

<https://doi.org/10.18778/1644-857X.23.02.12>

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## Forming a Definition of a Town Poland in the Context of Universal History\*

STRESZCZENIE

### Ku definicji miasta. Polska na tle dziejów powszechnych

W świetle obecnego stanu badań nie wydaje się możliwe stworzenie uniwersalnej definicji miasta, obejmującej wszystkie epoki i kultury. Jednak w przypadku zawężenia pola analizy jest to możliwe i pożądane. W ramach prac nad podstawami ontologicznymi systemów informacji geograficznej dla dziejów Polski zostało wypracowane narzędzie pozwalające odróżnić podstawowe (wsie) i wyższe (miasta) jednostki sieci osadniczej. Ocenie podlegają trzy podstawowe kryteria: czy dana osada była uważana przez współczesnych za miasto, czy była duża i złożona w porównaniu do wsi oraz czy miała status prawny miasta. W różnych okresach i systemach prawnych każde z tych kryteriów mogło mieć różne znaczenie, a łączne uwzględnienie wszystkich trzech pozwala na zaklasyfikowanie przypadków wątpliwych. Druga część artykułu przedstawia zastosowanie takiej definicji w analizie sieci miejskiej dwunastu powiatów (w ich współczesnych granicach) w czterech przekrojach czasowych: 1200, 1600, 1900 i 1939 r. Do sytuacji granicznych należały przede wszystkim grody wczesnopiastowskie o różnych funkcjach, następnie aglomeracje złożone z więcej niż jednej gminy miejskiej w 1600 r. i osady miejskie w Kongresówce w 1900 r. Określono liczbę miast na danym obszarze we wskazanym momencie czasowym. Jednoznaczna i spójna

\* This work was supported by the National Program for the Development of Humanities (grant number 2bH 15 0216 83).



Received: 2024-04-11. Verified: 2024-04-13. Revised: 2024-09-12. Accepted: 2024-09-20  
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klasyfikacja jednostek osadniczych dla długiego okresu i względnie dużego obszaru nabiera szczególnej wagi wobec tworzenia geoportali historycznych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** miasto, historia, Polska, ontologia, definicja

#### ABSTRACT

In the light of the current state of research, it does not seem possible to create a universal definition of town, covering all eras and cultures. However, if the field of analysis is narrowed, it becomes possible and desirable. As part of the work on ontological foundations of geographic information systems for the history of Poland, a tool has been developed to distinguish between basic (villages) and higher (towns) units of the settlement network. Three basic criteria are assessed: whether a settlement was considered a town by its contemporaries, whether it was large and complex compared to a village, and whether it had the legal status of a town. In different periods and legal systems, each of these criteria may have had different meanings, and the combined consideration of all three allows for the classification of doubtful cases. The second part of the article predicates the application of such a definition in the analysis of the urban network of twelve counties (within their contemporary boundaries) in four time sections: 1200, 1600, 1900 and 1939. Boundary situations included primarily early Piast townships with different functions, followed by agglomerations consisting of more than one urban commune in 1600 and, finally, so-called 'urban settlements' in the Congress Kingdom in 1900. The article also determines the number of towns in a given area at the indicated point in time. It seems particularly important to have an unambiguous and consistent classification of settlement units for a long period and a relatively large area, particularly in view of the creation of historical geoportals.

**Keywords:** town, history, Poland, ontology, definition

### 1. Is a definition possible and necessary?

A positive answer to this question may seem apparent, yet there have also been contrary opinions in research. At the same time, there is no doubt that none of the proposed definitions has been accepted in historiography. Many proposals coexist, which significantly differ not only in details, but also in basic assumptions<sup>1</sup>. This leads to the fact that in recent years further attempts have been abandoned. It is difficult to delude oneself

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, a review of definitions from German, Dutch, Czech, and Spanish definitions in: M. Escher, F.G. Hirschmann, *Die urbanen Zentren des hohen und späten Mittelalters: Vergleichende Untersuchungen zu Städten und*

that a new idea will bring a breakthrough and receive widespread applause. On the other hand, terminological precision is urgently needed due to the development of information technology and the gradual shift of the focus of knowledge exchange from texts to databases. In order for data from different sources to serve consistent analysis, the semantic categories used in them must be unambiguously defined and planted in an ontological system. The more universal the definition, the broader the applicability of the results produced using it. For historical geoportals, the town is one of the key concepts. Without it, they will not be useful not only for analyses of such phenomena as urbanisation, but also broader ones such as the transformation of the settlement network or even the development of civilisation.

This text presents one of the definitions: it justifies its adoption in the light of the current state of research, attempts to verify it in concrete historical material and draws conclusions from it. This contribution certainly does not solve the challenge indicated above. However, it may prove useful for at least some research, primarily on similar eras and civilisation zones. Some of the elements presented here may also be useful as methodological guidelines for constructing further definitions and their implementation of geographic-historical databases.

As a phenomenon, or rather as a word, 'town' is so common and well-known that we usually make use of it without any hesitation with regard to its meaning. Therefore many historians have foregone the choice of any 'fitting' definition<sup>2</sup>. After gathering an impressive number of sources on cities as a phenomenon ultimately, philosopher Mikołaj Madurowicz admitted that to a certain degree the meaning of the word 'town' would remain intuitive<sup>3</sup>. In his dissertation on urban history from prehistory to contemporary times, Franz Heigl posited that what is normally referred to

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*Städtelandschaften im Westen des Reiches und in Ostfrankreich*, vol. I, Trier 2005, *Trierer Historische Forschungen*, vol. L, pp. 14–15.

<sup>2</sup> For example: M. Słoń, *Miasta podwójne i wielokrotne w średniowiecznej Europie*, Wrocław 2010, pp. 8–9; cf. M. Ginatempo, L. Sandri, *L'Italia delle città: il popolamento urbano tra Medioevo e Rinascimento (secoli XIII–XVI)*, Firenze 1990, *Le vie della storia*, vol. III, p. 15; F. Irsigler, *Die Stadt im Mittelalter. Aktuelle Forschungstendenzen*, [in:] *Goslar und die Stadtgeschichte: Forschungen und Perspektiven 1399–1999, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Stadt Goslar I*, ed. C.H. Hauptmeyer, Bielefeld 2001, *Goslarer Fundus*, vol. XLVIII, pp. 57–58.

<sup>3</sup> M. Madurowicz, *Ciągłość miasta: Prolegomena*, Warszawa 2017, p. 190.

as a town is actually an umbrella term for a more varied collection of localities<sup>4</sup> dominant in certain areas for a given time period<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, geographical research also shares a wide-spread notion that ‘town’ cannot be defined, as its broad, universal character remains at odds with the necessary precision required to form a viable definition<sup>6</sup>.

The town thus emerges as one of the cornerstones of our civilisation, as important for its structure as points and lines are in Euclidean geometry. Thanks to the intuitive nature of its meaning, the notion of a town does not require defining, and can in turn form the basis for other defining constructs. There are nonetheless situations where a definition is not only possible, but also required; in this sense, possibility and need are intertwined, with possibility providing conditions to fulfil a certain need. Only a definition that is both accurate and effective can be deemed as necessary, and if such a definition cannot be formed, any other definition ceases to be a requirement. On the other hand, a need serves its purpose within a certain context and, to some extent, narrows down the proposed definition, which facilitates the formation of a definition.

<sup>4</sup> While ‘location’ and ‘locality’ are terms that can be found in ontological studies, here they are related to a particular subject. Thus ‘localities’ are settlements of varying sizes and ‘location’ refers to the spatial dependence of localities (trans.).

<sup>5</sup> “Eine Geschichte der Stadt ist daher jene von Städten, die Teilmengen des Begriffes »Stadt« bilden und denen nur gemeinsam ist, dass sie – in ihrer Zeit – eine gewisse relative Dominanz erlangten”, F. Heigl, *Geschichte der Stadt: von der Antike bis ins 20. Jahrhundert*, Graz 2008, p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. K. Zehner, *Stadtgeographie*, Gotha 2001, p. 17; R. Paesler, *Stadtgeographie*, Darmstadt 2015, p. 6; J.-L. Pinol, O. Georg, X. Huetz de Lemps, *Histoire de l’Europe urbaine*, vol. I, Paris 2011–2012, Points. Histoire H454 first ascertains that a definition cannot be formed, p. 7, and then proposes one, p. 288; P. Clark, *Introduction*, [in:] *The Oxford Handbook of Cities in World History*, ed. idem, Oxford 2013, p. 4 posits that, instead of a single definition, a definitional matrix of general criteria could be employed, though he does not specify any necessary or even sufficient conditions for those criteria to be met (cf. C. Haase, *Stadt-begriff und Stadtentstehungsschichten in Westfalen. Überlegungen zu einer Karte der Stadtentstehungsschichte*, [in:] *Die Stadt des Mittelalters*, ed. idem, Darmstadt 1975, Wege der Forschung, vol. CCXLIII, pp. 72–75; A. Lampen, C.D. Schmidt, *Stadt-begriff*, Institut für vergleichende Städtegeschichte, <http://www.uni-muenster.de/Staedtegeschichte/portal/einfuehrung/Definitionen.html> (accessed: 21 XII 2023), take the middle ground: they, on the one hand, state that there is no unified definition of a town and, on the other, they recommend choosing one of the proposed definitions.

The greatest challenges in the forming of a streamlined definition are not only the ubiquity of the urban phenomenon across time and space in human history, but also its meaning in different fields of scholarly interest<sup>7</sup>. As 'town' is one of the cardinal traits of civilisation, its form has gone through many context-dependent iterations; many scholars agree that town as a concept is a complex phenomenon, with the very characteristic of 'complexity' being regarded by many<sup>8</sup> as the constitutive aspect of a town.

This article attempts to tackle this conundrum in connection with a project of ontological foundations for the construction of historic geographic information systems (Polish *Ontologiczne podstawy budowy historycznych systemów informacji geograficznej*), led by Bogumił Szady. The spatial scope of the project encompasses the territories of contemporary Poland, while the time period ranges from the formation of the first Polish state in the 10<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of World War II in 1939. Consequently, it concerns the territory of several states with different traditions, development paths and languages. Apart from the period of territorial fragmentation in the late Middle Ages, it included also Lithuania, Prussia, Bohemia, Austria and Russia<sup>9</sup>. As such, the definition of a town cannot be limited to exclusively the history of Poland as a singular country or the emergence of legal and administrative requirements for towns in the process of structured settlement and colonisation. Moreover, the inclusion of vastly different time periods in the study, contrasting vastly different periods, such as the Early Middle Ages and the 20<sup>th</sup> century, renders any quantitative criteria futile for the task of distinguishing urban areas from other entities. Thus, the search for a definition leads us back to a more general

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, H.A. Mieg, *Perspektiven der Stadtforschung*, [in:] *Stadt: Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch*, eds. idem, Ch. Heyl, Stuttgart 2013, pp. 6–99; for a comparison of architectural, geographic, sociological, psychological, economic, ecological, historical, archaeological, administrative, political and cultural definitions of a town.

<sup>8</sup> B. Szady, *Wstęp*, [in:] *Metodologia tworzenia czasowo-przestrzennych baz danych dla rozwoju osadnictwa oraz podziałów terytorialnych*, ed. idem, [Warszawa 2020], p. 3, <https://zenodo.org/records/3751266> (accessed: 23 V 2020); T. Związek, P. Kulicki, *Definicje typów jednostek osadniczych i administracyjnych*, [in:] *ibidem*, pp. 437–454.

<sup>9</sup> W. Ostrowski, T. Panecki, I. Karsznia, *Kryteria wyboru badanych obszarów*, [in:] *ibidem*, pp. 22–23.

contemplation of the nature of towns in the history of human civilisation, or at least in the history of Europe, and may prove useful when considering a broader perspective<sup>10</sup>.

## 2. Three starting points

When contemplating the meaning and nature of a ‘town’, three partial answers to the question “what is a town?” could be considered:

1. A town is what people consider to be a town;
2. A town is a sizeable locality;
3. A town is a locality that has got the legal status of a town (such as town privileges or borough rights).

All three of these answers seem essentially correct and relatively universal; for at least a vast majority and perhaps all examples of contemporary Polish towns, these would be sufficient criteria to identify localities belonging to similar categories. In general, it is thought that a town is a large locality that possesses town privileges; however, this criterion is relative, depending on the opinion of the heterogeneous group labelled as ‘people’. In reality, ‘people’ differ in opinion of what can be put in a set labelled ‘towns’, not only in individual cases, but also in cases of whole clusters and groups of localities. Linguistic and semantic discrepancies make the task even more daunting<sup>11</sup>, blurring the lines of where a town might begin or end.

The measure of the usefulness of a definition lies not so much in exploring typical cases as in setting reliable limits. Without such limits – which have differed across time and, to an extent, space<sup>12</sup> – the size of a locality remains unreliable as material for a basis of a definition. Town privileges did not emerge in Poland until the

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<sup>10</sup> For more information about the distinctiveness of European towns, see W. Siebel, *Die europäische Stadt*, Frankfurt am Main 2004, Edition Suhrkamp, vol. MMCCCXXII, pp. 11–18.

<sup>11</sup> A difficulty often overlooked by geographers who compare the urban status of localities in different cultures, cf., for example, K. Zehner, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>12</sup> A typical example is the comparison between requirements for a town status in Iceland (200 inhabitants) and Japan, where a locality needs to be 250 times larger (50,000 inhabitants) to formally be considered a town. Cf. *ibidem*, pp. 17–18; R. Paesler, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

13<sup>th</sup> century and their legal implementation lasted throughout the whole Late Middle Ages, or even longer in the eastern peripheries of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Therefore the size and town privileges both remain limited in their usefulness in the analysis of the period essential for the formation of urban networks in Poland<sup>13</sup>.

Despite the issues mentioned above, our three answers must nonetheless serve as a starting point in the search for a definition. "A town is what people consider to be a town" is, in its essence, the epistemological foundation of this matter and cannot be easily discarded<sup>14</sup>. Town as a phenomenon cannot be defined outside of the realms of cognition, and while obviously there is a material side to the existence of a town, its urban character is defined by human perception, which incorporates multiple perspectives: the inside or the outside perspective as well as contemporaneous, administrative, or scholarly perspectives<sup>15</sup>. Scholars tend to aim at systematising these observations and judgements, essentially when it comes to answering the question of how people distinguish between towns and any other entities.

Historians in particular are concerned with the cognisance of the phenomenon of a town as it functioned within its contemporaneous semantic context. A town was thus anything that could be described as a town by the people living in a specific time period and a specific culture. By distinguishing criteria (chosen consciously or unconsciously) used to make such a distinction, it is possible then to make connections between various times and locations, hopefully arriving at a definition that would go beyond the immediate context of particular examples or monographic studies. Only such a definition could be considered satisfactory in cases where there are no contemporaneous sources to make an arbitrary distinction.

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<sup>13</sup> Germany abolished the legal distinction of urban localities and today the title of a town is only honorary, reflecting only the number of inhabitants.

<sup>14</sup> L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, Frankfurt am Main 1971, Suhrkamp-Taschenbuch, vol. XIV, pp. 41, 43, after: K. Grabe, *Literatur in der Stadt – Bilder der Stadt in der Literatur. Eine kleine europäische Revue*, [in:] *Vierlei Städte: Der Stadtbegriff*, ed. P. Johaneck, Köln–Weimar–Wien 2004, Städteforschung A/61, p. 70, referring to an opinion expressed by Erich Keyser.

<sup>15</sup> A. Heit, *Vielfalt der Erscheinung – Einheit des Begriffs? Die Stadtdefinition in der deutschsprachigen Stadtgeschichtsforschung seit dem 18. Jahrhundert*, [in:] *ibidem*, pp. 1–123. An early definition from the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (formed by Karl Friedrich Eichhorn) used linguistic sources, cf. C. Haase, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

The criterion of size – “sizeable locality” – has been, naturally, grossly simplified. The issue here is not only of where the line between ‘large’ and ‘small’ could be drawn, but also the measure chosen for the task proves to be quite problematic. Presently, the most common measure is the number of inhabitants in the locality, sometimes supplemented with population density and, consequently to both, the land area size. The floor area ratio, the existence of prominent buildings, and a specific spatial order can also be considered to be important factors, which means that not only quantitative but also qualitative criteria can be used to distinguish between towns and other entities. This can be understood as a consequence of the quantitative measures: with more inhabitants, dwellings need to be bigger and more efficiently located. However, qualitative criteria do not need to concern only the results, but also the causes, as they explain the reasons for the growth of the locality in the first place.

Towns possess a certain magnetism, attracting people, goods, capital, and more non-material aspects of civilisation and culture; this characteristic of towns is described in the Central Place Theory<sup>16</sup>. The concentration of various centres (of power, commerce, education, etc.) contributes to the urban character of the locality and allows for its identification as a town. According to Franz Irsigler, whose theories have recently gained traction among historians<sup>17</sup>, internal heterogeneity (mostly considering social groups) also emerges as an important factor besides quantitative criteria and the functions of central places. However, the validity of this criterion has come under some criticism, as not only large numbers

<sup>16</sup> The Central Place Theory, formed in the 1930s by Walter Christaller, entered mainstream geographical discourse following World War II, and became part of the historiographical discourse in the 1970s, for which an important turning point was the conference in Münster in 1975 (E. Meynen, *Zentralität als Problem der mittelalterlichen Stadtgeschichtsforschung*, Köln-Wien 1979, *Städteforschung* A/8). The theory was used as an element of the definition of urban spaces by F. Irsigler, *Stadt und Umland in der Historischen Forschung: Theorien und Konzepte*, [in:] *Bevölkerung, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Stadt-Land-Beziehungen in Deutschland und Frankreich 14. bis 19. Jahrhundert*, eds. N. Bulst, J. Hoock, F. Irsigler, Trier 1983, especially p. 26, and his collaborator, M. Pauly, *Die luxemburgischen Städte in zentralörtlicher Perspektive*, [in:] *Les petites villes en Lotharingie: Actes des 6es Journées Lotharingiennes, 25–27 octobre 1990, Luxembourg = Die kleinen Städte in Lotharingien*, Luxembourg 1992, Publications du CLUDEM, vol. IV, pp. 117–128.

<sup>17</sup> A. Lampen, C.D. Schmidt, *op. cit.*



of people tend to be diverse, but any locality could be characterised with this trait; in fact, it is rather difficult to find settlements or population concentrations devoid of diversity.

Overall, quantitative size is measured using several variables and is seen as both the cause and the effect of several qualitative features; size is one of the most important indicators for identifying urban localities.

Finally, in contemporary Poland, the official legal status of the locality is certainly the most important designator when it comes to towns. All statistics are calculated on the basis of data compiled for official administrative units and local governments and they do not account for any other criteria. If a locality has successfully received state-mandated town privileges, it can be defined as a town; if it, in turn, loses these privileges, it ceases to be a town. This situation is not a new one, having become the norm between the 13<sup>th</sup> and the 14<sup>th</sup> century, as a result of the developing settlement process. With regard to the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when a locality was described as *civitas* or *oppidum*, this was considered viable evidence that the locality had been granted town privileges. The fifteenth century saw the emergence of surveys listing towns, which were compiled using their legal status as the criterion. However, even today the legal status does not have to be the sole defining indicator. For example, the Tri-City (Polish *Trójmiasto*) in Poland, while often functioning as a single unit, actually consists of three formally independent municipalities of equal status, namely Gdańsk, Gdynia and Sopot.

It is the intuitive definition of the town that compensates for the imperfections in the legal status criterion. The dominant of town privileges as the designating criterion stems from the fact that a locality possessing the legal status of a town usually reflects the existing commonly accepted concept of a town. These two criteria are closely intertwined, as the existence of formal requirements for a locality that aspires to become a town is organically related to the locality taking steps to meet these requirements as well as the change in the cognitive image of the locality in the eyes of the populace.

A conceptual town is considered to be similar to other localities that have the same formal status, a phenomenon that has also accompanied the formation of urban settlement networks since the Late Middle Ages. As such, the emergence of smaller, dwarf

urban localities has caused a certain semantic devaluation of the notion of a town. In Poland, town privileges have been granted to many localities which in neighbouring countries would not be counted as towns. Moreover, the concepts that have been shaped by a specific urbanisation process also influenced the way pre-settlement urban status is perceived in modern historiography; a discussion on the urban character of market towns has been an ongoing effort in Polish historiography for almost a century<sup>18</sup>.

Returning to the abovementioned partial answers to the question about what a town actually is, all three seem generally correct in their assumption, showing strong correlations with each other. Thus 'towns' are sizeable localities which possess a legal status of a town; the formal distinction feeds into the popular image of what a town is and provides a measuring stick for the appropriate size for an urban settlement. At the same time, legal requirements reflect a pre-existing general concept of a town, including the appropriate size. The criterion of size, in turn, not only allows a locality to fulfil the requirement to gain legal status, but it also engenders a particular perception. The three criteria work in harmony and their internal mechanism enables the correction of any discrepancies existing between them. In the case of the pre-settlement period (not necessarily only in Polish history), if one of these criteria was lacking, then additional factors, emblematic for the time and location, could also be considered. In such cases the criteria originally generated for conditions present in the time periods and locations where town privileges already functioned would be projected on localities in earlier time periods.

However, a fundamental issue, which has been only briefly mentioned in this article, still needs to be addressed, namely the size limits of a town. While there is a relative agreement to the way these limits should be measured, pointing out specific lines seems impossible. Irsigler makes a valiant attempt at delineating these limits<sup>19</sup>, placing towns in opposition to villages and non-agrarian functionary settlements (mills, abbeys, forest lodges, prisons, etc.), the basic assumption here being that a town must be larger than

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<sup>18</sup> See K. Maleczyński, *Die ältesten Märkte in Polen und ihr Verhältnis zu den Städten vor der Kolonisierung nach dem deutschen Recht*, Breslau 1930, Bibliothek geschichtlicher Werke aus den Literaturen Osteuropas, vol. IV, especially pp. 141–142.

<sup>19</sup> F. Irsigler, *Stadt und Umland...*, p. 63.

a village. This approach, while valuable, is not without its shortcomings, as it assumes knowledge of the maximum size of a village, and not just any village, but an ideal, model village. Moreover, it assumes the existence of these smaller localities and their dominance in the settlement network<sup>20</sup>. These conditions were usually not present for time periods in which the criterion of legal status as the designator of a town could not be used.

Another important factor in the validity of any definition is the mode of comparison, which Irsigler fails to mention. As for the function of the town as a central place, the reader is expected to assume that a town can be distinguished from non-urban areas in a 'particular region'. Geographer Rudolf Klöpffer, who includes a historical perspective in his approach, uses vicinity (German *Umgebung*)<sup>21</sup> as his mode of comparison; Tschavdar Kirilov proposed a similar solution, though he stressed that both types of localities – urban and non-urban – should belong to a single settlement network<sup>22</sup>. František Hoffmann took yet another approach to the problem: the town should be a more developed settlement, therefore the state of the settlement (or localities similar to it) in an earlier time period could serve as the mode of comparison<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> For example, dispersed settlement was the prevalent in the pre-Crusade Prussia (S. Kujot, *Dzieje Prus Królewskich. Cz. 1*, "Roczniki Towarzystwa Naukowego w Toruniu" 1915, vol. XXII, pp. 311–312), while the dominant mode of settlement in north-eastern Masovia and Podlachia was a mixed form of farmstead clusters, with variable toponymy and borders between the clusters, I. Gieysztorowa, *Character and Size of Settlements. Mazovia*, [in:] *Historical Atlas of Poland: Polish Lands of the Crown in the Second Half of the Sixteenth Century*, part 2 (*Commentary, Lists*), eds. M. Słoń, K. Słomska-Przech, Warszawa 2021, pp. 845–846.

<sup>21</sup> R. Klöpffer, *Der geographische Stadtbegriff*, [in:] *Allgemeine Stadtgeographie*, ed. P. Schöller, Darmstadt 1969, Wege der Forschung, vol. CLXXXI, p. 4 lists size and central place function as necessary traits of a town, though he also argues that the locality should have a contained (closed) character, which would exclude many undoubtedly urban settlements from the definition; he also lists an "urban lifestyle" (Ger. städtisches Leben) as one of the requirements, which in itself is tautological, p. 259.

<sup>22</sup> T. Kirilov, *Die Stadt des Frühmittelalters in Ost und West: Archäologische Befunde Mitteleuropas im Vergleich zur östlichen Balkanhalbinsel*, Bonn 2006, *Studien zur Archäologie Europas*, vol. III, p. 9: "Bestandteil eines Siedlungsnetzes, wobei der städtische Charakter einer Siedlung sich vor allem aus dem Vergleich mit der unmittelbaren Umgebung ergeben kann".

<sup>23</sup> F. Hoffmann, *České město ve středověku: [život a dědictví]*, Praha 1992, vol. I, p. 15.

### 3. Definition of town

Bogumił Szady's research project requires a definition that would identify towns within the typological mechanism of the settlement process. In a broader sense, the study aims at structuring the complex and varied settlement network, and the working system proposed should include hierarchical elements. While the fairly generic terms of 'settlement' and 'locality' are used to describe the elements present in the set, these need to be divided further, distinguishing at least the basic and the higher class of settlement objects. The basic class would include the simplest and the most common objects, while the higher class would include objects characterised by a higher degree of complexity, ones that are less common, distinguished by their size and hierarchical importance in comparison to the objects in the basic class.

It seems obvious that urban localities belong to the higher class of settlement objects, as they fulfil the requirements of being distinguishable from their surroundings by their size (relative and dependent on the time period and location), their degree of complexity, and their function as central places. The key factor in the research project in question was the formalisation of the legal status of towns between the 13<sup>th</sup> and the 14<sup>th</sup> century, which ultimately led to the crystallisation of the very notion of a town and has since been strictly intertwined with the cognitive image functioning in the common perception of the phenomenon.

While this definition will hopefully prove to be helpful, it is not without its limitations. Firstly, the relational character of the definition should be considered: an existing settlement network (which is an entity of a more generalised character) and its basic elements need to be identified before an object can be classified as a town. Moreover, each settlement network needs to be considered separately, as networks tend to vary across different time periods and locations. This also limits the possibility of compiling the results of analyses of different networks, which needs to be taken into account when, for example, one would like to consider statistical data. On the other hand, the system of relations could also prove to be advantageous for the definition, as it could help compare urban networks across time periods and cultures. In addition, implementing a non-flexible definition disregarding specific conditions present in different time periods and locations could potentially

lead to confusing, meaningless results. Such a definition would only be detrimental for the purpose of the Szady project.

The cognitive harmony of formal and relational perception of towns has never been, nor will it ever be, ideal. The parallel coexistence of these two perceptions has been in effect since the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Sources from the Late Middle Ages and the early modern period indicate that early on in the process this new form, namely a municipality, would function as part of a larger urban settlement. There could be several such elements within a single urban network, consequently stacking several 'towns' within a single town. For example, while the district of Wawel did not formally belong to any town, it was nonetheless a vital part of the city of Kraków, alongside the oldest municipality in this urban complex<sup>24</sup>. The whole agglomeration, which incorporated two smaller towns of Kleparz and Kazimierz, could be described with a single toponym from a certain distance. The status of Kraków as a capital city was thus a simplification, as the residence of the king and the political capital of the state was Wawel, which technically lay outside of the borders of Kraków. This dissonance is even stronger in the case of Malbork: the small town which lay in the vicinity of the castle was in no way the centre of the State of the Teutonic Order, and the castle itself was not part of the town. These two formed entirely separate settlements, the only connection being their proximity to one another and the name. The definition proposed in this article unfortunately cannot be used to analyse the internal structure of these complex urban centres or even delineate precise borders of towns. While it could be ascertained that parts that play the role of central places belong to such urban complexes, this is only a very generalised indicator, one open to various interpretations.

The systemic changes that the Enlightenment brought to Poland also prompted a change in this autonomy of the municipality, wherein the whole settlement complex was administratively coordinated. Despite retaining its limited forms of self-governance, the town became first and foremost subject to state law and was from then on mainly an element in the administrative structure

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<sup>24</sup> P. Tyszka, *Obraz przestrzeni miejskiej Krakowa XIV–XV wieku w świadomości jego mieszkańców*, Lublin 2001, pp. 61–70; cf. 14<sup>th</sup>-century toponymic shifts in Gdańsk, Kassel, Prague, and Kraków, M. Słoń, *Miasta podwójne...*, pp. 298–300.

of the country. One of the aims of these reforms was to gather the whole settlement complex under a single legal and administrative rule and thus to overcome the fundamental duality in the perception of towns<sup>25</sup>. At the same time, however, the ongoing formalisation of the urban status and its politicisation exacerbated the dissonance between the two perspectives. A unified urban complex could still be separated with political lines, as it was in the case of the Polish town of Zgorzelec and German Görlitz, to this day divided by a state border.

The natural blending of urban centres that are located close to each other does not need to automatically mean that new administrative entities must be created, as happened in the case of Tri-City. However, formal forced mergers also occur, even for towns that technically remain separated, as exemplified by Bnin and Kórnik, or Węgrów and Liw. These are extraordinary situations and the rule for mergers is usually the unification of urban areas as well as a formal and intuitive perception of the town's distinctive character and its borders.

Having constructed a tool, namely a viable definition of a town fit for the project, it is important to test its effectiveness using the data collected in the study itself. While technically the study encompasses the whole territory of Poland from the very beginnings of the state in the tenth century to 1939, this current analysis will incorporate only selected districts (Polish *powiat*) in their current form: Krosno (the urban and the non-urban district), Kalisz, Wałbrzych (both without the urban district), as well as the districts of Gdańsk, Toruń, Bielsko-Biała, Nowy Tomyśl, Pruszków, Będzin, Starachowice, Hajnówka, and Świdwin. The historical development of urban networks in these localities showcases

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<sup>25</sup> This has been neglected in the historiography of Central Europe; in contrast, the case of German towns is discussed in the monographic work *Stadt und Bürger im 18. Jahrhundert: 11. Tagung der Deutschen Gesellschaft für die Erforschung des 18. Jahrhunderts, die im November 1986... in Hamburg und Lübeck stattfand*, eds. G. Frühsorge, H. Klüeting, F. Kopitzsch, Marburg 1993, *Das achtzehnte Jahrhundert Supplementa*, vol. II, particularly in the texts by Enders, Kopitzsch, and Eberling. Compare also M. Walker, *German Home Towns: Community, State and General Estate 1648–1871*, Ithaca 1971, pp. 159–160, 196–205 and P. Guignet, *Le pouvoir dans la ville au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle: pratiques politiques, notabilité et éthique sociale de part et d'autre de la frontière Franco-Belge*, Paris 1991, *Civilisations et sociétés*, vol. LXXX, for the situation at the border between France and the Netherlands.

three spheres of structural concentration of cases which could be labelled as unclear; these cases will thus be the subject of subsequent analysis.

#### 4. The four fields of verification: Poland in ten centuries

##### a) 1200

The settlements were granted Magdeburg rights, namely a set of town privileges, and when the formal status of a town did not yet exist. Already in this period some settlements undoubtedly had already belonged to the higher class of settlement objects. Some localities would have been called *civitates*, such as Gdańsk in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, whose central function as well as its great demographic and economic potential are well-documented both in surviving written sources and by archaeological evidence. Similarly, though on a smaller scale, the town of Siewierz of the same time period was already a stronghold (Polish *gród*) and a centre of commerce. The town also fulfilled the role of the castellany seat and towards the first quarter of the thirteenth century could already boast having two churches<sup>26</sup>. Another important factor is how early town privileges were granted in the case of Siewierz, which happened already in 1276.

Strongholds (gords) often featured also in other districts. These settlements were defined in the project as “Gord is a medieval or – in eastern territories – an early modern settlement with revetments and stockades<sup>27</sup>. An accompanying comment stresses the close association of the presence of a gord and early township status: Gords are characteristic mostly of the High Middle Ages, when documents were written in Latin, despite the fact that Latin does not know a proper notion for this kind of settlement unit. Expressions with a different, relatively similar, meaning had been used to describe the gord, i.e. a city (Latin *civitas*), or a castle (Latin *arx, castrum*). In earlier historical German sources *gród* was referred to as Burg, the expression meaning both a gord and a castle. Researchers consider ‘gord’ as an endemic and specifically Slavic phenomenon”<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> Z. Noga, *Słownik miejscowości księstwa siewierskiego*, Katowice 1994, p. 131.

<sup>27</sup> B. Szady, *op. cit.*, pp. 3–11 and (quotation) type “gord” in the ontology: [https://ontohgis.pl/viewer/t\\_settlement\\_unit113.html](https://ontohgis.pl/viewer/t_settlement_unit113.html) (accessed: 23 V 2020).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*.

Some settlements, such as Gdańsk and Siewierz, undoubtedly met the criteria allowing them to be described as towns. The question remains if the existence of fortifications in a settlement is a satisfactory argument to form a hypothesis that this settlement might have had the status of a town according to the definition of a town presented earlier: “A city/town is a superior locality, distinguished from other, surrounding basic units by categories of size (measured differently in different periods of time and regions), level of complexity, and central functions provided for those units”<sup>29</sup>. The construction of fortifications required considerable resources and the labour of the local populace, which could certainly fulfil the criterion of centrality. In early Piast Poland, a gord would also serve as an administrative centre, employed for services and tax collection. Locations in which such settlements emerged could also be interpreted as bearing the signs of networking.

However, strongholds did not necessarily have to differ demographically from nearby villages or fulfil any role in the local economy. The ‘complexity’ of such settlements was also rather dubious; in fact, gords often performed a single function, which is reminiscent of the later manor, a settlement which could be ranked at a lower tier than a village. Moreover, only one of the strongholds in the Kalisz district, namely Kalisz itself, which is outside the scope of these considerations, became a town in a later period. The Bielsko stronghold presents an interesting case: it was a major, relatively well-fortified structure. However, its main function remains unclear, the current widely-accepted interpretation being that of a refuge<sup>30</sup>. It would thus not have seen permanent inhabitants, which obviously rules the stronghold out as a potential town-tier object. Therefore, each case of a gord should be interpreted individually, as just the existence of a stronghold did not guarantee a town-tier status and additional criteria need to be confirmed by historical and archaeological sources. In the case of (a considerable number of) strongholds where there is a scarcity of written sources and lack of archaeological research present, the emergence of these settlements as towns at a later period might also provide an inkling as to their prior importance, though even this might not be enough to classify them as an early town.

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>30</sup> *Bielsko-Biała. Monografia miasta*, vol. I (*Bielsko od zarania do wybuchu wojen śląskich [1740]*), eds. I. Panic, B. Choraży, B. Choraży, Bielsko-Biała 2011, pp. 141–146.



Toruń is a good example of this. There is evidence that before the location of the Old Town, another fortified settlement, Werder, had been present at the site. There are suggestions that, while it was not agricultural in nature, it did not significantly differ from nearby villages in its demographic potential.

Another interesting case is that of Wąchock in the Starachowice district. The Cistercian monastery established in 1179 quickly became a bustling centre surrounded by a large number of lands. The adjacent settlement would in time grow in importance and receive town privileges in 1454. At some earlier point, the settlement became a thriving metalworking centre, though evidence for industrial activity could not be dated to before the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and as such we cannot categorise the settlement as a town prior to that; later, in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, formal town privileges had already become the decisive criterion for township status. The monastery alone could not be counted as an urban centre: while it was a specialised settlement, its potential was limited. In fact, rather than performing a central function, the monastery was isolated from the surrounding settlement network.

There were no settlements that could be classified as urban centres prior to their formal location under Magdeburg rights in any of the other analysed districts. During the High Middle Ages, only Gdańsk and Siewierz could be classified as towns among the locations in all twelve of the districts under consideration. This rather humble number will be juxtaposed with the state of urbanisation towards the end of the 16<sup>th</sup>, the 19<sup>th</sup> century and finally at the tail end period of the study, in 1939.

For this period, the distinction between the structural levels of the settlement network and the criterion of size was essential, with source terminology playing a supporting role. This caesura shows particularly clearly the need for a definition based on multiple criteria.

## **b) 1600**

In Poland of the Late Middle Ages and the early modern period there was usually little doubt whether a given settlement had the town status. There were naturally cases of unsuccessful locations, when a settlement that had been granted privileges would fail to thrive and retained its rural nature. This degradation would become fact only once the settlement stopped being formally categorised as

a town and was denoted as a village. There is no need for any other discriminatory category in such a case, as the legal status and the usage of the term ‘town’ were concurrent and allow for conclusive classification without the need for more relative terms of size, complexity, or centrality.



**Map 1.** Towns in the surveyed counties in 1600 (Source: own study)

The aforementioned double and multiple towns pose another problem for classification. Among the twelve districts under consideration there were two such complex agglomerations: Gdańsk and Toruń. The medieval city of Gdańsk consisted of three separately functioning municipalities: Rechtstadt, Altstadt, and Jungstadt. The last one was razed to the ground and consequently formally liquidated in 1455. Altstadt retained its autonomy, though it became subordinate to its much more powerful neighbour and over the course of the 16<sup>th</sup> century was eventually incorporated into Rechtstadt.

The problematic nature of Gdańsk is a good entry point into the analysis of the case of Toruń. The right bank settlement consisted

of two municipalities, namely the Old Town and the New Town. Opposite, on the left bank of the Vistula, lay Nieszawa, founded by the Polish king in 1424 and intended as competition to the Teutonic Thorn (Toruń)<sup>31</sup>. In 1454, the Old Town swore allegiance to the Polish Crown, subsequently annexing the New Town. The town also demanded Nieszawa be immediately liquidated and in 1460 Nieszawa was indeed moved 20 kilometres upstream. The new location did not legally change much in the town's functioning: it had the same inhabitants, the same privileges, the same name of the municipality, with only the spatial location differing from its previous state. There is no doubt that Nieszawa remained the same town before and after the transposition. In fact, in the place called Stara Nieszawa (Old Nieszawa), Dybów and finally Podgórz, another settlement developed opposite to the Old Town and was granted town privileges in the second half of the sixteenth century<sup>32</sup>. It is thus possible to conclusively categorise each legally autonomous municipality as a separate town, even if it lay adjacent to another, forming an urban agglomeration.

A cut-off date is necessary to pinpoint the number of towns in the analysed districts for modernity; in this case, 1600 serves best for the purpose as the state urbanisation for this particular year has been subject to thorough research. An extensive study by the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences mapping reconstructed settlement networks in the Polish Crown was compiled for the year 1600 and the research questionnaire covered identification of all urban centres. While approximately a quarter of the analysed districts remain outside of the scope of the atlas, the data collected in the study remains a valuable source. The database includes twenty-one towns in the twelve districts in question, existing in the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> S. Józwiak, *Nowa Nieszawa (Dybów) naprzeciw Torunia w latach 1423–1460/62 w świetle średniowiecznych źródeł pisanych*, [in:] *W poszukiwaniu zaginionego miasta: 15 lat badań średniowiecznej lokalizacji Nieszawy*, eds. A. Andrzejewski, P. Wroniecki, Łódź 2015, pp. 13–54; I. Janosz-Biskupowa, *O położeniu i przeniesieniu Nieszawy*, "Zapiski Towarzystwa Naukowego w Toruniu" 1954, vol. XX, pp. 167–195.

<sup>32</sup> P. Szwe do, *Character and Size of Settlements: Cities and Towns in Cuyavia and Dobrzyń Land in the Second half of the Sixteenth Century*, [in:] *Historical Atlas of Poland...*, p. 822; W. Duży, *Powiat m. Toruń*, [in:] *Metodologia...*, pp. 367–390.

<sup>33</sup> The database also included the town of Korab in the Kalisz district, which functioned in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century but lost its functions and municipal rights before 1600; hence it is not included in this article.

Two districts under consideration fell entirely outside the borders of the Polish Crown: the Wałbrzych district (here considered with the exclusion of the district seat, Wałbrzych) and the Świdwin district. Parts of the current Hajnówka, Krosno, and Bielsko-Biała districts also fell out of the bounds of historical Poland. Altogether, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, only seven towns existed in these areas that lay outside the Polish Crown at the time, including Krosno, Rymaków, Bielsk, Mieroszów, Boguszów, Świdwin, and Połczyn, while there were twenty-eight towns in all twelve current districts under consideration.

Although in the case of this caesura, the simplest criteria, namely source terminology and legal status, yielded a clear result in most cases, they proved sufficient in analysing the internal structure of complex centers, or the so-called 'multiple cities'.

### **c) 1900**

A decision regarding the so-called 'urban settlements' is necessary when compiling a list of towns existing in the area in question in 1900. This was a legal term assigned to 336 out of 452 of towns in the Kingdom of Poland in 1870, nearly three quarters of all towns in the Russia-dependent part of Poland. While only four out of the twelve districts under analysis fell within the borders of Congress Poland, the reform which affected this particular part of the country put the legal state of 'township' in doubt, along with the categorisation of the majority of settlements formerly regarded as towns. What might prove beneficial is taking a look at the debate preceding the legal shift as well as analysing the state of the localities falling under the scope of the reform thirty years later in 1900 in order to assess the consequences which the decision had on their development in the following decades.

Reports of a rampant alcohol problem in towns, which was supposedly connected with periodical markets, seems to have been the initial concern that prompted the Tsar to consider reducing the number of towns. However, the preliminary reform was rejected in the 1840s as, according to the local governors, the localities would have been negatively impacted by the reform, which would in turn take a toll on the Kingdom itself<sup>34</sup>. The January Uprising

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<sup>34</sup> R. Kołodziejczyk, *Zamiana miast na osady w Królestwie Polskim*, "Kwartalnik Historyczny" 1961, LXVIII, no. 1, pp. 191–200.

of 1863 changed the situation: reforms were implemented to further subjugate Congress Poland under Russian control and steps were taken to make Polish lands more similar to the rest of the Russian Empire. The possible collapse of smaller towns ceased to be a problem, as it fit the narrative of punishment for the insurrection<sup>35</sup>, pushing the issue of drunkenness to the background.

The Kingdom assumed three basic criteria for township: the number of inhabitants, the percentage of inhabitants not involved in agriculture, and the income. The Empire, however, argued that the thresholds for these categories and the categories themselves should be changed: the criterion of occupation was to be changed to the criterion of real estate value. Both aspects were meant to introduce Russian norms to the Kingdom, which had a vastly disparate settlement structure as well as a different economic and social profile<sup>36</sup>. The measures were also designed to curtail the flexibility of the implementation of general rules by taking into consideration some individual prospects and particular functions performed by a given locality, such as administrative functions. In the light of the Empire's criteria, 90% of existing towns were set to lose their town privileges. In the end, a compromise was reached by using the criteria posited by the Empire, but allowing the Kingdom to lower the thresholds to meet them. It was also decided that these downgraded localities would not be counted as villages, but an intermediary entity, a sort of quasi-town: an 'urban settlement'. The reform was implemented in 1870.

Ten out of the selected twenty-eight cities counted in 1600 became subject to the reform. One new town was founded, namely Wierzbnik in the Starachowice district. Only one of eleven retained its town privileges in their entirety, and it was Będzin<sup>37</sup>. Two others, Stawiszyn and Czeladź, regained town privileges in 1916–1919, around the time when Poland became independent.

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<sup>35</sup> This interpretation of the reform, treating it as yet another repression following the insurrection, would persist in the local tradition of many towns, and is still present in their historiography, cf. *Historia Czeladzi. Praca zbiorowa*, vol. I, ed. J. Drabina, Czeladź 2012, pp. 407–410.

<sup>36</sup> M. Nietyksza, *Rozwój miast i aglomeracji miejsko-przemysłowych w Królestwie Polskim, 1865–1914*, Warszawa 1986, p. 59.

<sup>37</sup> M. Nita, *Miasto powiatowe w Królestwie Polskim (1867–1914)*, [in:] *Będzin 1358–2008*, ed. A. Glimos-Nadgórska, Będzin 2008, pp. 127–210.

Table 1

**Demographic growth of downgraded towns between 1870–1920**

Town	District	Number of inhabitants in 1869	Number of inhabitants in 1911	Growth (%)	Growth (actual)	Year town privileges regained
Opatówek	Kalisz	1668	1990	119%	322	2016
Staw	Kalisz	636	940	148%	304	
Iwanowice	Kalisz	734	1182	161%	448	
Koźminek	Kalisz	1657	2615	158%	958	2021
Siewierz	Będzin	1707	2985	175%	1278	1962
Stawiszyn	Kalisz	1800	3729	207%	1929	1919
Nadarzyn	Pruszków	1099	2532	230%	1433	
Sławków	Będzin	2682	6410	239%	3728	1958
Wąchock	Starachowice	1229	3347	272%	2118	1994
Wierzbnik	Starachowice	613	2606	425%	1993	
Czeladź	Będzin	1859	8188	440%	6329	1919

Source: *Krótką statystyką gubernij Królestwa Polskiego obejmująca rozległość i ludność tychże gubernij oraz wykaz miast, osad i gmin*, Warszawa 1870; *Osady w Królestwie Polskim*, [https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Osady\\_w\\_Królestwie\\_Polskim](https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Osady_w_Królestwie_Polskim) (accessed: 23 V 2020); “Rocznik Statystyki Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej” 1920/21, vol. I, part 1, Warszawa 1921.

Should these eleven localities still be counted as towns after the reform, or should their status be more generalised, falling under a blanket category encompassing towns, villages, and other settlements?

In 1870, Opatówek was not much different from the other selected towns, though the number of its inhabitants was above the average of this group. Upon becoming a town settlement, Opatówek ceased to be an attractive destination for migrants and, while the

population of Congress Poland doubled between 1870 and 1911, Opatówek's population remained at a similar level to its pre-reform state; as a consequence, towards 1911 the 'urban settlement' was more akin to a village than a town. Koźminek's population also remained relatively stagnant and two other former towns in the Kalisz district, Staw and Iwanowice, also suffered a decline, their population growth falling behind of the general trend. Therefore, the severe curtailing of privileges did result in these locations losing their status as higher tier settlements. When the category of 'urban settlement' was abolished after Poland regained its independence, these four centers were no longer able to return to the role of a town and they simply devolved into villages.

The fourth urban settlement in the Kalisz district, Stawiszyn, regained town privileges after Poland regained its independence. Population growth in Stawiszyn remained at a similar level to the rest of the country, retaining a strong and stable trend throughout the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Without a doubt, the settlement managed to hold on to its central urban function in the referenced time period.

The former town of Nadarzyn, in the Pruszków district, never managed to regain its town privileges. While population growth was higher than the national average, the peak was driven entirely by the agricultural needs of nearby Warsaw, which experienced a dynamic expansion at the time<sup>38</sup>. Moreover, the town of Pruszków, located a mere 10 km away, emerged as the centre of industry and commerce in the area, eventually receiving town privileges in 1916. Marginalised after a longer period of devolution of its urban functions, Nadarzyn became a village, though the change occurred as late as the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The cases of both Siewierz and Sławków in the Będzin district should be analysed concurrently. Population growth rate for Sławków might raise eyebrows: the urban settlement would eventually count almost 6,500 inhabitants in 1939. The dynamic growth far exceeded the national average and was the result of industrial growth in the area. Both towns were close neighbours to Dąbrowa Górnicza, an industrial centre experiencing an explosive population growth, starting with 600 inhabitants in 1860 and growing by around 600 inhabitants per year, accumulating to 40,000 dwellers

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<sup>38</sup> *Nadarzyn na przestrzeni wieków. Historia Nadarzyny od średniowiecza po czasy współczesne*, Nadarzyn 2014, pp. 47–56.

in 1920. Dąbrowa first gained town privileges in 1916, after the region had been put under temporary Austrian governance. The development of both Siewierz and Sławków were dwarfed by this giant, incomparable to their neighbour in terms of both population numbers and the pace at which it grew. The nearby Czeladź made more significant progress as well, regaining its township status in 1919<sup>39</sup>. Nevertheless, all these settlements, at least within the timeframe of 1870–1920, never functioned as villages or suburbia, retaining their central urban character despite their reduced legal status.

Wąchock and Wierzbnik in the Strachowice district, only 6 km apart from one another, represent another two interesting and problematic cases. Both towns could be considered small when they lost their full town status, and subsequently experienced dynamic growth due to the developing metal industry. On the eve of regaining independence by Poland, Wąchock still had more inhabitants, but Wierzbnik's growth was more dynamic; in the end it was Wierzbnik that regained town privileges first, already in 1916. However, the largest metalworks in the area were founded in the village of Starachowice, located between the two; the village used to belong to the Wąchock Cistercian monastery up until the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when it was transferred to the governance of Congress Poland. In 1939, Starachowice was incorporated into Wierzbnik, forming a new town under a hyphenated name of Starachowice-Wierzbnik. A decade later, the latter historical part was removed from the name altogether, and the town has since been called just Starachowice<sup>40</sup>. Thus the village which had laid between two small towns was first incorporated into one of them, then experienced rapid growth and swallowed the town. The population of the nearby town of Wąchock, which did not regain its town privileges until 1994, is less than it was a century ago, while the bustling Starachowice is home to 50,000 people.

The Wąchock community had been for many generations represented by the iconic figure of a *soltys* (Latin *scultetus*) – the head of a municipality, or, rather, unequivocally a village. Wąchock, which had been the site of the medieval abbey and one of the metal-

<sup>39</sup> *Historia Czeladzi...*, p. 387; the author ultimately interprets the categorisation of Czeladź as an urban settlement to have been a complete loss of town privileges, though he does also provide arguments against such a definite stance, pp. 407–410.

<sup>40</sup> M. Adamczyk, S.J. Pastuszka, *Starachowice. Zarys dziejów*, Warszawa 1984, pp. 15–45, 67–77.



working powerhouses of Congress Poland, became the subject of popular jokes about its provincial nature<sup>41</sup>, for example: 'Why do houses in Starachowice have only two floors?' 'Because you could see Wąchock from the third.' Or: 'Why does the bus stopping in Wąchock only open its middle door?' 'Because the front of the bus has already left Wąchock and the back is yet to arrive'.

The basis for these jokes is the discrepancy between the grand past of the locality and its modest size in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which was exacerbated by the proximity to the bustling town of Starachowice, which was considerable in size but became divorced from its modest history due to the name change.

When considering the status of Wąchock around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (or the chosen time period of 1870–1920), it becomes clear that the settlement managed to preserve its urban character. The number of inhabitants was higher than that of even large villages, growing dynamically throughout the period, and its economy was based in industrial production. Both indicators point to Wąchock being an important industrial centre that could be counted as a higher tier settlement. However, even regaining town privileges much later does not contradict the fact that, Wąchock was, to all intents and purposes, functionally reduced to a village after 1918.

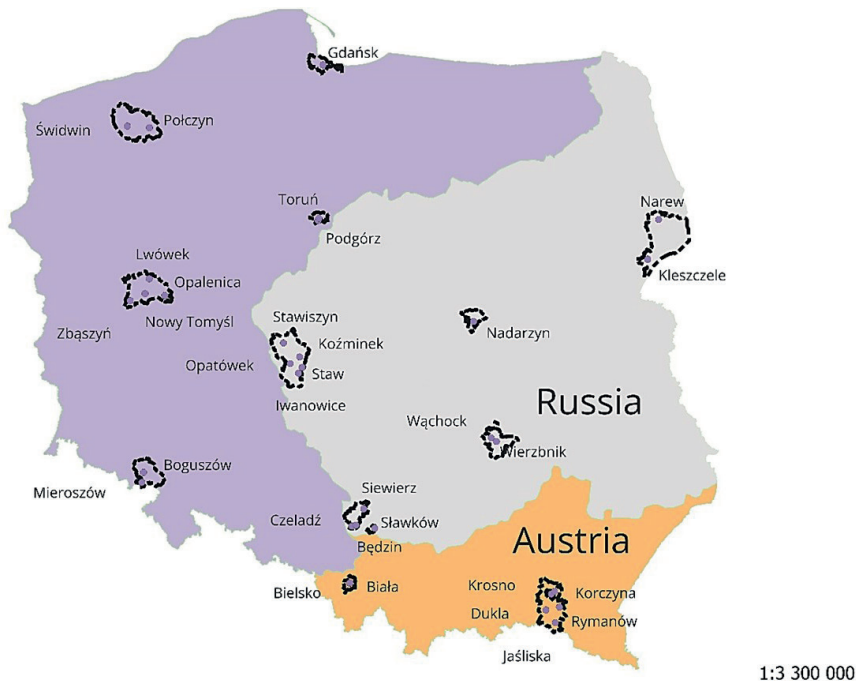
In conclusion, the 'urban settlements' established in 1870 can without a doubt be classified as a town; moreover, despite the Russian reform, towns in Congress Poland only grew in number.

It is worth recalling the further fate of these eleven centers, which were downgraded to urban settlements in 1870. Three of them regained full municipal rights as late as the interwar period, and five more in later years. This process is still ongoing: Opatówek regained its privileges in 2017, and Koźminek in 2021.

Between 1600 and 1900 six new towns emerged, namely Nowy Tomyśl (1786), Wierzbnik (1624–1939), Biała (1723), Korczyna (1783–1934), Jedlicze (1768–1880) and Stolzenberg (Chełm, 1773–1814). The last one was incorporated into Gdańsk and Jedlicze became a village. In 1900, there were thirty-three towns in the twelve districts considered in the analysis. However, the effect of status decline of a large part of them represented a gradual degradation that led to a significant fall in the number of cities in the following period.

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<sup>41</sup> The local government even spun this "infamy" into a promotional campaign for Wąchock.



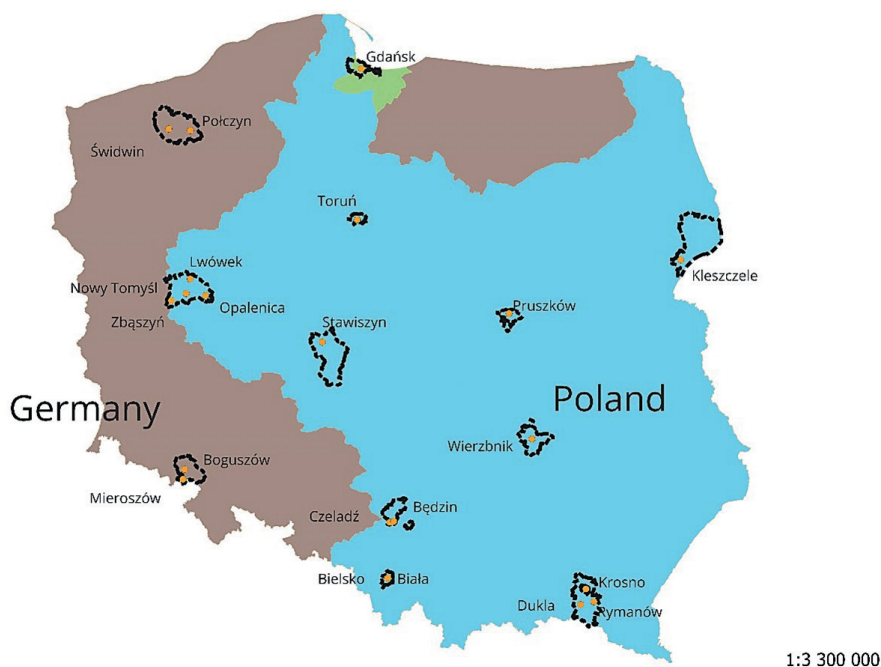
**Map 2.** Cities in the surveyed counties in 1900 (Source: own study)

The reform implemented by the Russian authorities in 1870 highlights the deep territorial differentiation of the legal town status and its connection to other criteria. The fate of each centre was determined primarily by its size, here measured by tax revenues and administrative importance, while the loss of full rights significantly affected its development in the following decades. The classification of degraded cities as ‘urban settlements,’ on the other hand, reveals the ambiguity of source terminology not only in earlier eras, but also in less remote and well-documented ones.

#### **d) 1939**

Degrading twelve towns into ‘urban settlements’ did not entirely deprive them of their prerogatives in all cases, though their rights were largely limited and in no way supported the preservation of their urban functions. Within half a century, when independent Poland sought to regulate the status and rank of various locations,

eight of these eleven towns had already devolved into villages; in addition to the towns included in this analysis, Narew in the Hajnówka district as well as Jaśliska and Korczyna in the Krosno district lost their town privileges in 1934 and were relegated to the rank of villages. In 1938, Podgórz was incorporated into Toruń, while the merger of Bielsko and Biała failed at the time, despite the close proximity of the two towns, though a successful merger did eventually happen in 1951. Finally, the early days of Poland's independence also saw the emergence of a new town, namely Pruszków. Compared to the state prior to 1870 and considering all the changes, the number of towns fell from thirty-two to twenty-one.



**Map 3.** Cities in the surveyed counties in 1939 (Source: own study)

In the last period, the legal status, which determined the naming practice, became by far the dominant criterion. On the other hand, it was adapted to the size of the town to a greater extent than in previous eras. Importantly, all the criteria were closely related. Thus, the definition adopted corresponds to realities close to us

in time, which should not come as a surprise: we look at the past through the glasses of modernity, especially when analysing backwards the phenomena that are still present.

Table 2

**Number of towns in the four timeline caesurae and 2023**

<b>Name</b>	<b>1200</b>	<b>1600</b>	<b>1900</b>	<b>1939</b>	<b>2023</b>
Będzin		x	x	x	x
Biała			x	x	x
Bielsko		x	x	x	x
Boguszów		x	x	x	x
Czeladź		x	x	x	x
Dukła		x	x	x	x
Gdańsk	x	x	x	x	x
Iwanowice		x	x		
Jaśliska		x	x		
Kleszczele		x	x	x	x
Korczyna			x		
Koźminek		x	x		x
Krosno		x	x	x	x
Lwówek		x	x	x	x
Mieroszów		x	x	x	x
Nadarzyn		x	x		
Narew		x	x		
Nowy Tomyśl			x	x	x
Opalenica		x	x	x	x

<b>Name</b>	<b>1200</b>	<b>1600</b>	<b>1900</b>	<b>1939</b>	<b>2023</b>
Opatówek		x	x		x
Podgórz		x	x		
Połczyn		x	x	x	x
Pruszków				x	x
Rymanów		x	x	x	x
Siewierz	x	x	x		x
Sławków		x	x		x
Staw		x	x		
Stawiszyn		x	x	x	x
Świdwin		x	x	x	x
Toruń		x	x	x	x
Wąchock		x	x		x
Wierzbnik			x	x	
Zbąszyń		x	x	x	x
<b>Number of towns</b>	2	28	32	21	25

Source: own study.

## 5. Conclusions

Establishing the number of towns present at different time periods should not be the ultimate goal of this analysis; instead, is the paper seeks to create a tool that would facilitate research into universal phenomena, such as the phenomenon of a town in different eras and across various economic, social, and political systems. The tool was used to arrive at some conclusions regarding the developmental dynamics of urban networks on the territory of present-day Poland, taking into account its regional diversity. The four timeline caesurae (1200, 1600, 1900, 1939) help illustrate the changes characteristic of each time period.

Urban networks only fully developed in western Poland during the time of coordinated, widespread town location efforts. By 1600, the

networks had been fully saturated. New centres emerged sporadically and often developed in close proximity to existing towns, as was the case of Biała, Stolzenberg and, to some extent, Wierzbnik. Conversely, eastern Poland, which was much less urbanised by the 17<sup>th</sup> century, saw further initiatives to spread urban networks; their results, however, often proved unstable. Despite some fluctuations, it can be concluded that the core urban network remained largely unchanged during the period between 1600 and 1900.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century saw major socio-economic changes and administrative decisions that rocked the stability of this network, resulting in nearly one third of all urban centres losing their town status. Small towns in Greater Poland and lands in eastern Poland as well as old towns located in close proximity to new dynamically developing municipalities suffered the most due to this trend. In regions experiencing rapid industrialisation, such as the Dąbrowa Basin (Polish *Zagłębie Dąbrowskie*), traditional lines between the basic and the higher tier of settlement were blurred; moreover, the establishment of major industrial objects outside of existing centres also made borders between settlements unclear. The size of these settlements was based on administrative divisions, which in the age of rapid industrialisation did not necessarily reflect their historical development.

Further utilising the tool developed in this study, the Szady project distinguishes towns from other locations by dividing settlement networks into basic units (villages) and higher tier units (towns). The main distinguishing criteria include size (based primarily on the number of inhabitants), the level of complexity (taking into account non-agricultural diversity of occupations), and central functions (centrality) of the settlements. If the concept and formal status of a town existed, this would take precedence in distinguishing between town and non-urban settlement. The formal status and the intuitive, cognitive recognition of a settlement as a town are related, though they do not always necessarily overlap.

A holistic view of the settlement network as a conceptual system made it possible to propose a new definition, although inspired by the suggestions of earlier researchers. It proved functional in the construction of a geoportal covering a long duration and an area of significant civilisational diversity, including different legal and economic systems, languages and even alphabets. This positive verification allows researchers to formulate some guidelines for subsequent attempts to define the concept of a town.

On a broader temporal and spatial-cultural scale, the definition should include a set of criteria, not just one. None of them will be sufficient in all situations. At the same time, for the consistency of the concept, at least one of these criteria should be universal, applying to all cases as necessary. The town is such a complex and basic concept that it needs to be clarified in the form of more detailed lower-level categories allowing better consideration of borderline cases. The most important conclusion is that for a limited – even broad – chronological and spatial range, the construction of a conceptual system that includes a definition of the town is possible.

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