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SOME REMARKS ON THE REVITALISATION OF SMALL TOWNS: THE POLISH PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT: This article concentrates on issues relating to the revitalisation of urban space in the Polish context, with a particular focus on small towns. It discusses the development of small towns after World War II, the changes that took place after Poland's accession to the European Union, current legal framework, and the directions for revitalisation planning and implementation in Poland. The article is based on publications dealing with revitalisation processes, materials provided by annually-held conferences dedicated to small towns, and studies analysing revitalisation programmes of towns which got involved in pilot activities within the framework of the project called *The Model Revitalisation of Cities*. The authors



highlight the benefits that a well-prepared revitalisation brings; they also discuss the limitations and problems facing local governments in the course of meeting this challenge. The article can provide inspiration for researchers to undertake studies in order to examine and evaluate the preparation and implementation of revitalisation processes as well as their effect on the resolution of social, economic, functional, spatial, technical, and environmental problems diagnosed in degraded areas. The paper should also be useful to local governments developing their revitalisation programmes.

KEYWORDS: small towns, revitalisation, site planning, Poland

KILKA UWAG NA TEMAT REWITALIZACJI MAŁYCH MIAST – POLSKA PERSPEKTYWA

ZARYS TREŚCI: Artykuł koncentruje się na przedstawieniu polskich uwarunkowań dotyczących rewitalizacji, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem tej problematyki w małych miastach. Prezentuje genezę rozwoju małych miast po II wojnie światowej, zmiany, jakie wywołało przystąpienie naszego kraju do Unii Europejskiej oraz aktualne ramy prawne i kierunki programowania i wdrażania rewitalizacji w Polsce. Artykuł powstał na podstawie dorobku publikacyjnego oraz cyklicznej konferencji dedykowanej małym miastom, a także własnych badań programów rewitalizacji małych miast, które realizowały działania pilotażowe w ramach projektu *Modelowa rewitalizacja miast*. W konkluzjach autorzy podkreślają korzyści jakie przynosi świadoma rewitalizacja oraz wskazują ograniczenia i problemy jakie czekają w tej materii samorządy. Wpisuje się w naukową dyskusję dotyczącą rewitalizacji, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem specyfiki małych miast. Artykuł może stanowić inspirację dla naukowców do pogłębiania badań na ten temat oraz dla samorządów przygotowujących swoje programy rewitalizacji.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: małe miasta, rewitalizacja, zagospodarowanie przestrzenne, Polska

9.1. Introduction

The origins of the majority of small towns in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) go back to the Middle Ages. In many of them, some elements of old structures have remained until today. Small towns play an important role in local development. After World War II, during nearly half of a century of the communist rule in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, many such towns lost their former functions, while their development, including spatial development, was disrupted or impeded. In addition, various elements destroying the spatial order appeared in their structures. The period of transformation after the fall of communism and the reinstatement of the local government after the year 1990 created new opportunities for the development of small towns. However, in order to make possible their effective contribution to the socio-economic growth of the country and the region, it is necessary to undertake actions that would help resolve a number of strategic problems. Such actions should be aimed at increasing the competitiveness of the

economic base, the development of human capital, and the enhancement of the attractiveness of urban space. In this context, what is particularly important is that revitalisation embraces not only the sphere of spatial development, but also the sphere of social and economic life as well as the revalorisation of the natural environment.

Despite the great diversity of Poland's small towns – which results from their different geographical locations, physiographic conditions, and heritage of the past – key revitalisation problems are similar in many of them. Besides the securing of funding, the main factors enabling revitalisation include the aspirations of local communities, their attitudes to urban space and its development, the importance attached in local policy to spatial order management, the ability to work out consistent long-term programmes of city development, the quality of local social elites, and their capacity for cooperation as well as their ability to give up particular interests for the benefit of pursuing common strategic goals.

For many years, small towns in Poland have been the object of study for researchers representing various disciplines; during the last two decades there has been increased interest in this subject, which has resulted in numerous interdisciplinary research projects, publications, and scientific conferences devoted to issues relating to small towns. The University of Lodz has a significant part in this activity. Since 2002, it has been organising – in cooperation with the University of Economics in Katowice – annual conferences aimed at sharing knowledge and experience among researchers interested in this topic, with participation of representatives of local governments. Mayors of small towns are frequently guests or speakers at these meetings, which allows them to become acquainted with the knowledge and results of studies carried out by the researchers, as well as to enrich the discussions with some practical indications by highlighting the specific character of their municipalities. It often provides inspiration for undertaking further research projects. After the year 1990, the University of Lodz published a number of books dealing with spatial aspects of small towns (e.g. Bartosiewicz, Marszał (ed.) 2013; Bartosiewicz (ed.) 2016a, 2016b, 2018a, 2018b). One of the important issues addressed in these studies is revitalisation, i.e. *“the process of bringing degraded areas out of the crisis¹ state in a comprehensive manner, through integrated actions oriented to local community, space and economy, territorially concentrated, undertaken by revitalisation stakeholders on the basis of local revitalisation programme”* (Revitalisation Act 2015). It is a complex, interdisciplinary topic providing stimulating research pursuits for representatives of various disciplines. It also constitutes a vital practical challenge for city authorities, especially those governing small towns.

¹ Crisis state – accumulation of destructive, undesirable, negative phenomena in social, economic, functional spatial, technical, and environmental spheres.

The aim of this article is to present research findings and reflections relating to the revitalisation of small towns in Poland. It also sums up the published studies on this topic as well as experience resulting from the conferences dedicated to small towns and from revitalisation programmes and actions implemented by the small towns which have participated in the project called *The Model Revitalisation of Cities* [Pl. *Modelowa rewitalizacja miast*]². The article contributes to the national and international discussion concerning revitalisation, especially in small towns (e.g. Szymański 2021; Bartosiewicz B. et al. 2019; Medhdipanah et al., 2018; Tumilewicz 2015; Paszkowski 2014; Gripiaios 2012; Marszał, Heffner 2011; Tallon 2010; Krośnicka 2010; Heffner et al. 2006). It is based on a review of relevant literature and desktop research, including the analysis of revitalisation programmes of the municipalities of Dobiegniew, Grajewo, Hrubieszów, Milicz, and Opole Lubelskie, as well as reports from social consultations and information available on websites and in social media. Conclusions presented in this study can provide inspiration for undertaking further research in this field as well as they can be useful to practitioners, especially local governments working out revitalisation programmes.

9.2. The specificity of Poland's small towns

The Second World War brought heavy losses of people as well as a change of Poland's political regime and economic policy, which now came to be realised under the system of centrally-planned economy. It had a particularly strong effect on small towns due to their development determinants. Their demographic degradation translated into the decline in, or disappearance of, traditional services, especially in central zones (Heffner et al. 2006). The second part of the 20th century was a period of stagnation for many of the small urban settlements. Certain growth-generating elements appeared in some of them, but they were rather short-term and did not correspond with the scale of the towns and their endogenous features. They also resulted in a devastation of urban fabric through strong interference in the spatial and functional structure of the city (Marszał 2012). The decades of the centrally-planned economy led to the elimination of basic components conditioning the existence of small towns, namely private services, crafts, and small industry. Despite the difficult history, many Polish small towns have preserved substantial potential in terms of townscape, urban structure, and architecture (Kosiński et al. 2009).

² In 2015, the Ministry of Development launched a competition called *The Model Revitalisation of Cities* [Pl. *Modelowa rewitalizacja miast*] and designed to assist local governments in preparing sound basis for revitalisation and working out, through pilot projects, some solutions which might serve as good practices.

The regime change and the socio-economic transformation – which were dynamically progressing in Poland since the early 1990s – brought about many adjustments, important also from the small-town perspective. They included the empowerment of the local government as well as ownership changes (the privatisation and municipalisation of property). It provided an impulse to undertake pro-development activities as well as opened up a number of new opportunities for the local government. The entrepreneurship and creativity of local communities began to play a major role in shaping the future of small towns.

In 2004, Poland joined the European Union, which gave local authorities the possibility to obtain assistance funds, which are still being used extensively to catch up on development gaps as well as improve the existing infrastructure. With the help of the EU funds, small towns are undertaking actions to renovate their central zones degraded through years of neglect under the former system, to restore their position and function, and to create new public spaces, as the role of public space is evidently gaining importance in the 21st century (i.e. it is increasingly perceived as common good important for the quality of life of local communities as well as for the strengthening of place identity and attractiveness).

In the years 1989–2011, the number of small towns – which constitute a significant element in Poland's settlement network – increased by 87. To some extent, it was the result of their inhabitants' aspirations and expectations. The settlements aspiring to the urban status included both those that had been towns in the past but lost municipal status as a result of historical determinants, as well as those that had never enjoyed such a status (Zaniewska et al. 2011). Currently, there are over 900 cities in Poland, $\frac{1}{3}$ of those being settlements with populations under five thousand.

There is a marked asymmetry in the spatial distribution of population in Poland. The group of small towns is definitely the most numerous one (Runge 2012), which confirms the need to conduct further wide-ranging research into this topic.

The main criterion for identifying small towns is the size of population on an administratively delimited area as well as its vocational structure (employment in non-agricultural sectors of the economy).

Based on the population criterion, small towns are usually defined as numbering up to 20–25 thousand inhabitants, sometimes up to 30 thousand, or, maximally, up to 50 thousand (see, e.g., Szymańska 2007; Bagiński 1998; Gzell 1987; Czarnecki 1960). It is, however, difficult to compare a town of 5 thousand with one of 50 thousand, which is why besides the quantitative criterion researchers often take into account various qualitative criteria indicating the small-town character. They usually relate to the city as a whole, its social characteristics, or spatial features. Gzell (1987), for instance, looks at features such as the size of the urban unit, the specificity of its space, the historical spatial structure, the evolutionary character of the changes that are taking place, the clear delimitation of boundaries

and private property, the personalisation of spatial problems, and low mobility. Bagiński (1998), in contrast, pays more attention to social characteristics, such as neighbour interactions or the “speed” of the spreading of information (gossip, news, bombshells).

The Municipal Government Act adopted in Poland in 1990 states clearly that a city should be characterised by specified social and technical infrastructure, urban structure, and type of buildings. It is then important to carry out a thorough analysis of the type of development and the spatial-functional structure of particular settlement units (the concentration of trade, the industry, the compactness of the built-up area, the technical infrastructure density) as well as of their administrative status (town charter) (*Ustawa o samorządzie gminnym...* 1990; Marszał 2012).

A small town should perform the function of the local development entity. To make it possible, it is necessary to take actions that would help solve a number of problems of strategic importance (Kozłowski et al. 2009), including these oriented towards:

- increasing the economic competitiveness (creating stable jobs, raising income levels and the quality of life of the local community, creating favourable conditions for investment);
- developing social capital;
- enhancing the attractiveness of urban space through, among other things, extensive revitalisation processes (Brandenburg 2003).

9.3. The determinants of revitalization

Endogenous factors

Revitalisation is a complex, interdisciplinary concept embracing not only the form of the city, but also the entirety of its functioning. It should be considered without leaving out any of its dimensions relating to space, environment, social life, and economic development. The main focus is on remedying the crisis situation in degraded city zones where various social, economic, functional, and spatial problems have accumulated. The purpose of revitalisation is to improve the quality of the inhabitants’ life and the state of the environment (both natural and cultural), revive the economy, and restore the spatial order and social ties (Mazur 2006). These various elements of revitalisation are interrelated – economic growth helps create the spatial order, and rational, people-friendly spatial development strengthens the competitiveness of the place, thus boosting the development processes. Similar dependency occurs between space organisation and the social dimension (Kozłowski et al. 2009). After the system change in Poland in the year 1990, local governments were increasingly being endowed with powers, which

enabled them to actually manage their territories. Local authorities have not always been able to make proper use of their powers, which is partly the heritage of several decades of the centrally-planned economy, which not only destroyed the legal and organisational structures of small towns, but also adversely affected the mentality of the community, weakening the sense of responsibility for the surrounding space and impeding the assimilation of new forms of management (Rabsztyn 2006).

The major endogenous factors conditioning the revitalisation of small towns include:

- needs, values, and aspirations of the inhabitants, their attitudes to the surrounding space, and their willingness to actively participate in changing it;
- priority attached to issues connected with the spatial order in local policy of the city;
- effective supervision over the execution of the building law and the requirements concerning the cultural environment and historical heritage;
- the quality of leadership, organisational abilities, and the engagement of local leaders (authorities, local businesspeople, individuals) in revitalisation;
- importance attributed in the city to revitalisation;
- constant improvement of local authority members' qualifications;
- educational activities for local communities for the purpose of raising their awareness of local matters;
- creating an atmosphere favourable to mobilising the inhabitants to support local initiatives and investments;
- creating mechanisms to finance the improvement of space quality, and to conduct business activity on the private–public partnership basis;
- effective regulation of real property's legal status;
- developing consistent long-term city development programmes which would take broad political and social perspectives, and restraining particular interests of individuals and groups for the benefit of common strategic goals;
- a harmonious cooperation between the town and its hinterland – especially in urban-rural communes it is important to replace fierce competition for funds from municipal budget with collaboration strengthening the competitive position of the whole commune, also through urban space revitalisation;
- the capability for conceptual cooperation with external entities (institutions, social organisations, universities, experts, etc.) with the purpose of working out optimal (for a given settlement unit) development solutions, and giving support to non-governmental organisations, whose activity can mobilise the inhabitants to become involved in revitalisation processes;
- the identification of local strengths and assets and promoting them externally, exploitation of the growth potential existing in the urban structure, stressing the cultural assets and friendly living environment in the town.

Factors that impede revitalisation of degraded areas in small towns include (Kozłowski et al. 2009):

- out-migration of the population;
- population ‘ageing’;
- strong dependence on external factors and a weaker (than in large cities) capacity to lobby for outside support;
- a limited pool of local professional expertise to support the development of rational spatial solutions;
- a strong impact of the majority of investments made by outside business entities on local development and environment;
- mono-functional character of the economy of many small towns in Poland, largely based on agricultural activity and agriculture-related services;
- the lack of solid knowledge of the value, heritage, and technical state of the urban fabric.

Formal and financial determinants

Poland’s accession to the European Union was a key factor behind increased interest in the topic of revitalisation. The possibility to obtain EU funding became the major motive driving local governments to consider revitalisation activities. Municipalities were undertaking projects that did not quite fall within the definition of revitalisation.

In order to meet the requirements necessary to obtain EU funds, local authorities willing to be the beneficiaries had to prepare local revitalisation programmes. At first, such programmes were regarded only as a necessary annex to the application for revitalisation funding. Revitalisation programmes were designed by external specialist companies, with a very limited participation of local authorities and without taking account of specific local conditions. In addition, such programmes did not:

- provide an accurate diagnosis that would confirm the need to concentrate revitalisation activities in the indicated area; some of the cities (especially the small ones) developed city-wide revitalisation programmes for the sake of political correctness;
- present an integrated approach to revitalisation, as they mostly included only projects for infrastructural improvements;
- engage local communities in revitalisation processes.

In the period of 2004–2013, local governments were mainly interested in infrastructural undertakings, without combining them with social and economic projects, which did not solve actual problems of crisis areas. For instance, the created infrastructure in the form of, e.g., public places did not find users. Plans and

projects were not consulted with local communities, although they are supposed to have real influence on such projects. The institutions that manage EU funds did not verify the provisions of local revitalisation programmes – these were only checked off on the list of documents necessary when applying for support funds.

The above-described problems, faced by Poland in the first years of the implementation of EU-supported revitalisation programmes, led to the tightening of the support-granting procedure in the following years. In the new EU programming period of 2014–2020, the conditions to be met by local authorities applying for revitalisation funding were much stricter. First of all, the Managing Institutions conduct a qualitative verification of revitalisation programmes and decide if they qualify as basis for applying for EU support.

As of 2015, three official documents constitute the formal basis of revitalisation in Poland:

- *Guidelines on revitalisation in operational programmes for years 2014–2020*, which is binding for all beneficiaries of EU funds;
- *National Urban Policy*, which devotes much attention to revitalisation and social participation as important elements of urban development policy;
- *Revitalisation Act*, which was long awaited, especially by practitioners (for more information, see: Masierek 2013), which:
 - provides a legal framework;
 - provides a conceptual framework for revitalisation as well as clarifies the terminology;
 - establishes the procedure for developing and adopting revitalisation programmes;
 - is designed to mobilise local governments to undertake revitalisation;
 - places emphasis on the good planning of this process (including a thorough, reliable diagnosis);
 - imposes the requirement of mobilising community participation at each stage of the planning and implementation of this process, as well as the requirement of active engagement of the stakeholders;
 - defines the instruments that can be used to support the implementation phase.

The governments which want to be granted EU funding must now devote much more time to developing revitalisation programmes. A thorough analysis carried out in the whole city in order to identify areas of accumulation of social, economic, functional, spatial, and environmental problems as well as their causes should provide a basis for the preparation of a revitalisation programme. The identification of degraded areas and delimitation within them of areas for revitalisation (not exceeding 20% of the town area and 30% of the inhabitants) is quite a challenge to be met by small towns (Figure 1).

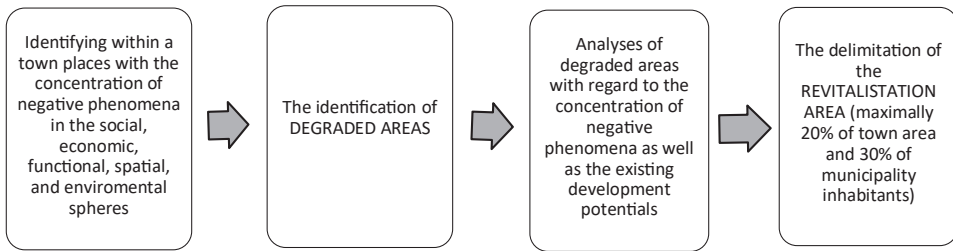


Fig. 1. The delimitation of areas for revitalization

Source: own work based on *Guidelines... 2016*

Regrettably, not all local governments are interested in identifying the weaknesses of their municipality, let alone making them public knowledge, because it is an inconvenient and politically-sensitive topic. In many small towns, the same mayor holds the office for several terms, which is why publicising difficult problems is detrimental to their image. It is then important to change this attitude and take a constructive view of the diagnostic part, i.e. to regard it as a valuable source of information for local authorities, supporting them in the making of rational decisions, also these which are not directly related to revitalisation. For areas designated for revitalisation within a town, a revitalisation programme is developed. Some municipalities have decided on the so-called municipal revitalisation programmes, based on the *Revitalisation Act*, while others take advantage of the transition period and base their programmes on *Guidelines for revitalisation in operational programmes for years 2014–2020*. In both cases, though, the revitalisation programme includes, among other things, detailed information about the problems, needs, and potentials of revitalisation areas, as well as the envisaged results after the programme implementation (Figure 2).

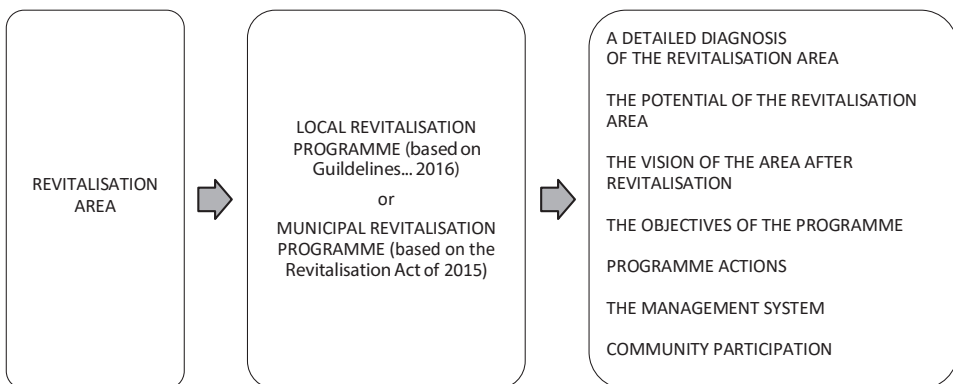


Fig. 2. The contents of revitalisation programme

Source: own work

Many local governments appoint individuals or teams responsible for revitalisation in the town, which, among other things, helps to develop local social capital. They also seek to mobilise, with varying results, community participation as well as to support the activities of local leaders and social organisations. The already adopted revitalisation programmes contain definitely more social and economic projects that are integrated with infrastructural undertakings.

9.4. Pilot projects in selected small towns

As mentioned before, in 2015, the Ministry of Development launched a useful initiative in the form of a project called *The Model Revitalisation of Cities*. It is designed to support local authorities in a proper preparation of revitalisation as well as to spread good practices in this respect. To qualify for funding within the framework of this project, municipalities had to undergo a strict competition procedure. Namely, 240 municipalities from all over Poland entered the competition, which indicates a considerable interest in this topic. The initial selection left 57 municipalities, out of which 20 (including small towns) were finally chosen for financial support and the so-called pilot revitalisation. The selected municipalities collaborated with experts to prepare their own strategic documents and work out innovative ways of finding solutions to diagnosed problems as well as local instruments effective in the implementation process. The pilot projects are designed to disseminate knowledge of revitalisation issues and to provide help in developing good programmes as well as to share experience and good practices with other municipalities having similar problems or determinants (Masierek 2017).

The thematic scope of the pilot projects in the selected 20 municipalities (urban-rural, urban, small, medium-sized, and large cities) covers issues essential for the effective implementation of revitalisation activities. These issues fall within study areas in which further research is needed to provide assistance in this process (Jadach-Sepiolo et al. 2018). The themes include the following:

- the financing of revitalisation activities;
- social policy and labour market;
- social participation;
- housing;
- urban space development;
- environmental protection;
- the economic revival and enhancement of investment attractiveness;
- urban mobility in degraded areas;
- the protection of cultural and natural heritage as well as the utilisation of their potential.

Also significant is finding ways of making city centres attractive to the inhabitants so that they can show willingness to live there, spend their free time,

make use of the trade offer and services provided there, and establish their own businesses in central zones. In many cities, central areas are visibly becoming deserted in social and economic terms. Therefore, what can be done to induce the people of the technological era to come to city centres? What can central urban zones offer that cannot be obtained when staying at home and using the Internet and smartphones? Each city must find its own ways of enhancing the attractiveness of its centre and adapting it to new (perhaps different than before) demands of the local community. It seems useful to resort in the programming process to the classic ideas based on compact area, human scale, and unique profile (Hospers 2017).

Equally important is changing the attitude to social participation. The ideas, programmes, plans, and concepts of transformations, especially those concerning space, should be developed by local governments in cooperation with local communities (Stouten, Rosenboom 2013). This should aid the implementation of changes that will be approved by the inhabitants and will make them more inclined to take care of the common space.

For the purposes of this article, an analysis was carried out of the revitalisation programmes and actions of some of the municipalities that have passed the selection procedure and in the period of 2015–2019 used the obtained funding to develop and implement their pilot programmes under *The Model Revitalisation of Cities*. The analysis helps to illustrate how the revitalisation objectives adopted in 2015 were actually realised in practice as well as it allows the formulation of additional conclusions. The analysis covers the revitalisation programmes of the municipalities of Dobiegniew, Grajewo, Hrubieszów, Milicz, and Opole Lubelskie, as well as the projects that they implemented. The financial support that they received in the form of grants ranged from 0.57 to 2.67 million PLN (Table 1).

In all the towns covered by the analysis, degraded areas were identified, and those for revitalisation were delimited on the basis of detailed spatial analyses which indicated concentrations of negative phenomena in social, functional, spatial, economic, technical, and environmental spheres. The choice of indicators and the studied negative phenomena point to the problems occurring in those towns, especially in their degraded areas. They are largely connected with depopulation of cities, the ageing of the society, poverty, crime, the technical degradation of housing and the environment, and the inadequacy of the infrastructure and public places to present the needs of the inhabitants (Masierek 2017). Grajewo and Opole Lubelskie decided to prepare municipal revitalisation programmes (under the *Revitalisation Act* of 2015), while Dobiegniew, Milicz, and Hrubieszów decided on the Local Revitalisation Programme (under *Guidelines...* 2016). The municipalities participating in *The Model Revitalisation of Cities* prepared, besides the revitalisation basis, various studies and pilot projects designed to aid the effective implementation of the programmes (Table 2).

Table 1. Pilot projects implemented by the studied small towns

No.	Municipality	The name of the implemented project under <i>The Model Revitalisation of Cities</i>	Funding [in million PLN]
1.	Dobiegniew	“Dobiegniew – I want to live and work here”	1,7
2.	Grajewo	“The revitalisation of the centre of Grajewo”	1,17
3.	Hrubieszów	“The revitalisation of the centre of Hrubieszów – a chance for the elimination of crisis phenomena plus the socio-economic revival of the town”	2,67
4.	Milicz	“The revival of Milicz – the multidimensional programme of town revitalisation”	0,57
5.	Opole Lubelskie	“Opole Lubelskie – to touch and taste. The preparation of Opole Lubelskie for the socio-economic revitalisation of degraded areas”	1,39

Source: own work based on <http://www.popt.gov.pl/strony/o-programie/wydarzenia/konkurs-dla-samorzadow-modelowa-rewitalizacja-miast/> (accessed: 20.10.2017).

Table 2. Activities of the analysed municipalities undertaken within *The Model Revitalisation of Cities*

MUNICIPALTY	Activities undertaken within <i>The Model Revitalisation of Cities</i>
Grajewo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Municipal Revitalisation Programme for the City of Grajewo for 2017–2027; – expert opinions on, and inventories of, the technical state of 12 buildings; – thermal modernisation projects for 16 municipal buildings; – building project for the vicinity of Plac Niepodległości; – urban planning and architecture concept for part of the revitalisation area (0.64 ha); – educational and animation activities in the Nowa Droga Social Centre; – the development and implementation of the Local Initiatives model; – the Young Entrepreneur Academy project with pilot activities for primary and secondary schools; – working out solutions for optimising rent policy in the revitalisation area; – study visits of government officials for learning about other cities’ good practices.

Table 2. (cd.)

Opole Lubelskie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Municipal Revitalisation Programme for the Opole Lubelskie Municipality for 2017–2024; – a detailed analysis and the development of an investment offer for the revitalisation area in cooperation with private entities; – developing a plan to attract and keep investors in the revitalisation area; – working out a concept with the aim of developing enterprises operating in the revitalisation area.
Dobiegiew	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Local Revitalisation Programme for the Dobiegiew Municipality until 2023; – developing the site of the former State Agricultural Farm in the city centre; – adjusting a burnt-down arsenal for the Local Activation Centre; – the Social Assistance Centre; – enhancing the economic attractiveness in cooperation with local entrepreneurs; – activities oriented towards, and benefiting, disadvantaged groups.
Milicz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Local Revitalisation Programme for the Milicz Municipality for 2016–2023; – the concept of developing the market square in Milicz; – an architectural competition to create in the city centre a space enabling social and vocational integration; – the improvement of neighbourhood spaces (micro-grants); – local initiatives; – workshops and events for the inhabitants; – the concept of putting the buildings in central zone into an effective use.
Hrubieszów	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Local Revitalisation Programme for the City of Hrubieszów for 2017–2023; – the examination and inventory of underground spaces in the central part of Hrubieszów; – the methodology for preparing an analysis of the legal state of real estate based on the example of the Sutki complex in Hrubieszów.

Source: own work based on <http://rewitalizacja.grajewo.pl/modelowa-rewitalizacja-miast/>; <https://www.funduszeuropejskie.gov.pl/strony/o-funduszach/rewitalizacja/modelowa-rewitalizacja/dobiegiew/>; <https://www.funduszeuropejskie.gov.pl/strony/o-funduszach/rewitalizacja/modelowa-rewitalizacja/milicz/>; <http://hrubieszow.sm32.eu/projekt/dokumentacje-ekspertyzy-analazy>; <https://www.funduszeuropejskie.gov.pl/strony/o-funduszach/rewitalizacja/modelowa-rewitalizacja/opole-lubelskie/>

Milicz adopted a revitalisation programme in 2016, Opole Lubelskie and Hrubieszów did this in 2017, and Dobiegniew and Grajewo – in 2018. The actions undertaken as part of *The Model Revitalisation of Cities* clearly indicate the tendency to prepare specific investments. There are also activities connected with the need to stimulate economic development and engage the private sector in the revitalisation. In order to encourage social participation, municipalities try to mobilise micro-grants and local initiatives, which enable local communities to carry out small projects which respond to their needs in a direct way (Table 2). The analysis of actions taken by municipalities to identify degraded areas, diagnose problems, and designate areas for revitalisation, as well as of their revitalisation programmes and undertaken revitalisation activities has revealed that, apart from typical problems connected with the preparation of this process – such as obtaining data for diagnostic work or problems with social participation, which are not related to the size of the settlement unit – there are also those resulting from poor adjustment of the revitalisation to the specific character of the municipalities which comprise rural areas as well (for more on this topic, see: Dej, Sykała 2018; *Raport o stanie polskich miast...* 2019). It is one of the topics worth studying in further research.

9.5. Conclusion

The demanding requirements that the beneficiaries of the EU revitalisation funding have to satisfy in the programming period of 2014–2020 are intended to raise local authorities' awareness of issues in this difficult sphere, as well as to improve the effectiveness of the undertaken activities. The tightening of the requirements – designed to force local governments to do solid revitalisation planning, mobilise community participation, and carry out integrated, comprehensive actions – was partly due to the not always positive assessment of the outcomes of the so-called revitalisation activities carried out in the first decade after Poland's accession to the European Union.

In the case of small towns, the new, more stringent requirements are a real challenge, as they demand a radical change of attitude, acquiring the necessary knowledge, and a novel organisation of revitalisation activities. Small towns often lack the necessary financial and human resources to meet this challenge effectively. This is compounded by more general problems, such as the outflow of young, ambitious people to larger cities – driven by seeking better future – as well as the ageing of the society.

Nevertheless, revitalisation processes undertaken in small towns provide a chance for the authorities to solve difficult problems and establish constructive dialogue with local communities. However, in order to achieve this goal, revitalisation activities should be:

- consistent and complementary, both at the local and the regional levels (Mazur-Belzyt 2018);
- suited to actual needs and endogenous features;
- based on solid foundations in the form of a thorough diagnosis and the identification of actual problem areas;
- based on utilising the various potentials of a given settlement unit, including its material and non-material heritage;
- integrated with housing policy;
- based on cooperation with local communities for the purpose of making use of their potential, enthusiasm, and initiative as well as meeting their actual needs in both infrastructural and social projects;
- oriented towards cooperation with the private sector (local business people, investors);
- based on good examples realised in other, similar towns.

The future of small towns largely depends on effective management. Local governments should be assisted in developing their human resources in order to be able to design their own revitalisation projects and implement them successfully. In particular, the central government should provide support (in financial, legal, and organisational terms) to small towns embarking on the difficult process of revitalisation. It is also necessary to undertake further research on the effectiveness of the revitalisation processes being implemented in small towns with regard to both the impact on their future development as well as the actual elimination or mitigation of the diagnosed social, economic, spatial, functional, and environmental problems.

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