing planning conditions and conservation guidelines, and communication with businesses affected by construction works.

The second term (from January 2022) was established by Order No. 9204/VIII/21 of 30 December 2021, comprising just 18 members. The reduction in membership was a sign of waning interest in participating in the Committee. The operating principles were also updated – by Resolution No. XLIII/1339/21 of the Łódź City Council of 2 June 2021, the rules of procedure were amended, with this change preceded by public consultations.

The focus of the second term centred on new social functions introduced in the areas covered by ROCŁ projects 1-8 – Local Activity Centres, sheltered housing, and community centres – as well as on assessing the quality of ongoing investments and communication with residents during the works. A recurring theme was the issue of housing communities as stakeholders in regeneration: the Committee analysed grant schemes available under the Special Regeneration Zone, renovation support, and the experience of comprehensive regeneration of post-industrial sites in Łódź (the Księży Młyn complex).

Over the course of its seven years of operation, the Committee has held a total of over seventy plenary meetings. Its formal outputs include annual opinions on MRP monitoring reports, opinions on proposed programme amendments, a position statement on the Łódź City Development Strategy 2030+, and intervention letters addressed to the Mayor and the management of the Office for Regeneration and Housing.

Environmental and climate issues featured indirectly in the Committee's work: in recommendations concerning urban greenery and its inclusion in monitoring reports, the grant scheme for rainwater

[35] Łódź Urban Regeneration Committee (ŁURC) – pl. *Komitet Rewitalizacji w Łodzi*.
[36] Act of 9 October 2015 on Regeneration (n.26).
[37] *Rewitalizacja Obszarowa Centrum Łodzi (ROCŁ)* – eng. Lodz City Centre Regeneration Zones.

harvesting and the greening of courtyards within the Special Regeneration Zone, as well as energy efficiency issues in building renovations. However, these themes were not systematically linked to the city's broader climate adaptation strategy.

For an overview of the structure of the Łódź Urban Regeneration Committee, see Figure 3 below:

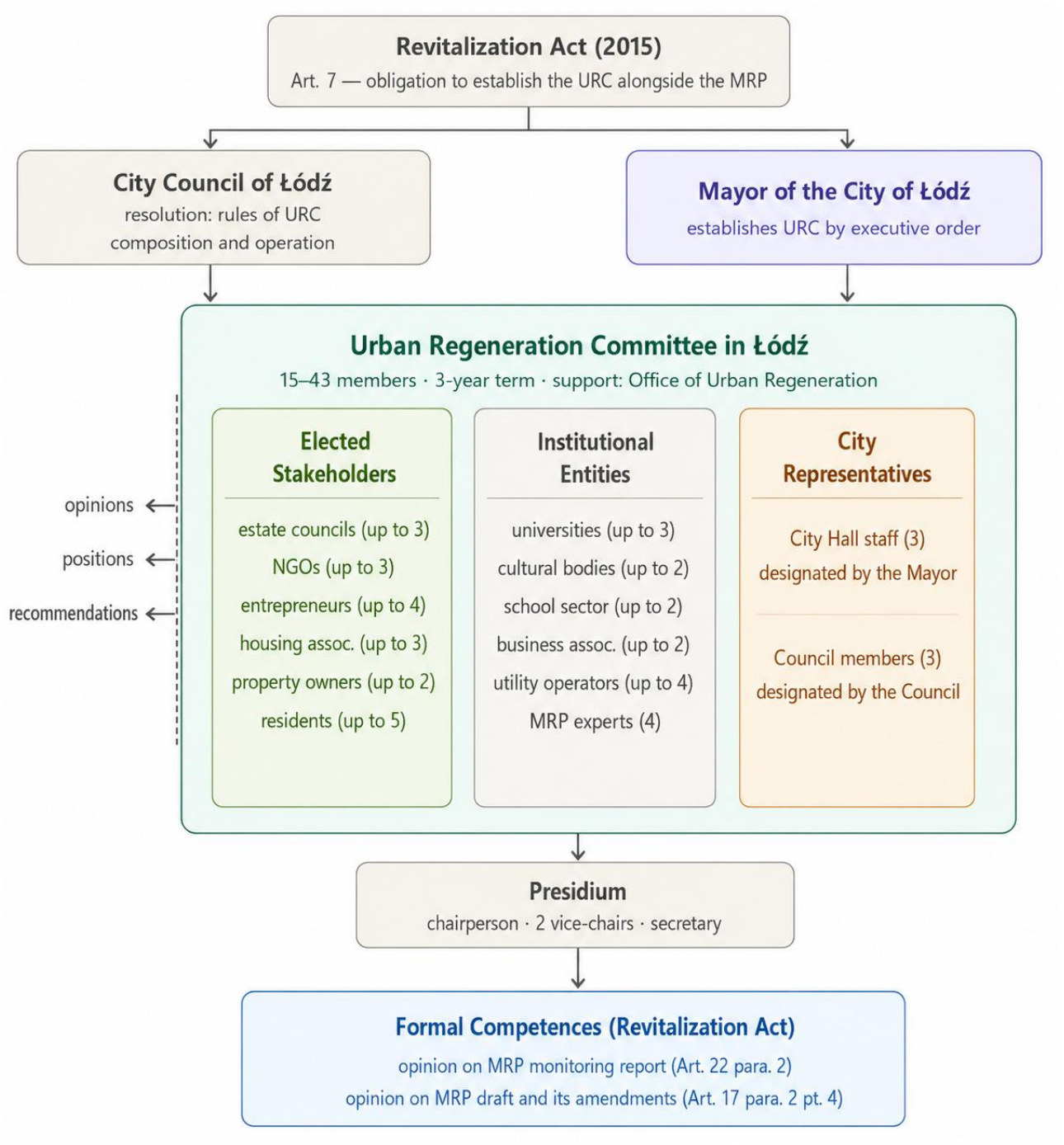


Fig 3: Structure of the Łódź Urban Regeneration Committee (source: own work)

It is also worth adding that the lack of resources is not the only significant challenge here – this problem, though real, recurs in other consultative bodies as well, such as the ŁPBAC. In the case of large cities and regeneration processes carried out on a broad scale, however, a more significant limitation appears to lie in the sheer complexity of the regeneration processes themselves, which involve hundreds of people planning and implementing individual activities across Łódź. This

hampers not only the full exchange of knowledge among participants in these processes, but also the systematic consideration of successive opinions formulated by the ŁURC.

In this context, the Committee's greatest potential seems to lie not so much in issuing opinions on already finalised documents, but in planning new initiatives at an early stage – functioning as a kind of laboratory of initiatives that reaches out to residents on its own and proposes concrete solutions, rather than merely reacting to projects submitted to it. It is worth adding that this type of approach – despite the Committee's lack of formal legislative initiative vis-à-vis the City Council – has already been tested in practice: at the initiative of one of the members of the Łódź Committee, a project was once submitted to the participatory budget, although it failed to secure sufficient support in the vote.

Independently of the above, it is worth emphasising that climate challenges – which require long-term, multi-year engagement of stakeholders in adaptation planning – make institutional sustainability and effectiveness all the more necessary for bodies of this kind.

Civic Dialogue Committees in Łódź

Civic Dialogue Committees (CDC) were introduced in Łódź in 2012. The city was one of the first Polish cities to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the 2010 amendment to the Public Benefit Activity Act. The initiative to establish a committee must come from at least five NGOs intending to cooperate with a specific department of the City Hall on a defined thematic area. The establishment of a committee requires the consent of the Mayor.[38] The committees are administratively supported by the relevant department of the City Hall.

Over the course of a decade of activity in Łódź, ten committees have been established, covering a broad spectrum of social and urban policy issues. These were, in turn: the CDC on Social Participation (2012), the CDC on Diversity and Anti-Discrimination (2013), the CDC on the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2013), the CDC on Demographic Policy and Intergenerational Cooperation (2014), the CDC on Regeneration (2014), the CDC on Grassroots Sport (2015), the CDC on Housing Policy (2016), as well as committees on culture, animal welfare, addiction prevention, and family, children and youth affairs.

Among these committees, the CDC on Urban Regeneration, established in October 2014, is of particular significance from the perspective of this study; its main objective was to support activities aimed at the effectiveness of the regeneration process, with particular emphasis on the social aspect and the widest possible implementation of the concept of sustainable development. In its agenda, the committee explicitly declared its openness to organisations whose activities relate to caring for the natural environment and a good quality of life in the city. It was therefore the committee most closely involved with the issue of adaptation to climate change – albeit through the prism of regeneration, rather than climate as a standalone field of action.

The Civic Dialogue Committee (CDC) on Urban Regeneration in Łódź operated from late 2019 and, throughout the period under review, focused its activities on issues at the intersection of public participation and sectoral cooperation policy. The dominant substantive theme was the involvement of NGOs in the implementation of tasks arising from the Municipal Regeneration Programme and area-based regeneration projects – both at the programmatic level (provisions in

[38] Order no. 4129/VI/13 of the Lodz City Mayor of 9 May 2013.

the City's cooperation programmes with NGOs) and the operational level (cross-financing, commissioning of public tasks). CDC also participated in drawing up the rules for establishing the Urban Regeneration Committee (URC) and – at a later stage – in planning social functions within facilities commissioned as part of area-based revitalisation.

Environmental and ecological issues remained entirely outside the mainstream of the Civic Dialogue Committee work. The only identified trace of such interest is the discussion regarding the preservation of as many trees as possible within the planned Karski Gardens. The absence of environmental themes from the CDC's agenda fits into a broader pattern of urban regeneration practice in Poland at the time, in which the ecological dimension – despite being formally included in the 2015 Act – was consistently marginalised in local practice in favour of social and infrastructural measures.

It is worth noting that in Łódź a separate committee for the environment or climate protection has never been established, whilst in other Polish cities – such as Kraków – an active Kraków Environmental CDC bringing together over a dozen organisations is actively maintained.[39] The absence of an environmental CDC in Łódź is a significant structural constraint on participatory climate planning in the city.

The thematic structure of the CDCs means that a committee dedicated to environmental issues, green infrastructure or climate policy could serve as a focused and expert forum for participatory planning in these areas.[40] The CDC model allows organised civil society to engage in direct dialogue with the department responsible for environmental management and climate-related programmes – a feature of particular importance from the perspective of participatory urban climate adaptation. In practice, however, the committees encountered serious difficulties. The local government did not demonstrate sufficient willingness to cooperate, which led to low activity levels and the gradual withdrawal of organisations. The Culture CDC was dissolved by order of the Mayor of Łódź in February 2023. By early 2025, only one committee remained active in Łódź, while several previously operating committees had been dissolved by the city authorities due to inactivity. The paradox of this situation lies in the fact that inactivity was largely a result of insufficient institutional support and a lack of commitment on the part of the council, yet became the formal justification for the dissolution of bodies whose very purpose was to sustain that commitment.

Impact Assessment of Łódź's Consultative Bodies

Łódź's participatory bodies – Public Benefit Activity Council, Urban Regeneration Committee and the Civic Dialogue Committees – operate under different laws, encompass different categories of stakeholders and report to different departments of the City Hall. They therefore constitute not so much a coherent system of participation as a collection of parallel platforms whose mutual relations are poorly coordinated. Each of these bodies formally has an advisory mandate, but none of them possesses powers binding municipal authorities to take the formulated recommendations into account or to publicly address the positions put forward.

Four channels through which Łódź's consultative bodies can influence urban policy can be identified:

[39] City of Kraków Office, Komisja Dialogu Obywatelskiego ds. Środowiska.

[40] Kazimierz Walasz, *The role of civil dialogue committees for environmental affairs in shaping the natural environment in communes* (2018) [text in Polish], https://kp.org.pl/pdf/pp/pdf2/PP_nr%204_2018_Walasz.pdf

1. Responding to proposals put forward by the City's authorities and making substantive contributions to them (although the final political decision rests with the Mayor or the City Council);
2. Raising public issues during meetings and through formal positions addressed to the Mayor;
3. Participating in consultations on strategic documents, including municipal programmes, city climate adaptation plans, city development strategies, and long-term cooperation plans;
4. Community dialogue – informal, ongoing communication between representatives of NGOs and City Hall staff, which takes place between meetings.

An analysis of the documentation of Łódź's participatory bodies from 2010 to 2024 highlights both areas of tangible impact and the structural constraints on its implementation.

Areas of influence:

- In the case of the ŁPBAC, documented examples of real influence include: intervention to defend funding for the NGO sector during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020); systematic co-creation of multi-year cooperation programmes between the City and organisations; and providing opinions on key regulatory documents concerning the operating conditions of the third sector. The regularity of meetings indicates the Council's institutional entrenchment and a sustained level of engagement on the part of the non-governmental sector.
- In the case of the ŁURC, the impact was real, though more difficult to measure due to the lack of a mechanism for tracking the implementation of recommendations. The ŁURC systematically reviewed MRP monitoring reports, each time accompanying a positive assessment with extensive reservations and proposals – which corresponds to a model in which the consultative body does not formally block documents, but rather formulates conditions and expectations.

The functioning of the three participatory bodies points to systemic barriers that undermine the practical effectiveness of formally established mechanisms of participation. In particular:

1. The experiences of all three bodies confirm the pattern identified in studies on Polish local government: formal participation is possible, but its effectiveness depends almost entirely on the willingness of local authorities to cooperate. In the absence of this willingness, none of the three tools has a mechanism to compel the authorities' involvement – which in practice means that consultation can become a procedure devoid of substance. This is illustrated particularly clearly by the history of Łódź's CDCs: committees established on the initiative of NGOs were gradually phased out due to a lack of activity, caused by an earlier lack of engagement on the part of the relevant departments of the City Hall.
2. A common weakness of all three bodies is the lack of independent resources (particularly financial). None of them has its own budget for expert opinions, research or administrative support outside the Office's structures. Participation is in every case voluntary – unpaid and without reimbursement of expenses – which means that the sustainability of engagement depends on the motivation of individuals, rather than on the institutional structure. The dramatic drop in attendance at the ŁURC in 2024 – to 17-22% of members at meetings – is the most telling sign of the limitations of this model.

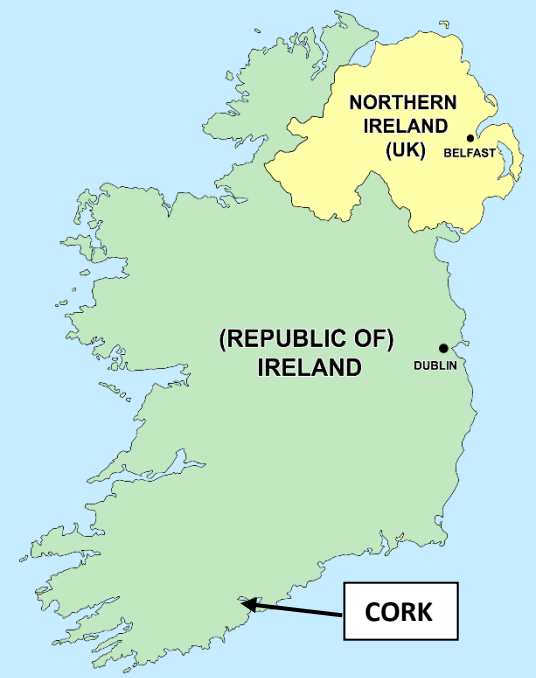
Environmental and Climate Issues

None of Łódź's consultative bodies were designed with climate adaptation in mind, and none has a formal mandate within the city's climate strategy.

Environmental issues appear in all three bodies – in the ŁPBAC as part of regulatory documents concerning transport and green spaces, in the ŁURC as a strand of recommendations regarding urban greenery and stormwater management, and in the CDC for Regeneration as a declared openness to environmental organisations – but in no case do they constitute an independent, systematic area of activity. Łódź has not established a CDC for the environment or climate, which constitutes a significant structural gap compared to other Polish cities. The lack of a formal mechanism linking the work of consultative bodies with urban climate adaptation planning means that even when these bodies function efficiently, their contribution to climate policy remains haphazard and unsystematic.

Cork: National and Local Public Participation Networks (PPNs)

Overview of the National Public Participation Network Structure



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In the Republic of Ireland, PPNs act as a conduit between the community, voluntary and environmental sectors, and local authorities.[41] The concept of such PPNs was introduced in the *Working Group Report on Citizen Engagement with Local Government*,[42] which was published by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government in February 2014. PPNs were subsequently provided with a legislative basis via the *Local Government Reform Act 2014*, and the first PPNs were operational by 2016.[43]

Within Ireland, local government structures are divided into 26 county councils, three city councils (Cork, Dublin and Galway), and two unitary city-county councils (Limerick and Waterford).[44] There is a PPN in every local authority area*, i.e.*, 31 in total. As explained by the responsible Government Department:

> "PPNs give citizens a greater say in local government decisions which affect their own communities. Our democracy is made stronger, by allowing diverse views and interests to be considered as part of the decision making process of local government."[45]

To become a member of a PPN, an organised community group must apply and register to join the PPN that is in their local authority area. There are three principal community groups represented on PPNs:

1. Voluntary groups based in local communities (*e.g.,* sports clubs, cultural societies, Meals on Wheels, TidyTowns).
2. Local organisations focused on environmental protection (*e.g.,* An Taisce, Bird Watch Ireland).
3. Groups or organisations representative of people who are socially excluded, marginalised and those "whose voices are not heard in our society" (*e.g.,* older persons, persons with disabilities, migrants, members of the Traveller Community).[46]

[41] See: Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, 'Policy information: Public Participation Networks' (last updated: 20 November 2025).
[42] Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, *Working Group Report on Citizen Engagement with Local Government to Phil Hogan T.D. Minister for the Environment, Community & Local Government* (February 2014), pp.22-28.
[43] Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, *Public Participation Network Case Study*, p.6.
[44] Section 12(2), Local Government Reform Act 2014. See also: Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 'Organisation information: Local Government: Structure and Functions' (last updated: 28 October 2021).
[45] Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht (n.41).
[46] Ibid.

The total national budget for the PPN structures for 2025 was €3,116,740, equating to €100,540 per PPN.[47] In general, there is a high level of engagement across the 31 PPNs, as set out in the national *Public Participation Networks Annual Report 2024*, published by the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht:[48]

There were **20,421 PPN member groups across Ireland in 2024**, of which:		
16,383 (~80%) are under the **Community & Voluntary** pillar	3,217 (~16%) are under the **Social Inclusion** pillar	817 (~4%) are under the **Environmental** pillar
↓ 834 PPN representatives sat on 341 Boards and Committees *(such as Strategic Policy Committees, Joint Policing Committees and County Boards)*		

Table 1: Overview of national PPN structures (source: PPN Annual Report 2024)

There was a ~7% increase in total PPN membership from 2023 to 2024 (an increase of 1,358 members).[49] While the Environmental pillar remains the smallest of the three pillars, there was a notable ~12% increase in its membership between 2023 and 2024 (from 730 to 817 members).[50] Whilst being the smallest pillar in terms of membership, environmental groups are highly engaged with PPN processes and are active in local and national decision- and policy-making processes.

Since the establishment of the PPN processes via legislation in 2014, three key reports have analysed their structure and operation as a means of community engagement. In June 2020, the Government, in collaboration with the Centre for Effectiveness Services (CES), published a *Case Study* of the PPN system, noting that it did not seek to represent "evaluations of the overall success and impact" of the PPNs but "to capture reflections on citizen engagement initiatives."[51] This was followed by a *Structural Review of the Public Participation Network – Report* in March 2022, conducted by Mazars at the request of the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD), to: establish how "the existing structure has facilitated the operation" of the PPNs; to seek out potential opportunities to build and enhance PPN structures; and to develop "recommendations as to how to build on existing structural strengths and support the future development of PPNs."[52] Subsequently, an independent research study on the *Barriers to Participation in PPNs* was commissioned by the DRCD in 2024, with a specific focus on under-represented groups within the PPNs.[53]

[47] Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, '2025 PPN funding allocations'. See also: Public Participation Network – Cork County, 'Media Release: Minister Joe O'Brien announces Budget increase for Public Participation Networks at 10-year anniversary gathering' (18 October 2024).
[48] Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, *Public Participation Networks Annual Report 2024*, p.1.
[49] Ibid, p.22.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (n.43) p.4.
[52] Mazars, *Department of Rural & Community Development: Structural Review of the Public Participation Network – Report*, (Final Report issued March 2022), p.3.
[53] S3 Solutions, *Research on the Barriers to Involvement in Public Participation Networks (PPN)*, Final Report (July 2025).

Building on these external reports, a detailed *PPN Implementation Roadmap* was drafted in July 2024 by the DRCD, in collaboration with a Working Group of PPN stakeholders.[54] As noted in the publication: "The overarching purpose of the Roadmap project is to implement changes to PPN structures to enable them to more effectively fulfil the overall objectives set out for them in the 2014 *Working Group Report on Citizen Engagement with Local Government*."[55] The roadmap therefore sets out a series of priority actions across five broad themes: governance and accountability; communications and engagement; coordination and participation; training, delivery and supports; staffing and skills.[56] Feedback from stakeholders also highlighted the need for more multi-annual funding for PPNs.[57]

Of the 31 PPNs, Cork City PPN has been chosen as a desk-based case study for this analysis. While not attempting to present a comprehensive assessment of the PPN and activities overall, this research provides insights into its establishment and general national structure in addition to the composition, procedures, relevance and work of the Cork City PPN.

Cork City Public Participation Network

Structures: The Cork City PPN is a "publicly-funded network of volunteer-run, not-for-profit groups" that works to foster public participation with the diverse communities and groups of Cork City and facilitates their engagement with Cork City Council and local decision-making processes.[58] As noted on the Cork City Council website, "[t]he PPN ensures that Cork City communities have a say in how local government works."[59]

The central mission statement of this PPN is outlined in Section 2 of the *Cork City PPN Constitution*:

> "Cork City Public Participation Network is the collective voice for community and voluntary, environmental, and social inclusion organisations in Cork City, its purpose is to improve people's well-being by meaningfully involving the community in local decision-making."[60]

Cork City PPN embodies a number of core principles (*e.g.*, inclusivity, participation, welcoming, independence, transparency, diversity and accountability) that guide its operations, processes and activities.[61] Presently, the Cork City PPN consists of two staff members (one coordinator role and one support worker), nine positions on the Secretariat (presently, four of these Secretariat positions are marked as vacant on the Cork City PPN website) and nearly 250 member groups.[62] The member groups of Cork City PPN are representative of one of the three pillars – Community & Voluntary, Social Inclusion and Environmental – within which there are presently 143, 81 and 23 local groups respectively listed on the Cork City PPN Member Directory.[63]

[54] Public Participation Networks Ireland, *PPN Implementation Roadmap* (July 2024).
[55] Ibid, p.1.
[56] Ibid, pp.7-32.
[57] Ibid, p.33.
[58] Cork City PPN, 'Home'; Cork City PPN 'About Us'.
[59] Cork City Council, 'Public Participation Network (PPN)'.
[60] Section 2, 'Mission Statement', Cork City PPN, *Cork City Public Participation Network Constitution* (ratified February 2024; updated 18 June 2025).
[61] Ibid, Section 4, 'Principles & Values'.
[62] Cork City PPN, 'Our People'; Cork City PPN 'Member Directory'.
[63] Ibid.

Membership: There are established requirements that prospective groups must meet in order to successfully apply for and attain Cork City PPN membership. As detailed in the Cork City PPN *Membership Criteria* document, groups must be in operation for a minimum of six months upon application, be organised on a "non-profit basis", be located in or operate predominantly in Cork City and align with the "aims, objectives and principles of the PPN."[64] If these criteria are not met, there is an option for groups to apply for Associate Membership. Some groups are ineligible for Cork City PPN membership, *e.g.*, State/semi-State bodies.[65]

Once membership has been approved, members can attend Cork City PPN Plenary Meetings, which are held twice a year at a minimum, and volunteer to run for election to represent the PPN and their respective pillar on relevant local committees.[66] As outlined in Section 4 of the Cork City PPN *Representatives Charter*, the committees and bodies upon which Cork City PPN Representatives can sit include:

a) Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs).
b) Local Community Development Committee (LCDC).
c) The PPN Secretariat.
d) Local Community Safety Partnership (LCSP).
e) Cork Local Drugs & Alcohol Taskforce (CLDATF).[67]

Prospective PPN Representatives must obtain support from a group that has full membership with the Cork City PPN via a formal nomination in order to qualify for election.[68] Elections can be facilitated through meetings of the Plenary or Linkage Groups.[69] Upon successful election, PPN representatives are to regularly attend committee meetings and liaise with PPN staff and member groups during their term. They are also expected to submit regular reports to PPN staff, including details related to their committee proceedings, issues raised and any actions emerging from these meetings.[70] It is important to emphasise the voluntary nature of the work carried out by PPN Representatives, alongside the commitment and time required from individuals when taking up roles on the above-mentioned committees and bodies.

Activities: Training and capacity-building initiatives are promoted by Cork City PPN to support elected representatives in navigating their voluntary roles and in enhancing the effectiveness of stakeholder participation. Some examples of free events held in 2025 include: *Political Communications and Advocacy Skills Workshop* offered by the Irish Council for Civil Liberties and St. Stephen's Green Trust, *Being an Impactful SPC Representative* held by the Irish Environmental Network and *Capacity-Building Resources for PPN Reps* facilitated by Social Justice Ireland. The Irish Environmental Network is highly relevant to discussions of environmental advocacy in Ireland.

[64] See: Section 3 for a list of full Membership Criteria, Cork City PPN, *Membership Criteria* (adopted June 2025). See also: Section 8, 'Membership Criteria – The Pillars'.
[65] Ibid, Section 4, 'Associate Membership Criteria' and Section 6, 'Groups not Eligible for Membership'.
[66] Cork City PPN (n.60), Sections 6-7.
[67] Section 4, Cork City PPN, *Representatives Charter* (adopted June 2025). It is worth noting that despite the ongoing triple planetary crisis the Environmental pillar does not always have equal representation on these committees and bodies. For example, the PPN Representative positions available on the LCDC include one position for the Environmental pillar, and two positions for Community & Voluntary pillar and Social Inclusion pillar respectively. See: Cork City PPN, PPN Reps List (June 2026), p.1.
[68] Ibid, Section 3.
[69] Section 3, Cork City PPN, *Election Policy & Procedures* (adopted 13 October 2022).
[70] Cork City PPN, 'Cork City Public Participation Network Representatives Reporting Template'.

Acting as a network for environmentally focused NGOs, its activities include capacity-building, as illustrated, alongside conservation and advocacy.

There are also currently five Linkage Groups established under Cork City PPN:

1. Housing, Planning and Transport.
2. Climate Action and Environment and Natural Heritage.
3. Diversity, Disability and Inclusion.
4. Arts, Community, Heritage and Sport (including International Relations and Tourism).
5. Community Safety.[71]

Each Linkage Group has a specific theme under which it operates. The purpose of a Linkage Group is to "[a]ct as the representative, collective voice of community and voluntary, environmental and social inclusion organisations in Cork City under the relevant thematic area."[72] Through these Linkage Groups, members can actively engage with elected PPN Representatives and highlight key concerns or issues which Representatives can then feed back to their committees as appropriate. There have been some noted difficulties with the Linkage Groups in the Cork City PPN, "with only one LG [Linkage Group] operational and meeting in 2024."[73]

Perhaps most relevant to this project is the Climate Action and Environment and Natural Heritage Linkage Group. Elected PPN Representatives from the Cork City Council Environment, Water and Amenity SPC and Transport and Mobility SPC are members of this Linkage Group, which typically holds four meetings per year; however, as detailed on the Cork City PPN website, "did not meet in 2025."[74] The work of the Cork City Council Environment, Water and Amenity SPC[75] broadly covers, but is not limited to, the following areas:

> "Flood Relief Policy, Flood Defence Strategy, Environmental Impact Studies, Waste Management Plans, Burial Grounds and Cemeteries Policy, Recycling Strategies, Sustainable Development Policy, Street Cleaning Policy, Litter Control Policy, Drainage and Waste Water Treatment Plans, Parks & Open Spaces Policy, Agricultural Policy, Climate Change."[76]

The Environment, Water and Amenity SPC meets regularly throughout the year, and it is chaired by an elected member of Cork City Council. There are, at present, two elected PPN Representatives on this SPC.[77]

One of the municipal activities which is relevant to the remit of this SPC, and this project overall, is the Cork City Council Alert System, which is a free service provided by Cork City Council. Through this system, any individual can sign up to receive direct alerts (via email or text message) related to weather events, travel disruptions, accidents, emergencies, planning applications and water supply issues.[78] Users of the system can select to have alerts personalised to particular areas in Cork City and it acts as a useful tool to help broadly inform the people and communities of Cork City about

[71] Cork City PPN, 'Linkage Groups'.
[72] Cork City PPN, *Linkage Groups Policy*, p.3.
[73] Cork City PPN, *Strategic Plan 2025-2030*, pp.25, 30.
[74] Cork City PPN, 'Climate Action and Environment & Natural Heritage'.
[75] See for more on the legislative basis of SPCs: Section 41 'Amendment of section 48 (strategic policy committees) of Principal Act' of the Local Government Reform Act 2014.
[76] Cork City Council, *Strategic Policy Committee Scheme 2024-2029*, p.5.
[77] Cork City PPN, 'Environment, Water & Amenity Strategic Policy Committee Meeting'.
[78] Cork City Council, 'Cork City Council Alerting System'.

any upcoming climate and/or disaster-related events. Issues of climate adaptation and disaster risk management and reduction are cross-cutting and are arguably relevant to the work of a number of committees and bodies across the Council.[79] As well as this publicly available alert system, Cork City Council has also generated a *Cork City Climate Action Plan 2024-2029*, and aims to reduce "carbon emissions by 80% and become climate-neutral by 2030."[80]

[79] See also: Section 8, Cork City Council (n.76), p.4.
[80] Cork City Council, 'EU Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission'.

Structure of the Cork City Public Participation Network

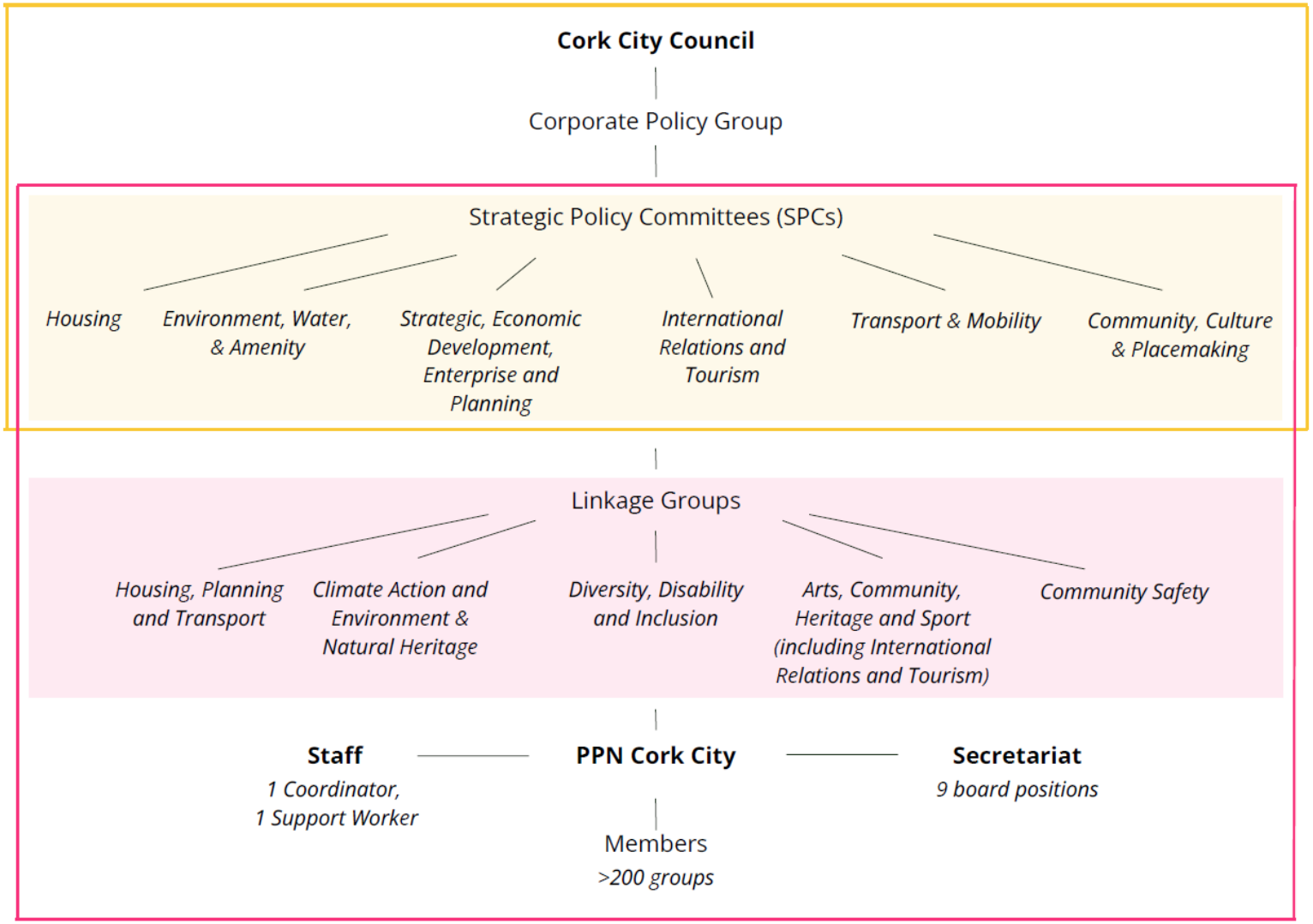

Fig 4: Visualisation of the Structure of the Cork City Public Participation Network and Cork City Council SPCs (source: own work)

Assessing the Impact of the Public Participation Network

As noted in the 2020 PPN Case Study, there are four routes via which PPNs can influence local government policy:

1. Responding and contributing to proposals that emerge from the local / municipal Council ("the ultimate decision on policy matters will rest with the elected Council").
2. Raising policy issues through Council committees.
3. Contributing to consultations on policy matters.
4. Community-based dialogue.[81]

The Annual Reports for PPNs at the national level highlight the extensive range of activities and initiatives, derived specifically from the PPN structures, that allowed public engagement and input into local authorities' planning.[82] Examples can include small, but fundamental, changes to urban streetscapes to improve mobility and accessibility for older persons and persons with disabilities, to awareness raising and community workshops on kitchen gardening and grow your own, and creative arts events celebrating diversity and inclusion in society.

However, as reported in the 2023 Annual Report:

> "Notwithstanding all of the examples above, challenges remain. Despite the extensive training and support given to PPN Representatives with regard to the theoretical working of the SPCs and other decision-making bodies, some PPNs have found that their on-the-ground experience of influencing at these committees has not reflected their expectations."[83]

The report also noted that there may be issues concerning "awareness or understanding of the role" of voluntary PPN members as being "representative rather than activist."[84] There also appears to be a specific challenge in filling Representative positions within the Environmental pillar, which was highlighted as "a cause of concern as there is such a small number of groups to fill vacancies from."[85]

This national trend seems to be reflected in the Cork City PPN. There is limited information within the 2023 or 2024 Annual Reports on the activities undertaken by Cork City PPN, in contrast to many other PPNs across the country.[86] While it is unclear if this reflects a lack of reporting or a lack of activities within Cork City, there are some important examples of impact set out in these reports. For example, in 2023 Cork City PPN "undertook the consultation for the Vision for Community Wellbeing" which then fed into their submission to the Cork City Council consultations for the Local Economic and Community Plan 2024-2029 and Climate Action Plan.[87] Likewise, in 2024, Cork City

[81] Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (n.43), p.10.
[82] Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht (n.48). See in particular: Appendix 3 'Impacts of the PPN in 2024', pp.54-60.
[83] Department of Rural and Community Development, *Public Participation Networks Annual Report 2023*, p.16.
[84] Ibid, p.23.
[85] Ibid. Notably, in 2025, Cork City PPN amended their policy to allow two representatives from the same member group to participate in the Environmental pillar as a means of addressing such vacancies.
[86] See: Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht (n.48), Appendix 3 'Impacts of the PPN in 2024', pp.54-60. See also: Department of Rural and Community Development (n.83) Appendix 3 'Impacts of the PPN in 2023', pp.50-63.
[87] Department of Rural and Community Development (n.83), p.52.

PPN was asked to sit on the Cork City Climate Neutral Leadership Group, and also presides on the Healthy Cities Committee.[88] During 2024, Cork City PPN also began the "process of developing" a 'Vision for an Inclusive City' (VfIC) to identify barriers and supports for Cork City to "become a more inclusive place."[89] Furthermore, Cork City PPN ran consultations with its members to develop and inform their own Strategic Plan.[90]

On a local level, the Cork City PPN *Strategic Plan 2025-2030* offers some useful insights into the impact of the Cork City PPN alongside recognition of existing challenges and future opportunities for enhancement. As part of this Plan, consultations were run with stakeholders of the Cork City PPN,[91] and the feedback gathered underwent SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats).[92] Whilst some weaknesses, *e.g.*, budgetary restrictions, and threats *e.g.*, limited capacity, were identified, there was also recognition of the benefits offered by the broad membership of the Cork City PPN alongside the possibility of enhancing cooperation within and outside its structure.[93] Future means of gauging the impact of the Cork City PPN are also considered in the Strategic Plan.[94] The Strategic Plan also highlights the need for succession planning, at both the Representative and Secretariat levels. Linked to this is the need for training and support, including "guidance on recruitment and nomination processes required to recruit new members."[95] Perhaps most strikingly, the Strategic Plan quantified the financial value of the voluntary work carried out by its members, approximately translating to an "annual value of €2,410,200."[96] This highlights the extensive work undertaken by individuals and groups to support their communities on a voluntary basis, as well as posing a potential challenge if community members are unable to provide such a high level of voluntary service.

In the local authority context, the role and significance of the Cork City PPN was recognised by a Cork City Council focus group in the Strategic Plan. Under Section 3.3.1, Cork City PPN is highlighted as "a trusted source of information" in addition to the statement that "Cork City Council value the impact of a strong, independent PPN leading to better overall decision-making and outcomes for the residents of Cork City."[97] Reflecting the partnership approach, Cork City Council regularly runs a "PPN promotional campaign both internally and externally" and promotes the role of PPNs through "internal communications and external newsletters."[98] Going forward to 2030, Cork City PPN has identified four key areas for strategic action, namely: 1) Governance & Operations; 2) Participation & Representation; 3) Capacity Building; and 4) Information & Communication. Each priority area has established objectives, means of measuring progress and timelines for completion.[99] Of note, aims under "Strategic Priority Area 2 – Participation & Representation" include working with elected members of Cork City Council and reviving the Cork City PPN Linkage Groups.[100]

[88] Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht (n.48), p.37.
[89] Ibid, p.44.
[90] Ibid, p.62.
[91] Cork City PPN (n.73), Section 3.
[92] Ibid, p.30.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid, pp.26-27.
[95] Ibid, p.26.
[96] These calculations were based on three hours of unpaid, voluntary work (€15 per hour) carried out by Cork City PPN members per week. Ibid, p.14.
[97] Ibid, p.28.
[98] Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht (n.48), p.46.
[99] Cork City PPN (n.73), pp.32-37.
[100] Ibid, p.34.

Public Participation Processes: Lessons from Łódź & Cork

A comparison of Cork City's PPN and Łódź's consultative bodies reveals a fundamental difference that goes beyond organisational issues and concerns the very philosophy of designing public participation in post-industrial cities. In both cases, there is a desire to institutionalise dialogue between organised civil society and local government. In both cases, the legislator has created a legal framework enabling this institutionalisation. However, the way in which this framework has been designed and resourced leads to fundamentally different outcomes – both in terms of sustainability and effectiveness.

Key differences and similarities include:

1. Mandatory status and initiative

The Cork City PPN was established under the Local Government Reform Act of 2014 as a mandatory body, appointed top-down by the local authority. Its existence does not depend on the mobilisation of the NGO sector or the goodwill of a particular mayor – it is an element of the local government architecture on a par with the departments of the council. Among Łódź's tools, only the Urban Regeneration Committee has a similar mandatory nature – but only for municipalities carrying out regeneration under the MRP. The PBAC and CDCs are optional. Their establishment requires an initiative from NGOs and the consent of the local government executive. This means that, in the Polish model, the burden of institutionalising dialogue rests with the weaker actor – the civil society sector – rather than with the local government.

2. Funding and resources

This is the most significant structural difference between the two models. Cork City PPN has dedicated public funding – the total national budget for the 31 PPN networks in 2025 amounted to €3,1 million, which works out at an average of €100,540 per year per network – as well as full-time staff (*i.e.*, a coordinator and a support officer). These resources enable the provision of training for representatives, the organisation of group meetings and the systematic capacity building of participants. None of Łódź's consultative bodies has its own budget. Participation in all three is voluntary – unpaid and without reimbursement of expenses – and administrative support is provided by the relevant departments of the City Council. The sustainability of engagement depends solely on the motivation of the participants, not on the institutional structure. Although, it should be noted that PPN representatives from civil society organisations participate in a voluntary capacity as well, and it can be difficult to fill all vacancies across the three pillars of activity.

3. Representation and composition

Cork City PPN is based on a three-pillar model of representation: the Community and Voluntary pillar, the Social Inclusion pillar and the Environmental pillar. The latter – comprising organisations working for nature conservation and environmental protection – is a mandatory element, ensuring the constant presence of an ecological/environmental perspective within the network's structure. Łódź's consultative bodies do not have a specialised environmental pillar. In the ŁPBAC and URC, environmental organisations may be present, but only as part of the broad 'NGO' category, without guaranteed representation. The CDC, which, due to its thematic structure, had the greatest

potential to represent the interests of environmental organisations, however in Łódź, a CDC dedicated to climate or environmental protection has never been established.

4. Mechanisms of influence

Cork City PPN has a formal right of representation on the City Council's SPCs, including the Cork City Council Environment, Water and Amenity SPC. This means that elected PPN representatives sit at the same table as councillors and officials responsible for policy decisions – in an advisory and voluntary capacity, but in a formally regulated manner. None of Łódź's consultative bodies has a comparable right to representation on the committees of the Łódź City Council. It is worth adding that city councillors sit as members of both the ŁURC and the ŁPBAC; nevertheless, the ŁURC, ŁPBAC and CDC alike formulate opinions and positions addressed to the Mayor without any guarantee of formal consideration, a response, or a public justification in the event of rejection.

5. Climate and environmental potential

Climate and environmental issues are encompassed in the activities of the Cork City PPN, the Liaison Group for Climate Action, Environment and Natural Heritage is one of five thematic Linkage Groups, and two of its representatives sit on the Environment, Water and Amenity SPC. In 2023, the Cork City PPN contributed to the City Council's consultation on the Climate Action Plan. In Łódź, none of the consultative bodies analysed has a formal mandate in municipal climate policy. The topic of climate adaptation appears – in the ŁURC, ŁPBAC and CDC for Regeneration – as a side issue or part of broader documents, never as a standalone, priority area of action.

Table 2 below summarises the key dimensions of both models:

Dimension	Cork City PPN	Łódź (ŁPBAC / ŁURC / CDC)
Legal basis	national legislation (2014)	national legislation and local regulations
Nature of obligation	mandatory	URC – mandatory within the framework of the Municipal Regeneration Programme (MRP); ŁPBAC and CDC – optional
Initiating authority	local government (top-down)	URC – local government (top-down); ŁPBAC and CDC – NGOs (bottom-up)
Funding	dedicated public funding (~EUR 100,540/year)	no dedicated funding; financed within the municipal budget
Staffing	full-time coordinator and support staff	administrative support provided by relevant departments of the City Office
Remuneration of participants	none; reimbursement of expenses possible	none
Representation in council committees	formal (Strategic Policy Committees – SPC)	none

Dimension	Cork City PPN	Łódź (ŁPBAC / ŁURC / CDC)
Environmental pillar	mandatory structural component	no equivalent
Link to climate policy	formalised (Linkage Groups, SPC)	incidental
Capacity building	systematic (training, workshops)	no systemic support
Institutional stability	high (independent of political cycles)	low (dependent on the willingness of local authorities to cooperate)

Table 2: Key dimensions of public engagement activities in Cork and Łódź (source: own work)

A comparison of Łódź's consultative bodies with one another reveals a further conclusion that goes beyond the relationship with the Cork model. The ŁPBAC – an optional body established on the initiative of NGOs – has shown significantly higher levels of activity in recent years than the mandatory ŁURC, which recorded its lowest attendance figures in 2024. This demonstrates that the mandatory nature of a body's existence does not guarantee its viability. Various factors may determine this, including the quality of relations between NGOs and the authorities, participants' sense of agency, and a thematic scope tailored to their actual interests and needs. A body that is formally mandatory but lacks resources and real influence fades away just as effectively as a voluntary body – only more slowly and whilst maintaining the formal appearance of activity.

A comparison of Cork and Łódź allows us to draw several conclusions relevant to the design of effective participatory mechanisms in urban climate adaptation processes:

1. Firstly, the mere obligation to establish consultative bodies is a necessary but insufficient condition for their functioning and effectiveness. Without dedicated resources and formal powers of representation in decision-making processes, it remains a declaration devoid of substance.
2. Secondly, the presence of a specialised pillar or thematic group dedicated to the environment and climate is a key structural element that enables the systematic incorporation of ecological and environmental perspectives into urban policy. The absence of such a specialised group often means that climate-related issues appear in the work of participatory bodies only incidentally and marginally.
3. Thirdly, building the capacity, skills and engagement of participants through, amongst other things, training, substantive support and access to expert advice is a prerequisite for the genuine, rather than merely formal, participation of NGOs and civil society representatives in complex adaptive planning processes.
4. Fourthly, the institutional sustainability of participation cannot depend solely on the political will of those currently in power and requires embedding within local government structures that are independent of electoral terms.

Conclusions

This comparative study aimed to determine how post-industrial cities design and utilise participatory structures to engage civil society in urban governance. It also sought to establish whether these structures are capable of supporting genuine participation in climate adaptation processes. The cases of Łódź and Cork, analysed through the prism of their consultative bodies, reveal a clear contrast between two approaches shaped by differing legal traditions, varying levels of institutional resources and, presumably, different understandings of the relationship between the state, local government and civil society.

The first and most fundamental observation concerns the distinction between formal and actual participation. Both Łódź and Cork have established legal frameworks mandating or facilitating civil society engagement in local governance. In both cities, bodies operate that issue opinions, attend meetings and formally participate in consultation processes. However, the extent to which this participation is meaningful – in terms of exerting real influence on decisions, shaping the political agenda and building the long-term capacity of civic actors – differs fundamentally between these cases. Formal participation, detached from institutional resources and decision-making powers, risks becoming a procedural exercise that drains the energy of civic actors without commensurate influence. The Irish PPN model, which has dedicated funding, permanent staff and a formal right of representation on statutory policy committees, is designed to prevent this disconnect. The Polish model, in which consultative bodies lack independent budgets, administrative autonomy and binding mechanisms, is structurally vulnerable to it.

The second conclusion concerns the relationship between institutional design and climate relevance. Urban adaptation to climate change is not a single policy area, but a cross-cutting challenge that simultaneously affects spatial planning, housing, energy, green infrastructure, social policy, and public health. Effective participatory management of climate change adaptation therefore requires bodies that are both sectorally flexible and climate-oriented, capable of bringing an environmental perspective to multiple policy areas simultaneously. The thematic structure of Cork City PPN (*i.e.*, with a dedicated Liaison Group for Climate Action, Environment and Natural Heritage, feeding into the relevant City Council SPC) provides an opportunity for precisely this kind of institutionalised climate channel. The Polish instruments analysed in this study have no equivalent. Environmental and climate issues appear in the work of Łódź's consultative bodies only incidentally, as part of broader strategic documents, as peripheral recommendations, or as an implicit dimension of regeneration policy. However, they do not formally constitute a priority, or independent area of engagement. The absence of a citizens' dialogue committee on the environment in Łódź and the lack of a dedicated climate structure within the Urban Regeneration Committee (URC) or the Public Benefit Activity Council (PBAC) are not accidental gaps. They reflect a broader pattern in which Polish participatory law establishes consultation obligations without specifying the substantive areas or the broad scope of activities in which such consultations should take place.

The third conclusion concerns the non-governmental sector as the foundation of participatory governance. Both the effectiveness and the limitations of consultative bodies are determined by the vitality, diversity and organisational potential of the civil society sector from which these bodies draw. In Ireland, the PPN model was built on a sector with a long tradition of community organisation, a clear legal status and – relatively speaking – coherent representative structures. In Poland, the non-governmental sector developed dynamically after 1989, but remains fragmented,

legally complex and unevenly resourced. Environmental organisations constitute a small minority of registered entities, which means that even where formal channels for civic participation exist, the pool of organisations capable of substantive engagement in climate consultations is limited. This is a problem that legal reform alone will not solve. It points to the need to invest in the capacity of the environmental civil society sector – through dedicated funding, training and networking support – as a prerequisite for effective participatory climate governance.[101]

The fourth conclusion concerns the paradox of mandatory status. A comparison of the three consultative bodies in Łódź reveals that the mandatory existence of a body does not guarantee its institutional viability. The Urban Regeneration Committee (URC) – the only mandatory body among the three – showed the most dramatic decline in participation. Meanwhile, Łódź Public Benefit Activity Council – formally optional, established on the initiative of the NGOs themselves – has maintained regular and productive activity. This suggests that the conditions for sustained engagement are relational rather than legal in nature.[102] These may depend largely on the quality of day-to-day relations between civil society and the local administration, on a sense of genuine agency among participants, and on whether the issues addressed by a given body correspond to the actual interests and expertise of its members. A body that is mandatory under the law but lacks resources and real influence loses participants just as effectively as a body that was never established.

The fifth conclusion, perhaps the most useful in practice, concerns the institutional architecture needed to support participatory climate adaptation in post-industrial cities. The cases of Łódź and Cork collectively indicate that effective structures require at least:

a) Dedicated and predictable public funding, independent of annual political decisions;
b) Formal powers of representation in the decision-making processes of the bodies whose policies are to be influenced;
c) A structural mechanism ensuring the inclusion of environmental and climate perspectives;
d) Systematic support for capacity building, enabling stakeholders to engage substantively in complex planning processes; and
e) An accountability mechanism obliging public bodies to publicly respond to opinions and recommendations issued.

None of the cases analysed fully meets all these conditions. Cork comes closer than Łódź, yet the PPN's 2023 annual report itself acknowledges that even in Ireland, representatives often state that their practical experiences of exerting influence on committees do not reflect their expectations.[103]

What both cities ultimately demonstrate is that the gap between participation as a process and participation as influence cannot be bridged by legislation alone. It requires sustained political commitment, institutional investment and resources, and a genuine understanding that meaningful participation in climate adaptation is not a consultative formality, but a shared responsibility for the long-term resilience of post-industrial urban communities.

[101] Boryczka et al. (n.4); UNIC (n.3).
[102] The importance of relational ties between members has also been noted within the Cork City PPN framework.
[103] Department of Rural and Community Development (n.83), p.16.