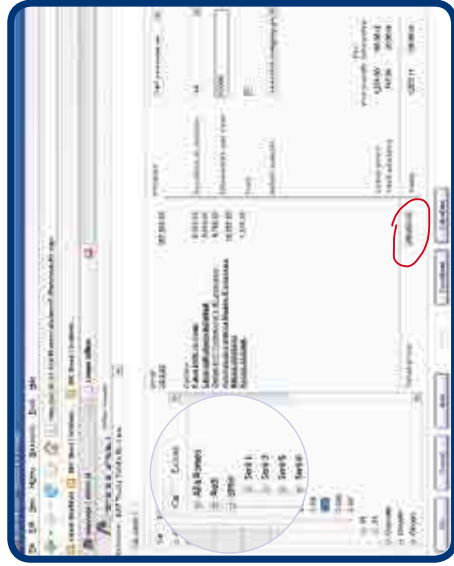


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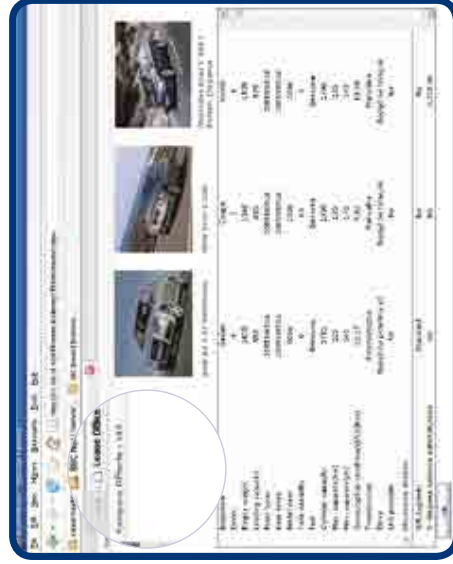


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"If we look at the number of inhabitants, this should decline from 730,000 today to 600,000 in 2030. This can have great implications for the local government budget. Shouldn't there be some kind of support from the government for this?"

"It is a trend which is quite typical, not only for Łódź but also for other cities in Poland, when people are moving out of the cities to the suburbs. Every weekend, especially when the weather is better, I ride my bicycle around in the Łódź area with a friend looking for places we have never been to. We often ride past construction sites. And believe me, most of the houses we see are not small, also not compared to any Dutch standard.

So people are moving out from cities to these kind of places. It is a problem for the city and we could address this issue by revitalizing the centre of Łódź. One of the constraints is that we have inherited a dramatically difficult structure of ownership in the centre of Łódź.



From left to right: Regional boardmember in Łódź, Jasja van der Veen, President Marek Belka of the NBP and Regional boardmember in Łódź, Sławomir Karasiński.

As a result, Piotrkowska street is populated by some dwellers who own nothing there and it is very difficult to change anything for the better in this area. If poll tax is introduced, this would enable wealthy people to stay in the city centre. Without this tax on real estate, there is no incentive for poor people to move out. I'm sorry that it sounds so cynical and cruel, but this is how it works all over the world. This would revive that neighborhood. Young people are happy to live in those areas where they have access to good restaurants, theaters, and their friends who also live in those areas.

There is one more thing I would like to add here. I remember I was in Holland in 1972 for the first time as a student and one day I visited the Museum Boymans van Beuningen in Rotterdam. I was on a rock bottom budget with a back pack, the museum was completely empty and I was approached by a clerk from the museum who asked me where I was from.

I answered that I was from Łódź. To that guy Łódź was the most important place in Poland. Why? Because of the museum of Modern Art in Łódź. The real connoisseurs know that this is probably one of the most interesting museums in Poland, and we have other places like that, such as Teatr Jaracza, which is one of the absolute top Polish drama theaters. Do the people of Łódź know about it? Some, not many. And keeping the quality of a city high is also about fighting to keep the horrible graffiti made by football fans off the walls of Łódź. It's shameful for Poland and dealing with it is very important."

"In the nineteen eighties and nineties, the Netherlands had similar problems with people leaving the cities. To keep them there, the government allowed large amounts of new houses to be built in specific areas. Wouldn't a more centralised policy applied by the government be the best solution for Łódź?"

"Of course there are certain funds and European programs to cofinance the revitalization of city centres. I'm sure that people in Łódź know how to use them and this is obviously not a waste of money, in Łódź we need a city centre where people can meet. My children pay taxes in Łódź, but live in Warsaw.

But when they spend weekends in Łódź and go with friends to restaurants, discos and pubs, they go to Piotrkowska or nearby. They would never go to shopping centres. We have too many of them; we need European style small boutiques. I'm an economist, but I don't believe in this. We should not follow Americans, but rather the French, the Dutch or the Germans."

"What is your favourite memory from Łódź?"

"First of all, most of my memories are from Łódź, since I was born in this city. I have spent my childhood here, and that is where I still live. In my youth I lived there with my parents and my grandparents in the same house. My primary school was quite far away and we had to walk to school every day. We never got back on time since me and my younger brother used to play football after school on the meadows near the river Ner. We used to play football sometimes until nine in the evening.

One year we had a strange winter with a lot of rain that caused the meadows to be flooded and finally frozen. In one day, we got in the best Dutch tradition, a 10 km ice skating rink. Everyone came to play hockey and skate. Unfortunately, I jumped and fell and hurt my eyebrow badly. I was covered with blood on my face. You can still see the scar above my eye. I was around 9 years old and I came back home and my mother and grandmother took care of me. That is my memory of me being a victim of the biggest skating adventure in Łódź." ★



**Slawek Karasinski – board member**

„I am a lawyer and I have run my own law firm since 2003 based on my educational background in Poland and the Netherlands. I spent almost two years studying different areas of law in the Netherlands in the cities Den Haag, Nijmegen and Leiden. I decided to study in the Netherlands because of the quality and openness of law professors and their international approach. It was also very nice to live in an open society like the Netherlands. Currently, in Poland I operate a regional law firm with offices in Lódź and Warsaw. We deal mostly with tax and business law and we have 35 staff. We are currently the biggest regional law firm in the Lódź region.”

**Jasja van der Veen – board member**

„My first visit to Poland was in 1983. When I was a student, I wrote my thesis introducing Chocomel and Frisli for Nutricia in Poland. I came back in 1988 and started working for a Dutch direct marketing company. Later I specialised in the call centre business when I started to work for Dinar in 2001, which I currently fully own. In 2007 I moved to Lódź because a client asked me to build a call centre there, selling insurances. At first I was commuting every week; however, gradually I moved both my business and my private life to Lódź.”

# NPCC's new regional board members with a passion for Lódź

Can you tell us what there is to like about Lódź from an entrepreneurial point of view?

SK: „Lódź is a city that is rapidly changing. There are many important investments taking place and as a result Lódź has turned into the biggest construction site in Poland.”

JvdV: „If you say Lódź, you say textile which had its heydays at the beginning of the previous century, when large fortunes were made. Communism effectively killed this entrepreneurial success after the WWII. However, you can see that all the buildings in the center are industrial.

If they are renovated, they could be used as office space. Piotrkowska Street in the center of Lódź is now getting back its old style. I think it would have been very nice to live in Lódź in 1910-1920 when there

was a lot going on. Hopefully some of it will come back and after the economic growth of Wrocław and Kraków, now could be the time in Poland for Lódź!”

SK: „What I would also like to mention is that people are well educated. The number of higher education institutions is high, but also the quality is very good. If you take for instance the law faculty at the University of Lódź, it is rated the second best law faculty in Poland.”

JvdV: „Indeed you see that a lot of people studying in Lódź; however, after their studies they move to Warsaw to find a job. They commute all the time, the Monday morning and Friday afternoon trains are full, but these people would prefer to work in Lódź. Nowadays we see that business is coming back; companies are recognising that in Lódź you can pay a lower salary and have lower office costs with the same quality as in Warsaw.”

If we look at the companies that are located here such as Infosys, Indesit, Bosch, Siemens, ING, Samsung, Raben and Fujitsu, one of the successes of Lódź is its economic zone.

SK: „The Lódź economic zone is indeed very successful, not only compared to other Polish economic zones but also worldwide. The Financial Times put us within the first 10 special economic zones in the world, and you have to take into account all the Chinese and Arabian zones, which also offer incentives for businesses.”

How is that situation in general? Marek Belka already told us that the city should focus on quality companies that can offer higher salaries in order to keep good staff in Lódź. Does the local government have some kind of strategy?

SK: „One of the city's strategies is the creative industry. Lódź is also famous for its film school, which is probably the most famous in Eastern Europe or even in the whole of Europe. The success of this sector has sparked the emergence of different companies that are connected to this industry like the production of computer games.

The city is thinking about providing incentives for software producers based on utilizing knowledge from content coming from the production of films fashion and art industry. There is also a focus on fashion with the Lódź fashion week that takes place twice a year and which is the biggest fashion event in Poland.”

JvdV: „There is still some textile here, such as Polish brands Mommari, Kastor and Vistula as well as Wólczanka in the Lódź area. They are here because of their heritage, and level of education (there is still a textile academy). In the building where I we are located, on the ground floor there are still ladies sewing and producing clothes.”

Both of you are entrepreneurs who have invested in Lódź. You are both very positive. However, during the meeting with President Belka we heard that many people are leaving Lódź and construction projects might not be finished. What are the challenges for the coming years?

JvdV: „The local government has made a good start with infrastructure. The railway station is currently under construction and the highway is ready, which is a major step. Now it's time to focus on business.

In my opinion, over the past few years Lódź has been trying to find the right focus: whether to be city of culture or to focus on entertainment, or only as a commuter city for Warsaw. I think it is time they make the decision to focus on business growth.”

And what is your opinion of the mayor Hanna Zdanowska?

JvdV: „It is difficult to say since Hanna Zdanowska has only just started. She inherited a city that was in a poor condition, and the inhabitants of Lódź are frustrated after previous mayors who didn't perform very well.

Therefore, people are skeptical about how she will manage. However, I see that things are changing, and I see that she is really doing her best.”

You are both board members for the NPCC for the new chapter that has been established in Lódź. What are the plans for the coming year?

JvdV: „First of all to identify the Dutch companies here. The central word regarding events is co-operation. Lódź is at present not a huge Dutch economical hub; there are around 25 companies with Dutch origins altogether in the Lódź area.

Some of the better known are Philips, Infosys (working for Philips as world-wide BPO center), Avell, Altec, De Heus, Enkev, Kersten Europe, Cobouw, Oomer and Tomtom. So we have to work with other chambers, consulates and other organisations to promote doing business with each other.”

What type of events will you be organising here?

SK: „The goal is to slowly but steadily start activities and to do this with the help of other chambers, to organise more international mixers, and meetings and so on. I think that to start with we would like to have 2-3 events per year and for each event to be successful.”

There are fewer people here of Dutch origin than in cities like Kraków or Poznań. On the other hand Lódź is much closer to Warsaw so taking people to Warsaw events and vice versa can be a good solution to get a high turnout.” ★



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