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THE COMPLEXITY OF A SMALL TOWN

WIELOWĄTKOWOŚĆ MAŁEGO MIASTA

Abstract

The article presents deliberations about a small city as a desirable living environment of a multi-layered character focusing on sociological issues that take into account the lifestyle of the residents and their preferences. Environmental studies, which reflected the expectations of the residents regarding their living environment, proved to be very important for the matter of the paper. Another issue related to small cities is the architecture responsible for the vitality of the place, its character and intimacy. It often determines the attractiveness of the centre, its history and culture. The considerations provided by the authors were supported by urban analyses, interviews, literature studies and own observations regarding selected urban centres located in the Podkarpackie Voivodeship.

Keywords: small cities, architecture, spatial arrangement

Streszczenie

W artykule przedstawiono rozważania na temat małego miasta jako pożądanego środowiska zamieszkania o wielowątkowym charakterze skupiającym zagadnienia socjologiczne uwzględniające styl życia mieszkańców oraz ich preferencje. Dla tej części rozważań istotne okazały się badania środowiskowe, których wyniki odzwierciedliły oczekiwania mieszkańców względem ich środowiska zamieszkania. Drugi wątek towarzyszący małym miastom to architektura odpowiadająca za żywotność miejsca, jego nastrój oraz kameralność. Niejednokrotnie decyduje o atrakcyjności ośrodka, jego historii i kulturze. Wskazane rozważania podparte zostały analizami urbanistycznymi, wywiadami, studiami literatury oraz własnymi spostrzeżeniami dotyczącymi wybranych miast zlokalizowanych w województwie podkarpackim.

Słowa kluczowe: małe miasto, architektura, układ przestrzenny

1. Introduction

Nowadays, small towns are becoming more and more popular. While some people find a desirable peace and cosy atmosphere in such places, others still cannot imagine living there. The extreme emotions that are evoked by such a town result from its multi-level character and specificity that reveals contradictory demands of people directed towards the environment they inhabit.

Modern man feels lost in the world filled with technological novelties, in which anonymity, the pace of life, demands and expectations increase daily, and are so mercilessly exposed in a large urban centre. Despite the feeling of constant threat resulting from the rapid development of cities, their inhabitants frequently feel dependent on them. In such moments, people need some respite, intimacy, tranquillity, a possibility of communing with nature, which can be provided by a small town. Unfortunately, such small urban centres are frequently not able to meet the expectations of their residents, usually those on the basic level, such as availability of employment.

Small towns can be perceived in various ways because of their multi-level character co-creating their complete image. And so, among others, a sociological level can be distinguished – the most significant, since it is focused around the image of a town created by man – his lifestyle, preferences, ways of communicating, interacting with others. Man shapes the culture of a place, strengthens its identity, and builds up the awareness of a place. Because of those values, a town has an opportunity to develop and be perceived as a unique place.

The second level is the morphology of a town with its important elements – architectonic objects and spaces, which can create a picture of a degraded, forgotten town [1], or a place that is alive particularly by means of public spaces, such as squares, streets, lanes, pathways, parks, quiet or loud, atmospheric or typical. The architecture of the place and its interior can be pleasant and friendly, or can evoke the feeling of fear or being lost as well as uncertainty.

The third level includes the morphological network of the town – its pathways, roads and passages connecting essential points and larger spaces inscribed within the town structure.

The efficiency and safety of those connections frequently become a priority because of the growing intensity of traffic, slowed down commuting and increasing air pollution caused, among other things, by excessive use of individual means of transport (car).

The last level seems to be a compilation of all the one mentioned above, yet perceived from a different perspective. It allows for interpreting a town as a space in which the existing architecture becomes an event for us – its viewers. The social dimension is forcibly present on this level. Architecture, urban space and man constitute a complete image of a town and are its inextricable elements. The townscape is the background for architecture, and the latter is a static point, which can be put into action by man. From this perspective, the town's atmosphere, dynamics of changes, size, scale and proportions – i.e. elements shaping the composition and physiognomy of the urban space - are not without significance [2].

The sociological level that allows for seeing the town as a set of places where people with their faces, names and identity meet, and spend their leisure time together, seems provided to a greater extent in a small town than in a large city, despite activities of cultural character offered by the latter. Usually, such activities are available in public spaces, mostly squares, including

main market squares – thus open interiors accessible for everybody. Considering the number of residents which is higher in cities than towns, it should be emphasised that participants of such events in larger urban centres remain anonymous which unfortunately limits the possibilities of strengthening social relations. Therefore, the function is largely taken over by social spaces used by a definite group of residents, frequently concentrated around a housing estate. The size and the manner in which such spaces are furnished should be adjusted to the number of users and their preferences. It seems that a city and its fragments are human-friendly if they meet social requirements and follow their expectations, which is influenced by the morphology of a town with its spaces and architecture. Partially, it determines possibilities concerning the availability of specific places and services which belong to the primary group of the so-called living ones, and the secondary some of which can be treated as urban attractions.

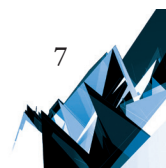
The network of morphological conditionings addresses the issue of mobility and accessibility developed by the idea of a compact town. The idea focuses on the issue of healthy public transport generated by pedestrians and cyclists. Although the awareness of the society sensitised to the problems caused by the growing intensity of car traffic is increasing considerably, yet the manner of arranging public spaces in Polish cities still does not sufficiently ensure the safety of fans of bicycle transport. A town, even though they less frequently possess bicycle paths or footpaths on both sides of streets, is a much safer place to live in this respect, which is caused by restricted traffic.

Urban space and its architecture create a complete image of a town with all its assets and shortcomings. Assets of towns usually result from characteristic elements which make up the town atmosphere. It is created by a user-friendly scale, cosy ambience, the sense of safety, the impression of peace and privacy. Those elements mutually influence one another strengthening the desired impressions shaping urban space and its mood. The small scale of objects creates the already mentioned cosy atmosphere that enhances the sense of balance and peace.

Why can towns be an important subject of scientific research? The issues associated with small towns have been addressed relatively rarely.

Because of the frequently uncertain economic situation of a small urban centre, it is much more difficult to try to promote it. It results from limited possibilities offered by towns which are unable to provide such convenient access to various services, and primarily places of employment, as big cities. Thus, it is more difficult to introduce changes in their spatial structure. For this reason, they also often remain overshadowed by a neighbouring, thriving city. It is not a rule, however, since one can notice small towns strong enough not to need support from a larger urban centre – they are usually towns specialising in one predominant function (e.g. tourist function – Zakopane, or health resort function – Iwonicz Zdrój). Small towns also frequently meet some of the requirements of a high standard living environment. In small towns, one can find a lower intensity of building development, greater intimacy, restricted car traffic in the centre, more greenery, more low buildings, but more difficult access to services especially those more exclusive.

An indisputable asset of small towns is their often individual character built up by their indigenous culture, regional architecture, or valuable architectonic objects and unique landscape. Not always are those unique assets of small towns commonly known. The residents themselves are often unable to notice and appreciate the value of particular architectonic



objects, especially those whose origins date back to the distant past. The lack of social awareness concerning the architectonic value of a place does not help to promote it.

Moreover, popularising such places requires efficient and suitably developed tourist accommodation. In the case when towns are in financial straits, the process is much harder. It requires charting and indicating directions of development, supported by specialist functional-spatial analyses that would allow for identifying the main problems of a town, and on the other hand possibilities of using those elements which could contribute to promoting the place [3].

It also ought to be noticed, that the number of residents of small urban centres is still growing. They are inhabited by approximately 50% of the population (according to the United Nations Organisation). At the time, when we observe increasing threats posed by the development of civilisation, such as growing air pollution, a small town with its pro-ecological solutions and conditions seems to be an important and fundamental place of residence. Traditional solutions, only slightly disturbing the environment built by natural elements, shape the so important nowadays health-oriented conditions, which are indubitably enhanced by biologically-active areas, water reservoirs, and rich and diverse vegetation. Climatic changes partially connected with the manner of spatial development in the densely inhabited areas are not without significance. We affect only a part of climatic changes. To a much greater degree, we aggravate environment degradation and upset the appropriate relations with our surroundings. The process is generally visible in large cities. Expansively developing cities and their smaller structures, such as residential districts, create a new micro-climate changing the existing local factors which, subsequently, contribute to changing the temperature, humidity, sun exposure and direction of the wind. In large agglomerations there occurs an increased emission of heat loss and a rise in the external temperature resulting from the heat loss generated by buildings. The development of urban tissue occurring in cities results in upsetting the balance between green areas and built-up areas, which may lead to the appearance of urban heat islands. Another problem in densely built-up areas is poor air circulation, and consequently poor airing, and continuing intensive air pollution. Despite many difficulties related to living in a small town, in light of health-oriented conditions a town can be regarded as an attractive place to live, both because of climatic and environmental conditions, and those resulting from its structure: namely its scale, proportions shaping the small-town, peaceful ambience. In this work, social conditions partially determined by the morphology of a town – its spatial layout and architecture were regarded as a priority. The analytical part of the work presents the significance of those issues in shaping a high-quality residential environment in small towns.

2. Analysis of selected examples

2.1. General comments

Three small towns located in the Podkarpackie Voivodeship – in south-eastern Poland – were selected for this analysis. On the one hand, the Podkarpacie area is a poorly developing region of Poland, but on the other is has a high tourist value because of a variety of natural

elements, clean rivers, low air pollution and architectonic treasures. The main problem is fragmented agriculture, which is the fundamental branch of economy in this region of Poland, as well as hidden unemployment.

The inventorying, urban planning analyses and sociological research were carried out in Kołaczyce, Sieniawa and Zagórz, which allowed for evaluating elements constituting their multi-level character.

The sociological theme developed in the work by means of interviewing residents of the towns selected for the research reflects the needs of man addressed to the inhabited area: their perception of the town, expectations concerning it and opinions about changes that seem necessary to its development.

The morphology of a town – its components – was evaluated on the basis of field research. It represents spatial relationships linked by significant architectonic objects of historic importance. Results of analyses allow for obtaining a complete image of a town – a complex living environment of various social groups with their needs and expectations.

Kołaczyce is located in the western part of the discussed voivodeship, by the national road no 73. The population of Kołaczyce (1,437 people) places it among small urban units. The main functions of the town are agriculture and tourism which develops in Kołaczyce because of historic monuments located there. Among the most valuable are: the Main Square with the *Bartek* fountain (Fig. 1), the neo-Gothic parish church of St. Anna with a stoup from 1632, a shrine from the 1st half of the 19th century, a statue of Our Lady from 1803, a statue of St. Francis from 1885 at the exit from the Jasło – Pilzno road, and three houses from the 18th century.

Sieniawa – the second town selected for this analysis – is located in the eastern part of the voivodeship, in the Przeworsk district, in the Lower San Valley, at the junction of regional roads: 867, 835 and 870. The town numbers 2182 inhabitants and covers the area of 6.76 km². The economic development of Sieniawa is based on industry and tourism. Worth noticing is the urban layout of the town from the time of its foundation dating back to the 17th century, with the main square (Fig. 2), a park-and-palace complex of the Czartoryski family, historic churches, and a fragment of masonry-earthwork fortifications of the no-longer-existing castle of the Sieniawski family.

Another town subjected to numerous analyses is Zagórz located in the southern part of Podkarpacie, in Bukowskie Upland. The town is inhabited by over 5 thousand residents and covers the area of 22.39 km². Tourism is the leading function of Zagórz. Among the most valuable spaces and objects of historic character there are: the main square, the parish church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin from the 18th century with a Gothic-Renaissance painting of the Annunciation to the Blessed Virgin, the orthodox church of St. Michael from 1836 (Fig. 3), an orthodox church in Wielopole from 1865, a burial chapel (1840), and a wooden church in Dolina from 1836.



Fig. 1. Historic market square in Kołaczyce (photo by J. Kobylarczyk)



Fig. 2. Market square in Sieniawa (photo by J. Kobylarczyk)



Fig. 3. Orthodox church in Zagórz (photo by J. Kobylarczyk)

2.2. Survey results

The survey allowed for obtaining information about the residents' views on the living conditions in the examined towns, their expectations regarding their living environment, the elements they particularly appreciate within their place of residence. The work presents

respondents' answers to six basic questions all of which referred to assessing the comfort of living (Fig. 4). Within the topic the survey participants evaluated the following elements and factors of their living environment: the feeling of intimacy and tranquillity (IIS), a view from the window overlooking greenery (WZ), proximity to the place of employment (BMP), proximity to basic services, the size of backyard (Podw.), and proximity of leisure grounds – up to 3 minutes (TS).

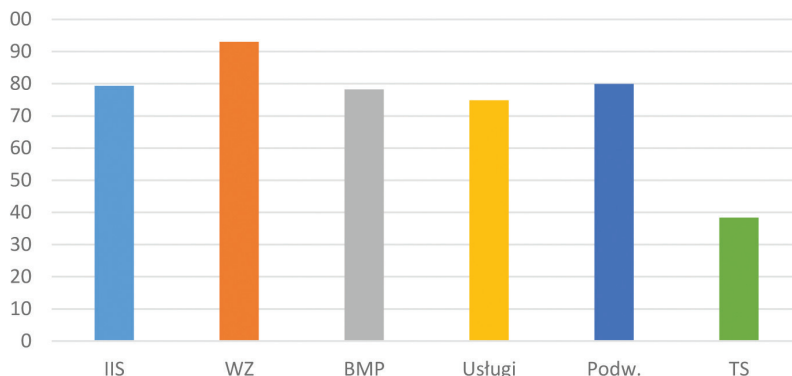


Fig. 4. Survey results evaluating comfort of the place of residence (by J. Kobylarczyk)

The presented research results indicate that 80% of respondents believe that their living environment ensures the feeling of intimacy and tranquillity. Over 90% of the survey participants find a view from the window onto greenery highly attractive, and 80% have decided that their place of work is located relatively close to their place of residence. Moreover, in the respondents' opinion, their living environment ensures proximity to basic services (approximately 75% of answers) and a sufficient size of backyard space (80%). Only 60% of the polled have indicated that leisure grounds are further than within 3-minute walking distance.

On the basis of sociological research, it can be assumed that in many respects small towns can be perceived by their inhabitants as an attractive living environment. The sociological dimension of a small town created by its residents is an immense asset, particularly considering the importance of man – the community forming the image of a town – its identity and culture. The priority among the town functions is whether it satisfies the expectations of its residents [3].

2.3. Spatial conditions in selected areas, considering culturally valuable spaces and objects

Besides the above described multi-level aspects affecting the quality of life in a small town, one should also mention the urban layout and valuable architectonic objects. The spaces and architecture shaped in the past create the cultural landscape characteristic for particular towns. That landscape offers the residents a feeling of “familiarity”, being at home, but is also a significant asset in promotion and development of those towns. Skilfully used cultural values can make a small, forgotten and lethargic town flourish again, and become an important local centre, a tourist attraction and a credit to its inhabitants.

The analysed towns exemplify how elements of the cultural landscape, such as a historic urban layout or objects that improve the quality of the residents' lives, very well, and they have a positive impact on the development of those centres. Therefore, the above-mentioned elements of the cultural landscape of selected towns ought to be more thoroughly analysed in order to understand their uniqueness and features that make them attractive for both inhabitants and visitors.

Kołaczyce is a town whose origins date back to the medieval period. It was founded around the year 1339 by the Benedictine monastery in Tyniec [4, p. 57]. In the 1st half of the 20th century, Kołaczyce lost its town rights, but regained them, thanks to the efforts of local authorities, in 2010.

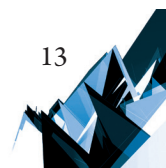
The urban layout of the town dates back to the time of its foundation and is enclosed within a 9-square model, based on the module of 'sznur duży' (app. 45 m). It has the shape of a rectangle measuring 3.5×4 'sznur' (157.5×180 m). The centre of the layout was the main square measuring 2×1.5 'sznur' (90×67.5 m) and covering the area of 0.6 ha. This interior was enclosed on 4 sides with single blocks of buildings 1 'sznur' deep, divided into settlement plots [5]. The described layout has not radically changed and has survived until the present time. Its regularity, with a precisely marked centre that is also the heart of the town, is one of several features which make it human-friendly. Another one is connected with its historic buildings creating the character of the place. Buildings fit well into the urban tissue, and boast native details characteristic for the region. Among the most valuable examples in Kołaczyce, there are relics of timber building constructions, including the former post office located by the market square, the church of St. Anna with the 17th-century furnishings, as well as the already mentioned culturally valuable architectonic element in the form of a fountain, statues or shrines.

The current parish church of St. Anna was built on the site of a previous shrine at the beginning of the 20th century. It is a magnificent edifice, erected in the neo-Gothic style, according to the design of an architect from Przemyśl, Stanisław Majerski. The church was built of brick and sandstone. On the plan, its shape resembles the Latin cross. Its silhouette is dominated by the lofty tower situated in the front elevation. The church is located in the vicinity of the main market square. Its height makes it predominant in the town panorama, as well as a town landmark and an important architectonic element.

The historic building of the former post office was erected in the 1st half of the 19th century and shows features of traditional buildings of the region. It was built from wood using the log-house construction. It is an important accent among the present-day buildings around the market square, unfortunately mostly masonry and largely transformed.

In Kołaczyce, one can find many examples of historic architectonic features of which the most valuable is the 19th-century masonry road shrine located in the main square. It was built in the eclectic style. Inside, an 18th-century Baroque statue of Our Lady stands on the stylobate and column. The shrine has recently been renovated which makes it a particularly attractive ornament of the main square in Kołaczyce.

The described objects of historic provenance, designed or built by indigenous artists and craftsmen, occupy a special place in the inhabitants' consciousness. They make people feel safe in their surroundings and identify with the cultural landscape of their town.



The second analysed town is Sieniawa, which was granted its town rights in 1676, as a result of the urbanisation of private estates of the Sieniawski family. The town was founded as a local market centre and a powerbase for a port. An earthwork-and-brick fortress linked to the town was built next to it, with a wooden manor and a parterre garden. This led to the creation of a Renaissance urban layout known in the literature of the subject as a „town-fortress”, complemented by a river port as the main city-forming factor, the Observant Dominican monastery and the Tarnogrodzkie suburb. The urban layout of the town covered the area of approximately 12 hectares. It was enclosed within an outline of Renaissance defensive ramparts which no longer exist. In the centre, the main market square was measured out which was surrounded by a row of single building blocks [6, pp. 102n].

The cultural landscape of the town, besides the already mentioned main square and relics of the fortress, consists also of the park-and-palace complex, as well as the town hall, the former monastery of Observant Dominicans and the edifice of the Gymnastic Association “Sokół”.

The park-and-palace complex was founded in the 18th by Adam Mikołaj Sieniawski. Its current appearance is due to the rebuilding carried out in the years 1881–1883 by the Czartoryski family. Nowadays, the complex consists of 6 manorial buildings, a historic park with an Italian and an English garden, and valuable architectonic features such as fountains and bowers [6, pp. 102n].

The town hall in Sieniawa was built in the 2nd half of the 17th century, soon after the town foundation. It was located in the centre of the main square as a predominant feature, and has remained so until today. Originally it was a masonry object, partially cellared, with a gable roof. With time, it was expanded, more rooms were added some of which served as shops, while others were used by the town administration. Currently, it is a 2-storey building, maintained in the classicist style. In recent years the object has been revalorised. A tower was also added, which is supposed to resemble the one that once crowned the object [6, pp. 102n].

The former monastery of the Observant Dominicans serves today as the parish church for the town and is dedicated to the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin. The church was erected in the years 1719–1749 according to the design by G. Spazzia in the Baroque style. In 1754, the monastery was added, which ceased to function as such in 1778 as a result of the dissolution of monasteries implemented by the Austrian oppressor [1]. It was then that the church began to serve as the parish church for Sieniawa, which has continued to the present day. Revalorised a few years ago, the object is one of the town landmarks, and together with the edifice of the former Gymnastic Association “Sokół” creates a specific gateway to the town from the south.

The last among the above mentioned historic buildings in Sieniawa is the edifice of the Gymnastic Association “Sokół”, which was erected around 1920, on the site adjacent to the parish of Sieniawa [7, p. 2680]. The building is an ideologically important object in the town. It was here that the town residents met since the 1st quarter of the 20th century. At first, it was connected with the functioning of the organisation i.e. propagating sports, a healthy life style, maintaining and developing national awareness. Nowadays, the object serves to promote the town, as a venue for organising events, performances and concerts, as well as to integrate residents. Consequently, it is significant in the awareness of Sieniawa inhabitants as it combines the past and the present, and revives their sense of community.



Fig. 5. Urban layout of Kolaczyce on an aerial photo (source: Archive of Dep. of History of Architecture, Urban Design and Art, Faculty of Architecture, Cracow University of Technology)



Fig. 6. Fragment of the main square in Kolaczyce nowadays. View from the north-west.
(photo by D. Kuśnierz-Krupa, M. Krupa)

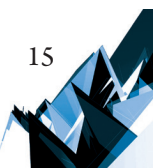




Fig. 7. View of the former post office building on the east frontage of the main square
(photo by D. Kuśnierz-Krupa)



Fig. 8. View of the palace in Sieniawa (photo by D. Kuśnierz-Krupa, M. Krupa)

Finally, it should be emphasised that Sieniawa has developed in recent years. Culturally valuable spaces and objects have been revalorised. It positively affected the living standards of residents, their feeling of familiarity and perception of the so-called community symbols i.e. spatial forms to which inhabitants themselves give a symbolic meaning [8, pp. 99–111].

Zagórz was founded on the site of a former village established in the 14th century. In the 15th century, the settlement was the property of Mikołaj from Tarnawa, later of Piotr Kmita from Wiśnicz, and then returned to the hands of the Tarnawski family. The most valuable elements of the cultural landscape of Zagórz, with which the local community particularly identifies, are undoubtedly the ruins of the Discalced Carmelites monastery, the orthodox church of Archangel Michael, and the church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin. The mentioned church objects are also local landmarks, continuously present in the memory of Zagórz residents, as well as attractive for visitors.

A particularly picturesque accent in the Zagórz townscape is the ruin of the Discalced Carmelites monastery. The complex was erected in the 18th century, in the late-Baroque style. It was located on the Mariemont Hill (345 m AMSL), in the bend of the Oslawa River. The former monastery complex consisted of the church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, the monastery and utility buildings. The golden era of the monastery lasted until the first Partition of Poland. Later the monastery fell into decline, having been a site of many battles and fires [9, pp. 29–31]. Despite numerous attempts, it has never been rebuilt. Nowadays, it is a valuable historical monument in Zagórz, important for residents and fascinating for visitors.



Fig. 9. View of the western elevation of the town hall (photo by M. Krupa)



Fig. 10. Ruins of the Discalced Carmelites monastery in Zagórz (photo by D. Kuśnierz-Krupa)



Fig. 11. Orthodox church of Archangel Michael in Zagórz (photo by D. Kuśnierz-Krupa, M. Krupa)

The orthodox church of Archangel Michael is yet another significant object in Zagórz, especially for the Orthodox members of the community, since it reminds them of their roots. The object is also a vital part of the cultural heritage in Zagórz. It was erected in 1836 as an oriented masonry building with an impressive 2-storey tower.

The church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin was erected in the 18th century in the late-Baroque style. It is a single-nave edifice, with a vestibule and a sacristy. A Baroque altar, and a late-Gothic painting depicting the Annunciation to the Blessed Virgin, which attracts numerous pilgrims, can be seen in the church interior. The building is another landmark of considerable significance for residents of Zagórz, with the so-called tradition of place [10, pp. 23–32].

The described elements of the cultural landscape of Zagórz, like the previously mentioned historic buildings in Kołaczyce and Sieniawa, have their own inimitable climate palpable mainly for the inhabitants of the town. Those objects, shaped throughout centuries, existing within the town space for decades, are important evidence of the community heritage, which has to be taken care of and should be preserved for future generations.

3. Conclusion

A complete image of a town is shaped by its spatial conditions with architectonic objects, as well as its culture and identity, building an individual value and character of the place. An inseparable element of an urban centre and, at the same time, its most important link is the man – a user of the urban space, its inhabitant. He is the reason why a town develops in order to satisfy his requirements. The presented results of the sociological research indicate that respondents highly appraised small towns in Podkarpacie (Kołaczyce, Sieniawa, Zagórz) because of the presence of elements selected for research and phenomena determining the comfort of living. According to the survey participants, those towns largely ensure the feeling of intimacy and tranquillity. Because of the proximity to green areas, residents can enjoy attractive views from their windows and, more importantly, the majority of respondents stressed the significance of their place of residence being close to their place of employment. For the elderly or the disabled, it is vital that the basic services are within reach, or that the social spaces enhancing neighbourly relations are of suitable size.

The results of the survey have shown that the towns selected for research meet the demands of their inhabitants. Despite the difficult economic situation of the region in which the towns are located, residents view them positively because of the quality of the living environment they offer. The social aspect accompanying each town is in the case of Kołaczyce, Sieniawa and Zagórze an asset, the more so since it has a strong positive impact on shaping the towns' identity, which allows for preserving the culture and uniqueness constituting the value of each urban centre.

To sum up, considering the issues associated with the culturally valuable space and objects and their impact on the life of residents of a small town, one has to conclude that the cultural landscape offers local communities a sense of safety, familiarity and mental comfort. Historic spaces and objects also give a chance for development to small towns, frequently being their

main assets. Revalorised market squares and renovated architectonic objects with valuable details can become targets for cultural tourism, which might stimulate the economy, provide workplaces, and consequently improve the quality of the life of inhabitants.

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