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EXAMINING THE PUBLIC ACCEPTABILITY
OF TRANSPORTATION POLICY THROUGH THE LENS
OF POSITIONING THEORY.
A CASE OF THE CITY COUNCIL DEBATE IN KRAKÓW, POLAND

Abstract. This paper applies positioning analysis to the case study of the extraordinary city council meeting in Kraków devoted to assessing controversial transport policy instruments. Positions are entitlements to perform actions in an episode. The paper explores how actual positioning patterns of pro-policy and anti-policy camps calmed the conflict between them. It is claimed that conflicted parties shared three narratives (storylines) that secured political and public acceptance of the policy, albeit in a non-obvious way.

Keywords: policy acceptability; positioning theory; transportation policy; discourse.

INTRODUCTION

The solution to the transportation problems of modern cities is among the most urgent tasks for policymakers. Despite a rich literature, the traditional paradigm in transportation studies, based mainly on a predict-and-provide engineering approach, has not lived up to expectations. The general public feels that transportation problems have not only not been practically solved but are getting worse. Therefore, alternative approaches are being sought. A promising direction in the research is to explore how various actors engage in the production and contestation of transport policy to better understand the politics of redistribution of benefits and responsibilities along with the tensions involved (Sosa López & Montero, 2018, p. 138). This means moving away from cost-benefit modeling towards need-based and social justice approaches (Martens, 2016; Vanoutrive & Cooper, 2019) with discursive components. There is

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also a parallel movement away from research aiming at formulating law-like generalizations toward locally grounded, context-specific problem-solving analyses (Henriksson et al., 2019, p. 627).

Such a shift opens up a whole spectrum of new analytical possibilities, offering hope for a better diagnosis of the source of many transportation problems. One new method, positioning analysis, developed by social psychologist Rom Harré and his collaborators (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré et al., 2009; Harré & Slocum, 2003) seems especially well suited for the analysis of interactional production and contestation of various policies. Positioning analysis concerns how people navigate local moral orders in communication episodes assigning contestable rights and obligations to themselves and their interlocutors. The assignment of rights and duties through the appeal to commonly known narratives is a practice of discursive positioning. The analyst's task is then to bring to light patterns of such practices to describe the ways actors manage to move forward in an episode, i.e., to show how an interaction goes on.

It is easy to see that conflict is very often at the heart of the implementation of any public policy. The expectations of different people towards the policy rarely match perfectly, making it necessary to engage in political negotiations. From this perspective, positioning analysis is about discerning the ways in which the expression of conflict organizes negotiations. Here, this method reveals its practical usefulness. Positioning analysts hold that the hostile stances of antagonists are dependent on patterns of discursive positioning in an unfolding episode. If it is possible to change these patterns so that a conflict "can no longer readily find expression," then "in a sense, it ceases to exist" (Harré & Slocum, 2003, p. 100). This is how acceptance of transport-demand measures might be achieved. On the other side, the opportunity for such achievement might be missed as well if it is pro-policy institutional persuasion that cannot readily find expression due to, for example, incoherence in underlying positioning patterns. Whether it happens or not is, of course, an empirical matter determined in case-by-case studies.

This paper applies positioning analysis to the case study of the extraordinary city council meeting devoted to assessing transport policy instruments introduced in Kraków, Poland. In October 2017, an open-to-the-public meeting was called in response to the sudden traffic paralysis throughout the city that occurred two weeks earlier. The initial discussion on the incompetence of political opponents quickly turned into a fierce political debate on the very idea of pursuing a sustainable transport policy. The present paper explores actual patterns of discursive positioning of pro-policy and anti-policy camps.

It is hypothesized that the conflicted parties did, in fact, share a story that temporarily calmed the conflict and secured political and public acceptance of the policy, albeit in an unobvious way. The paper contributes to the literature by demonstrating how such an acceptance can be conceived of as a hard-won yet fragile local interactional achievement.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. The next section investigates the shift towards discursivity in the transportation literature with a focus on the notion of acceptability/acceptance of coercive measures. Section 3 presents positioning analysis and discusses its methodological underpinnings. Section 4 describes the methodological procedure along with the data used for the empirical analysis and briefly presents the historical context of the selected case. Section 5 presents and discusses the results. Section 6 concludes.

1. DISCURSIVITY, INTERACTION, AND ACCEPTABILITY OF TRANSPORT POLICIES

References to discursivity have appeared in the literature on various transportation and mobility issues. They are particularly evident in studies on the acceptability and acceptance of coercive transport-demand measures. The most discussed issue, at least in the Global North, seems to be the implementation of congestion pricing.

“Congestion pricing has been viewed as the most appropriate solution to ensure maximum utilization of existing roads,” write Aya Selmoune et al. (Selmoune et al., 2020, p. 1). However, as they immediately acknowledge, there are very few cases where such implementation has been successful beyond the planning stage. It is the lack of public acceptability that hampers the implementation (Morton et al., 2021, p. 257). Congestion pricing, as well as other coercive measures, are economically sound tools that effectively help in managing road traffic. It is a solution that works well on paper and is supported by statistical calculations. So, here is the conundrum: Why do rational actors not want to accept it and behave in accordance with the solution? Can measures such as road pricing ever be designed to be economically efficient and acceptable to the public? (Holguín-Veras et al., 2020, p. 561) Can coercive measures be acceptable to the public and politically feasible simultaneously? (Gärling & Loukopoulos, 2007, p. 322) There seem to be three answers to these crucial questions in the transportation literature.

The first answer, now manifestly archaic, is that some rational actors are apparently not rational enough to follow the “correct” solution. That is, they are not adequately educated or have other internal intellectual deficiencies. But since it is the rejection of coercive measures that is a statistical norm, it would follow that most actors are not rational enough in this sense, which in turn renders the whole explanation problematic (see Vanoutrive & Zijlstra, 2018 for a review and moderate critique).

The second answer keeps the internal rationality story mostly intact but adds an important qualification: There are external factors that confound the rationality of actors so that their rationality “in the wild” is never as pure as to match the “correct” models construed by scientists. The scientist’s job is to identify those factors, measure their impact on an average actor, infer from the sample to population, and ideally modify causally related factors by experimental manipulation.

Selmoune et al. review the current literature on external factors affecting public acceptability/acceptance. They claim that most studies focus only on four major factors of congestion pricing, namely equity, complexity, privacy, and uncertainty, while there is a need to add at least a few more. Among potentially influential yet not well-researched factors, they include such discursive elements as public attitudes, use of project champions, or political acceptance (Selmoune et al., 2020, p. 2). Christiansen attempts to unravel the relationship between political legitimacy and the implementation of various coercive measures (Christiansen, 2018, 2020). One important finding in his work is that local contexts make a difference in statistical relationships. Thus, whatever factors one identifies as working, one should also pay attention to their grounding in the locality. This invites cultural and interactional considerations.

The third answer, presented mainly implicitly in the current transportation literature, reconceptualizes rationality as embedded in a social environment. This is significantly different from internal rationality being under the influence of some measurable external factors. If the social environment is conceived of as dynamic, which seems entirely uncontroversial in modern science, then embedded rationality must be dynamic as well, which amounts to saying that rationality is discursive. This is the very interactionism pursued in this paper. But it comes at a methodological cost of replacing measurements with a narrative (see Section 3). Scholars in the transportation field often maneuver between option 2 (external factors) and option 3 (discursive rationality) in their actual

work. The rest of this section reviews examples of such intellectual maneuvers to pave the way for the introduction of positioning analysis in the next section.

Thomas Vanoutrive and Toon Zijlstra remind their readers that the current discussion in the field is no longer about the interpretation of individual preferences “but about *publicly debating* the allocation of road space and accessibility in general” (Vanoutrive & Zijlstra, 2018, p. 99, emphasis added). What stabilizes the debates for scientific scrutiny is normative reasoning. Thus, researchers are invited to ask questions such as “who has the right to drive during peak hours?” instead of asking only about the configuration of variables that renders economically optimal and statistically significant results. The right to use road space – on their account – is derived from the accessibility needs of members of a community as they participate fully in society (see also Farrington, 2007). But although Vanoutrive and Zijlstra are reluctant to give up variables entirely in favor of a narrative-normative explanation and support their reasoning with traditional questionnaires, choice experiments, and statistical calculations, their thinking is clearly discursive and interactional friendly.

A similar move can be seen in the influential work of Eliasson on the success of congestion charge implementation in Stockholm. His main research question is simple: How does a highly controversial policy eventually settle down as an almost entirely uncontroversial fact? (Eliasson, 2014). Eliasson answers this with a model that includes a movement from the technical-rational domain of economic efficiency to the moral domain and back again. The movement is discursive and interactional, as Eliasson assumes that his main explanatory devices, sociopsychological attitudes of stakeholders, are dynamic: i.e., they may be unstable, incomplete, and inconsistent. They are made in interactions, at least partially. He writes: “A political battle over a new issue where voters do not have strong pre-existing attitudes, such as congestion charges, will often be a battle over which existing attitude voters will associate the new issue to, using the existing attitude as a template for the new one” (Eliasson, 2014).

Even though Eliasson does not switch entirely to narrativity in his research, as he relies heavily on surveys and traditional “measurement” of attitudes, he also stresses the importance of how the actual debates unfold as discursive episodes. He explains: “When the debate becomes more intensive, attitudes become stronger and more pronounced, and voters more polarized. This development is enhanced by the use of moral and emotional arguments. But once the debate calms down, attitudes become less strong, and congestion pricing may be judged more on its objective purposes and effects” (Eliasson, 2014).

In the literature, there is also general agreement among scholars that understanding proposed policies play an important role in achieving acceptability/acceptance. The intuitions here are straightforward: “What people understand a pricing scheme to be (information) impacts on their perceptions of scheme acceptability” (Liu et al., 2021, p. 98) or “The public may oppose pricing initiatives due to perception that the measures are intrusive” (Holguín-Veras et al., 2020, p. 561) or “Policies are more acceptable if the public is aware of the negative impacts associated with car use and they understand the need for measures to address these impacts” (Pridmore & Miola, 2011, p. 8). Pridmore and Miola reviewed research in this field to extract details of what understanding might amount to. They list the following conditions for successful implementation of transportation policies: “consistent messages, strong and clear political leadership, transparent, responsible revenue spending, revenue spending ‘benefits’ those affected by the program, data on program outcomes from nonpartisan sources, information about ‘others doing their part’ is readily available and widely publicized” (Pridmore & Miola, 2011, p. 14). It is easy to see that at least some of these conditions are clearly discursive in nature. A notion of consistent messages can be translated into a notion of interactional consistency in producing messages by a communicator; clear political leadership is a confident situational speech-acting of a politician, and so on. In contrast, none of these can be easily “measured” as a fixed state of the world encoded into a variable.

Holden et al., in their review of the idea of narrative inquiries in transportation and mobility studies, go one step further and argue that “[...] well-formulated narratives are needed to give meaning to ideas and should be a priority for achieving sustainable mobility” (Holden et al., 2020, p. 4). What is important here is that *understanding* a policy is essential for the *achievement* of policy goals.

Similarly, Theresa Kallenbach presents her research on transformational urban mobility as employing “narrative analysis to understand not only how the current mobility sector is perceived, but also what kind of future changes are envisioned in discourses on urban mobility” (Kallenbach, 2020). Clearly discursive and interactional is the research of Van Der Meulen and Mukhtar-Landgren, who seek to deconstruct the accessibility discourse. They give the following rationale: “Deconstructions turn our attention to the way interpretations of a phenomenon are sustained, namely through entanglement with other interpretations, through practices, and through the roles that transport policy and planning are attributing to people” (Van Der Meulen & Mukhtar-Landgren, 2021, p. 494).

Placing emphasis on the local and culturally bounded aspects of acceptability of transportation policies does not mean completely abandoning the discerning of “big” concepts and questions. One of the recent efforts to bring those back into the equation is the work of Rinkinen, Shove, and Marsden (Rinkinen et al., 2021). The authors ask how seemingly non-negotiable interpretations of normality come into being. They discern the constitution of demand (taking the energy and transport sectors as examples) by showing that it depends, among other things, on the range of evershifting, historically situated social practices. As such, the demand for mobility does not simply exist “as something to be met, nor does it remain unchanged” (Rinkinen et al., 2021, p. 8). The demand is “provisionally held in place by a raft of social and technical arrangements, all of which have complicated and contested histories, all of which are open to negotiation and change and none of which are inevitable or natural” (Rinkinen et al., 2021, p. 25). When discussing the demand for travel, they notice that already existing arrangements of practices, infrastructures, technologies, and policies are linked to pro-growth narratives. But they need not be, and policy analysis can help identify practices and arrangements that serve to reduce demand and aim at degrowth. Where there is practice, there can always be supportive discourse.

2. POSITIONING THEORY AS AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of position and positioning is directly related to practices and social arrangements. People in arrangements are always in positions, and these positions can change all the time (Cook et al., 2005). Discursive positioning “[...] focuses analytical attention on the micro, local, and situated conversational moves individuals take to create and challenge social arrangements” (Zanin & Bisel, 2018). Positions are understood as clusters of beliefs about how rights and obligations are distributed in the course of an unfolding episode of personal interaction (Harré et al., 2009). To put it differently: positions are entitlements to perform certain actions (to say and to do something) in an episode. The basic insight is that not everyone can perform every action by default. What one may or may not do depends on how she is positioned in an episode and whether she accepts or successfully challenges this positioning or not. This brings to mind the sociological concept of a role. However, while roles are conceptualized as fixed, positions can be challenged at any time during

an episode. An episode is any social situation that can be plausibly described with some minimal principle of unity.

Positioning theory breaks with epistemologically and ontologically problematic claims about the causal influence of unavailable for any scientific inspection attitudes as internal states of persons in favor of studying how the various parties involved in an episode mutually constitute and manage the meanings, making (or not) the situation intelligible.

Positioning analysis does not rely on a precisely defined analytical procedure and certainly not at all on any sort of measurement. Rather, a narrative inquiry is a suitable way of carrying it out. It requires imagining a life course as a story told by a narrator, that is, as a description of a sequence of events with an effort to explain how these events came to be. Paul Roth's concept of "essentially narrative explanations" is a close ally to positioning theory and applicable to the method of positioning analysis (Roth, 2017). For Roth, a narrative comes as a unit in the sense that an explanandum is non-detachable from supporting discourse. Harré was very close to this conception when he recommended a conversation as a model of an otherwise intangible flux of social practices (Harré, 2009).

Harré and colleagues believe that with the help of positioning analysis, one can highlight practices that inhibit groups of individuals from performing certain acts or actions. This highlighting is done through the study of positions created in "storylines." A storyline is a chunk of conversation that develops around a certain topic among participants (Kayi-Aydar, 2019, p. 8). An analyst looks at the content of conversations in the chosen episode, trying to detect emerging patterns in the storylines and positions in them. She then tries to retell the observed episode as if it were a coherent narrative, discerning if, in doing so, she succeeds in making the entire situation intelligible for herself and her audience as well.

In research practice, it is useful to distinguish between first-order, second-order, and third-order positioning. First-order positioning refers to the attribution of rights or duties either to oneself or to another participant in an episode. Second-order positioning refers to the acceptance, rejection, or negotiation of first-order positioning. Third-order positioning refers to positioning outside the ongoing episode. One can also distinguish prepositioning, which is any discursive activity that facilitates first-order positioning.

Positioning analysis has been successfully applied in many studies (Aronson, 2021; Badarneh, 2020; Zanin & Bisel, 2018). It has been particularly successful among classroom interaction researchers (Herbel-Eisenmann et al., 2016;

Wagner & Herbel-Eisenmann, 2009). So far, positioning analysis has not been applied directly to transportation and mobility research. It is not difficult to see that research in this area that relies on discursivity and interactional character, as presented in Section 2, could easily be framed through the lens of positioning. In most of them, one could identify some episodes (like transport policy debates or public hearings) with storylines and positions.

3. DATA AND CASE DESCRIPTION

Historical context. On Tuesday, October 3, 2017, during the afternoon traffic rush hour, congestion formed on most of the main roads in the center of Kraków, causing total transport paralysis in the city. Traffic difficulties are part-and-parcel of every day in many modern cities, but on this particular day, the situation was exceptional. Radio stations and press portals covered it live, reporting that cars and streetcars were standing still *en masse*. At the major intersections, the police controlled the traffic. It did not help much, and the paralysis subsided only late in the evening. What happened that day? One answer is that the paralysis was the result of an unlucky coincidence. Numerous infrastructure projects were underway in the city, requiring the closure or narrowing of many roads. To make matters worse, it was raining that day, and autumn weather prevailed, which along with increased traffic and the resulting nervousness of many drivers translated into numerous collisions that made the already bad situation on the roads worse. The “unlucky coincidence” explanation was quickly dismissed in mass and social media. Journalists, politicians, and ordinary residents pointed out that it is the responsibility of officials to anticipate such situations. Rain, collisions, or breakdowns are unpredictable, but closing or narrowing multiple roadways is a matter of irresponsible decision by a particular official.

For this reason, a group of councilors called a special open session of the City Council on October 18, 2017. This session is the episode selected for analysis. It was devoted to investigating into management failures of the city officials (and the President of Kraków, who formally oversees traffic management in the city) but also to evaluate the “Mobilny Kraków” policy program that had been implemented in the city at the time. This program was supposed to evolve into a fully-fledged Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP, Gałka et al., 2020; Okraszewska et al., 2018). It is precisely the shift from the investigation into management failures to the attempt to undermine the policy program that makes the selected case analytically interesting.

The City Council meeting provided an opportunity for a conflict episode to occur. Adding to the meeting's agenda, a discussion on the evaluation of the "Mobilny Kraków" program and the city's transportation policy encouraged the participation of residents aggrieved by the reorganization of many streets in the city. "Mobilny Kraków" aimed to calm down car traffic in the city center, but it also aimed to provide additional parking spaces for residents. Two years earlier, as a result of a change in national law in 2014, city managers had to liquidate about 2500-3000 parking spaces located on the sidewalks where too little space was left for pedestrians. The new law required leaving a minimum of two meters if a parking fee is to be charged. This was impossible to obtain in many areas. The city was faced with a choice: either liquidate the illegal parking spaces or lose the ability to charge for parking. "Mobilny Kraków" was supposed to be a way to kill two birds with one stone: to pursue sustainable urban transport policy goals and to create additional space by making limited access zones and narrowing the streets to relocate previously liquidated parking places. However, it turned out that this policy was not understood in such a charitable way by many citizens who, feeling aggrieved by narrowing the streets and liquidation of "their" parking spots, organized themselves into anti-policy urban social movements. This, in turn, caught the attention of politically sensitive councilmen and fueled the conflict.

Data Description. The basic source of data was the official transcript of the session available in Polish on the website of the Municipality of Kraków (<https://www.bip.krakow.pl/plik.php?zid=192375>). The website also provided a 6-hour audio-video recording of the same session, which served as an additional data source. It was used to resolve questions about the observable behavior of speakers at moments when this was crucial for capturing, for example, nonverbal responses to positioning.

The analysis consisted of reading the entire text several times, along with watching the video. The episode was formal in nature, so it was easy to distinguish between successive turns of speakers. The chairman gave the floor to the subsequent speakers, and this was indicated in both the transcript and the video recording. Each turn was coded and annotated using the MaxQDA software. Coding followed the basic tenets of grounded theorizing. The notes included suggestions for potentially found storylines and first chunks of interpretation. The notes were revised many times with each subsequent reading of the text. Ultimately, 1501 codes and 135 extended notes were written.

4. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

This section presents the results of the empirical analysis. General remarks on the structure and content of the session are presented. The main actors are identified. Their versions of what was at the heart of the dispute are presented. Next, the three identified main storylines are described, along with information on who positioned who, how, and with what effect.

The City Council session consisted of two roughly equal parts. The first part was devoted to a discussion of the causes of the city's transportation paralysis. The second part was devoted to the implementation of the "Mobilny Kraków" program. The structure of the two parts was similar. First, the city hall representative spoke, then the councilors commented on his speech, then the floor was given to the residents, and finally, the city representative spoke again. The session was chaired by a councilor from the coalition favoring the president. However, the session was initiated by councilmen from the club, being a political opposition to the President of Kraków. The session was held in the fall of 2017, while the next local government elections in Poland were scheduled a year later. Before the session started, some media and social media users prepositioned the organizers of the session as the initiators of a political campaign against the president, but this thread did not turn into a storyline during the episode.

The first part of the session was marked by the storyline, which can be named "incompetence of political opponents." Politicians of the camp friendly to the president and his opponents positioned themselves by invoking the same argument: that the opposing side is not competent enough to coordinate the renovation works. The presidential camp was positioned as unable to control the issuance of permits for street closures. In turn, the opposition camp was indirectly positioned as incompetent. The fact was used here that besides the renovations organized by the Kraków authorities, some streets were closed by the State Railways, which are under the control of the state and the ruling party in Poland, the same party whose councilors at the municipal level form the opposition in Kraków.

Although this exchange of mutual accusations of incompetence lasted two hours, it did not evolve into any significant argument and died out at the end of the first part of the session. This was partially facilitated by the president, who was also the first speaker of the session. He immediately positioned himself as aware of the organizational difficulties in implementing large infrastructure projects and, in a peculiar way, also helpless. This positioning was based on the metaphor of gritting one's teeth. But the president also positioned

himself as one who takes responsibility for the difficulties. At the end of his speech, he positioned himself as one who gives himself the right to hold any of his subordinates accountable. And at the end of his turn, he positioned all the councilors as the ones to point out the guilty and prove them guilty. This last step was crucial. The president authorized the session as substantively important, but at the same time, he positioned the councilors as those who must show some ingenuity in proving the officials' guilt.

The storyline "incompetence of political opponents" was apparently tiring for the session participants, as various speakers tried to move on to the topic of the second part as they began to explain the causes of the paralysis by the implementation of sustainable transport policies in general and the "Mobilny Kraków" program in particular. The session chair intervened, preventing these threads from developing. Clearly, participants aimed at co-creating the new storyline, which they needed to move interaction further on. The attempts to do this came from both the president's camp and the opposition.

It was not until the second part of the session that a sharp exchange of positioning took place. There the political divisions were manifested differently. Liberal, pro-sustainable policy camp clashed with the anti-policy conservatives as three distinct storylines emerged. Chunks of them could be seen in individual statements in the first part but only now came to the fore.

Storyline 1: Irrational management of sustainability

The storyline "Irrational management of sustainability" was the main driving force of the whole second part of the session. Its fragments appeared in the councilors' statements already in the first part of the session. The storyline revealed, albeit in an indirect way, a whole new political division: between supporters and opponents of implementing a sustainable transport policy, a division distinct from the existing party political divisions in the city council. The storyline was needed because no one wanted to openly attack the idea of sustainability. However, the storyline did provide an opportunity to position officials as unable to implement sustainable transportation policy in a rational manner.

The opponents used specific examples of reconstructed streets under sustainability requirements, predicting that such actions would bring opposite effects to those intended. Typical arguments are captured in the following quotes from two councilors.

[Excerpt 1, city councilor, anti-policy camp]

First of all, I would like to protest and ask for the bus lane, which was painted on Wielicka street yesterday or the day before, to disappear. Because until now there were no traffic jams there. Since the bus lane was painted, there have been huge traffic jams.

[Excerpt 2, city councilor, anti-policy camp]

Many supporters of the introduction of “Mobilny Kraków” expressed more or less this opinion, ... [that] residents should give up traveling by car to the city center. ... the idea was that they should simply switch to public transport ... which is inefficient and certainly will not take over everyone during rush hours, ... So there is no logic to this, we should first invest in road infrastructure on these main sections ... and then talk about people giving up their cars and not entering the city center. And we are not doing this; we are closing roads for everyone.

Another way to point out the poor implementation of sustainability policies was to cite examples of bankrupt stores. According to the policy opponents, traffic calming and the elimination of sidewalk parking spaces are directly linked to the decline of retail. Officials were positioned as not caring about the personal tragedies of local entrepreneurs. This theme had been particularly picked up by representatives of urban social movements that fought to maintain the dominance of automobiles in the city. One representative showed a photo of a devastated street in the UK as an example of the effects of interfering with the “normality” of everyday life of ordinary residents through sustainable transport policies. He acknowledged that the problem was European, thus positioning the officials, arguably unintentionally, as acting in accordance with international policy trends.

This positioning was paradoxically tacitly accepted by the officials. The only trace of a second-order positioning oriented toward rejecting the accusation of the incompetent introduction of the sustainability policy was a comment by the deputy director of Infrastructure Management Authority (ZIKiT) Łukasz Franek, indicating that none of his opponents was able to justify the thesis of lack of progress in extending the quality of public transport. Franek, in this way, positioned his critics as people who, by default, reject the possibility of using public transport, who do not know its reality, and who use a simplified and unsupported by facts idea about the inefficiency of public transport.

Storyline 2: Residents should have more rights than outsiders

The second prominent storyline could be titled “Residents should have more rights than outsiders.” This storyline grew out of threads about entrepreneurs

being ruined by the inept implementation of sustainable transportation policies. One councilman from the liberal camp, for example, claimed that the traffic jam problem only begins in the city when students arrive. The complaint was that coercive measures are introduced that affect ordinary residents, including entrepreneurs, while they should target outsiders only, including, in the first place, students. A typical form of this argument is captured in the following quotation:

[Excerpt 3, independent city councilor, anti-policy camp]

I would like to support those of you who believe, as I do, that the safety and comfort of residents should be secured first, and only then should we welcome guests.

Such voices appealed to the city residents present at the session, as they supported positioning them as having special rights in the city. Some took advantage of this situation to simultaneously position the authorities as working against the residents:

[Excerpt 4, urban social movement representative, anti-policy camp]

Let's calculate what costs are borne by the residents, what costs are not borne by tourists, and who in this city is the most important for the city authorities.

[Excerpt 5, district councilor, anti-policy]

It cannot be that the people outside of Kraków have more rights than we, who make this city. In fact, it seems that we are some kind of problem for the city; it cannot be so; everyone else is glorified here, everyone else gets something, and we, where are we in all this as residents, users, and taxpayers of this city?

All parties in the episode have widely accepted this positioning of the residents as unfairly disadvantaged. In fact, the researcher was unable to find a single instance of the rejection of this particular positioning in the dataset. Literally, no one dared to call it into question. One of the councilors from the liberal camp, a proposer of the "Mobilny Kraków" program, admitted that the program, through the introduction of residential "green blocks" with limited car access, is aimed precisely at guaranteeing the residents that the streets near their homes will be free from the cars of tourists and other visitors.

Storyline 3: Normality of parking practice

The third major storyline was that of the normality of parking practices. As before, the origins of this storyline go back to mutual accusations of incompetence in the first part of the session. The elimination of nearly 3,000 parking

spaces due to illegal locations on sidewalks was a significant political issue. The president's camp accused the governor of ordering the liquidation of illegal parking spaces, positioning him as the actual enforcer of this decision. The opposition camp, politically sided with the governor, defended itself against this positioning, arguing that the governor had no legal power not to react to the non-compliance of the city's parking solutions with the national law.

As it turned out later in the episode, it was the issue most noticed by the city residents who came to the sessions. In the vast majority of their statements, there were appeals not to liquidate the parking spaces and to seek a compromise to preserve them. The storyline under discussion was interesting because residents positioned councilors as obligated to give them answers as to why changes resulting in parking spaces being eliminated had been made at all. One resident noted, for example, that the regulations for café gardens in the city center assume a 1.5 meters space is needed for passing. She asked why in the case of a parking space, it has to be 2 meters. Pedestrians were positioned as beneficiaries of something they do not use anyway because – as was repeatedly pointed out – 1.5 meters is just as comfortable and useful as 2 meters. It is enlightening that the only explanation offered on this issue in the entire episode was derived from the normative nature of law. It has been simply argued, in a circular manner, that since such a law had been introduced, one must conform to it.

Obviously, this explanation convinced no one, so the councilors tried to save themselves politically by declaring their willingness to appeal to the relevant minister to make it clear in which situations exceptions to the 2 meters rule are possible. This was also a positioning move, shifting the responsibility for local government decisions onto the state-level minister.

Regardless of these actions, the positioning of both transport authorities and councilors as incapable of understanding that cheap or free parking is a normal need for most residents continued throughout the episode. An exemplary example of this argument is the following quote from one of the residents:

[Excerpt 6, a resident of Kraków, anti-policy]

At this point, the safest and most convenient mode of transportation for me, for my family and me, is my own car. And I need to be able to park my car near my place of residence as well as near my destinations, such as school, kindergarten, doctor's surgery. Liquidation of these parking places strikes directly against families in Kraków.

The lack of a defensive response demonstrates that authorities and councilors at least partially agreed to the positioning within this storyline. They failed to clearly demonstrate why current parking practices pose a problem for the

city, why previously free parking spaces should now be paid, and why they may not be allocated virtually everywhere where they are needed.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper aimed to explore the narratives that helped extinguish the conflict around a particular social problem. Three such narratives had been revealed. With their help, it was possible to present the story of transport problems in Kraków as the story of a city overwhelmed by tourists, students, and visitors in which authorities introducing transport policies act out of sincere motives, but they do so incompetently and unconvincingly for the public, and even for themselves. Recognizing this positioning, officials promised to try harder.

The “Mobilny Kraków” program was dismissed as hostile to the residents, even though it contained measures to protect the streets near the residents’ homes from visitors’ vehicles. However, the program’s proponents could not counter the unfavorable positioning made by the program’s opponents. However, in a peculiar sense, officials have granted acceptance for a sustainable policy, at least temporarily. The “Mobilny Kraków” was rejected but only as a concrete proposal for the implementation of a sustainable transport policy. The need to pursue sustainability at large was not challenged; thus, the pro-policy camp was not forced to defend it. On the contrary, during the episode, it became clear to all parties that all revealed storylines assume some kind of sustainable transport policy. It is in this sense that one can speak of policy acceptance being a fragile interactional achievement. However, there is nothing that guarantees that such an achievement will last.

One way to stabilize it would be to subsume identified storylines to some master narrative, that is, to show that the storylines in question are parts of something bigger, more general, and widely accepted or considered normal. Nevertheless, in the analyzed episode, it was difficult to find any particularly original vision of a contemporary European city with a modern and creative transport policy of the kind promoted by Karel Martens when he writes about “re-envisioning transport planning and policy as a key domain of government intervention” (Martens, 2020). None of such re-envisionings could be found in the analyzed data. On the contrary, one could have the impression that city authorities and liberal councilors are in no hurry to implement modern, effective policies regarding transport problems. Perhaps, these minimal, defensive tactics had been planned as a low-cost positioning strategy, and in a sense, they worked,

as the conflict around the causes of city transportation paralysis had indeed been extinguished. However, it is difficult not to notice that if the authorities do not take on proactive governing strategies, they “might end up in a future situation with diminished institutional capacity” (Wallsten et al., 2021, p. 12).

The study had its limitations. From an interactionist perspective, each episode must be treated separately; thus, the possibilities for generalization are low at best. It is difficult to say whether the same or similar storylines identified in the present case will also emerge in future debates on transport policies. The present research is historical as it explains what had already happened. On the other hand, the social world is unique, dynamic, and thus historical. Interactionist research strives to be relevant to it. Then there is an apparent methodological incompatibility with more conservatively framed research in the field. The results obtained within the interactionist framework neither strictly support nor falsify existing models in transportation research. However, they can inspire others by presenting and commenting on interesting cases.

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BADANIE SPOŁECZNEJ AKCEPTACJI POLITYKI TRANSPORTOWEJ
PRZEZ PRYZMAT TEORII POZYCJONOWANIA.
PRZYPADEK SESJI RADY MIASTA KRAKOWA

Streszczenie

W artykule zastosowano analizę pozycjonowania do zbadania przypadku nadzwyczajnej sesji Rady Miasta Krakowa, zwołanej w celu oceny kontrowersyjnej polityki transportowej. Pozycje to uprawnienia do wykonywania danych czynności w epizodzie. W artykule przedstawiono wzorce pozycjonowania zwolenników oraz przeciwników polityki, które wygasily konflikt między nimi. Zidentyfikowano trzy wspólne dla obu stron narracje, które, w nieoczywisty sposób, doprowadziły do akceptacji polityki.

Słowa kluczowe: społeczna akceptacja polityki; teoria pozycjonowania; polityka transportowa; dyskurs.