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THE POTENTIAL OF CULTURAL HERITAGE OF NATIONAL MINORITIES IN SMALL TOWNS – THE CASE OF BRZEZINY

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ABSTRACT: Small towns are understood here as settlements with municipal rights having up to 20,000 inhabitants. In Łódź Voivodeship (a unit of Poland's administrative division) there are 28 such settlements inhabited by almost 210,000 people. The aim of the study is to analyse the potential of the heritage of national minorities in the towns of Łódź Voivodeship. The town of Brzeziny was selected for the study as national minorities played a prominent role in its land development in the past.

KEYWORDS: towns, cultural heritage, national minorities, Brzeziny.

POTENCJAŁ DZIEDZICTWA KULTUROWEGO MNIEJSZOŚCI NARODOWYCH W MAŁYCH MIASTACH – PRZYKŁAD BRZEZIN

ZARYS TREŚCI: Małe miasta rozumiane są jako ośrodki posiadające prawa miejskie i liczące do 20 tys. mieszkańców. W województwie łódzkim funkcjonuje 28 takich ośrodków, zamieszkałych przez niespełna 210 tys. osób. Celem podjętych rozważań jest analiza potencjału dziedzictwa mniejszości narodowych w małych miastach regionu łódzkiego. Jako szczegółowy przykład rozważań wybrano Brzeziny, w których w przeszłości mniejszości narodowe odgrywały niezwykle istotną rolę w rozwoju przestrzennym.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: małe miasta, dziedzictwo kulturowe, mniejszości narodowe, Brzeziny.

6.1. Introduction

In recent years there has been an increased interest in the history and cultures of national minorities in Poland. Minorities directly relate to multiculturalism understood as co-existence on a given level by communities of different cultures, habits, traditions, religions, languages, or value systems. As M. Barwiński (2015) pointed out, multiculturalism is most often a result of migration (by choice or coercion), political and economic integration processes, as well as all kinds of organized settlement processes, changing of borders, territorial expansions by countries, colonization, and political and economic transformations.

The subject matter of this study is the cultural heritage of national minorities in towns. A town is defined in academic literature as a settlement with municipal rights and up to 20,000 people (Bartosiewicz 2014; Kobojeck, Marszał 2014). The issue of towns, though not discussed for several years, has been included in the research of geographers, economists, and sociologists since the revival of local self-governance. There is a number of works to be found in professional literature on the cultural heritage of local towns, e.g. by M. Czepczyński (2005/2006), T. Figlus (2011), M. Kowalski, S. Wiśniewski (2013), M. Kulesza, A. Rykała (2005/2006), *etc.*

From among the towns of Łódź Province (Fig. 1), the author has selected one for an in-depth analysis. Brzeziny was chosen where in the past national minorities played a prominent role in land development.

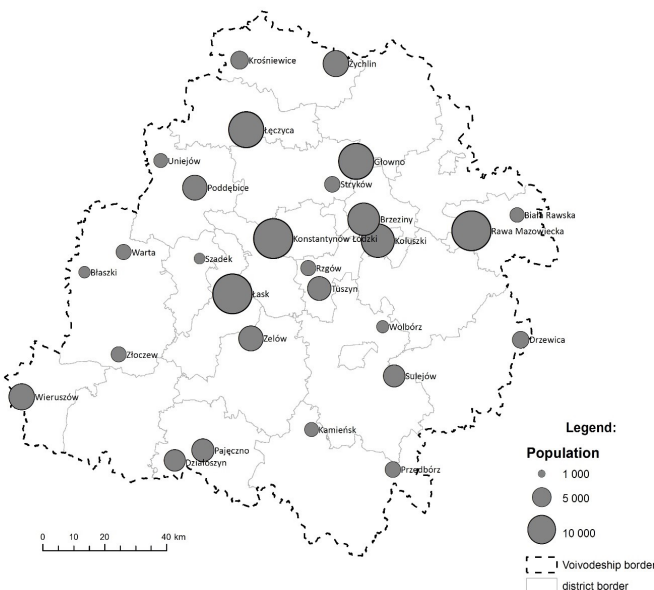


Figure 1. The number of inhabitants in towns of Łódź Province in 2014

Source: developed by the author based on data from the Central Statistical Office of Poland.

The aim of the study is to analyse the potential of cultural heritage of national minorities of the town of Brzeziny. To achieve this, the author examined this heritage and analysed land development and strategic documents directly referring to the case at hand including, among others, *The 2014–2020 strategy for the promotion of Brzeziny* (2014), *The study of the conditions and trends of land development in Brzeziny* (1999–2000), *The 2014–2020 strategy for the development of Brzeziny* (2014), etc.

6.2. Cultural heritage – terminological considerations

In recent years, the term „cultural heritage” has become very popular and is consistently replacing the classic notion of a historical monument. As J. Purchla (2013) aptly noticed, monuments are a thing of the past, whereas heritage serves present purposes and apart from material products of culture it also encompasses memory and identity. It has to be emphasised that heritage belongs to everyone and access to it is one of the fundamental human rights. It is not only the object of protection, but also a potential that ought to be used for future development of a given area.

One of the most commonly used definitions of cultural heritage is the one proposed by UNESCO. According to the *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, cultural heritage consists:

- „monuments: architectural works, works of monumental sculpture and painting, elements or structures of an archaeological nature, inscriptions, cave dwellings and combinations of features, which are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science;
- groups of buildings: groups of separate or connected buildings which, because of their architecture, their homogeneity or their place in the landscape, are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science;
- sites: works of man or the combined works of nature and man, and areas including archaeological sites which are of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view”.

What is important, heritage encompasses both material and non-material elements and its value is determined by the degree of its authenticity. Social awareness of the importance of heritage is also vital because it influences people’s awareness of heritage and to what extent they identify with it (Kronenberg 2012).

In accordance with Art. 3 of the *Act on monuments protection*, a monument is „a property or a moveable asset, their elements or groups, which are the works of man or relate to human activity and constitute a testimony of a past time or event and their conservation lies in social interest due historical, artistic, or scientific value”. Furthermore, the forms of heritage protection include: entry into the registry of monuments, granting the official status of a historical monument, creation of cultural park, and granting protection in a local land use plan.

Local land-use plans are binding documents directly relating to cultural heritage on a local level. Their provisions guarantee legal protection of monuments; however they do not provide sufficient protection because of the size of the units they are usually drawn up for (Szmygin 2011).

According to the *Act on monuments protection*, *communes* (low-level units of Polish administrative division) are obliged to draw up the so-called „communal registries of monuments”, yet few decide to prepare programmes for their conservation.

The number of entries in the register of monuments of Łódź Province reveals a rising trend. All structures entered into the register based on the Act may be granted funding for renovation or conservation.

As noted by M. Murzyn-Kupisz (2013), cultural heritage affects development processes at several levels (Fig. 2). Among the most significant effects cultural heritage exerts are economic effects. Elements of heritage may directly contribute to generating income on a given territory (e.g. for the sale of tickets). Preservation and accessibility of heritage makes it possible to create new jobs. Heritage may be seen not only as a certain source of historical, material or non-material values, but also as a product having various characteristics of different quality and usefulness for the society (Broński 2013).

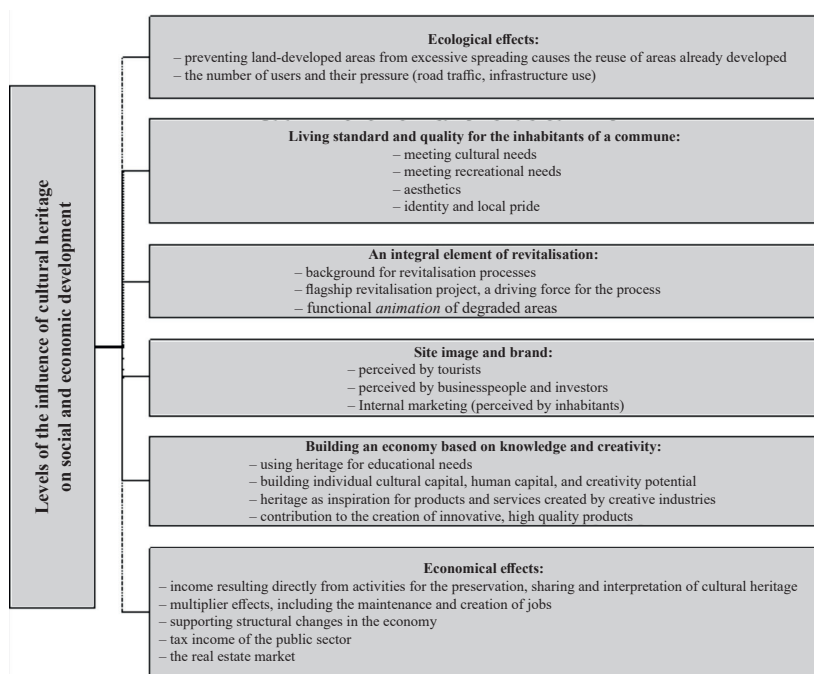


Figure 2. Potential levels of the influence of cultural heritage on social and economic development

Source: own work based on M. Murzyn-Kupisz (2013).

The scale of influence of individual objects rests mostly on their geographical position and the accessibility of a given site, the scale and brand of the object, and the size of the city, town, or village of the object. The attitudes of local communities towards heritage are also very important together with the awareness of its value and commercial potential, business skills, and the size of internal capital (Murzyn-Kupisz 2013).

An important level of heritage's influence is also the standard and quality of life on a given territory. Heritage helps fulfil the cultural and recreational needs of inhabitants and the general satisfaction given by the place of living. Cultural heritage often sparks collaboration and integration around a common goal. Cultural heritage sites are large social capital resources and they can also foster the development of the creative industry (Murzyn-Kupisz 2013).

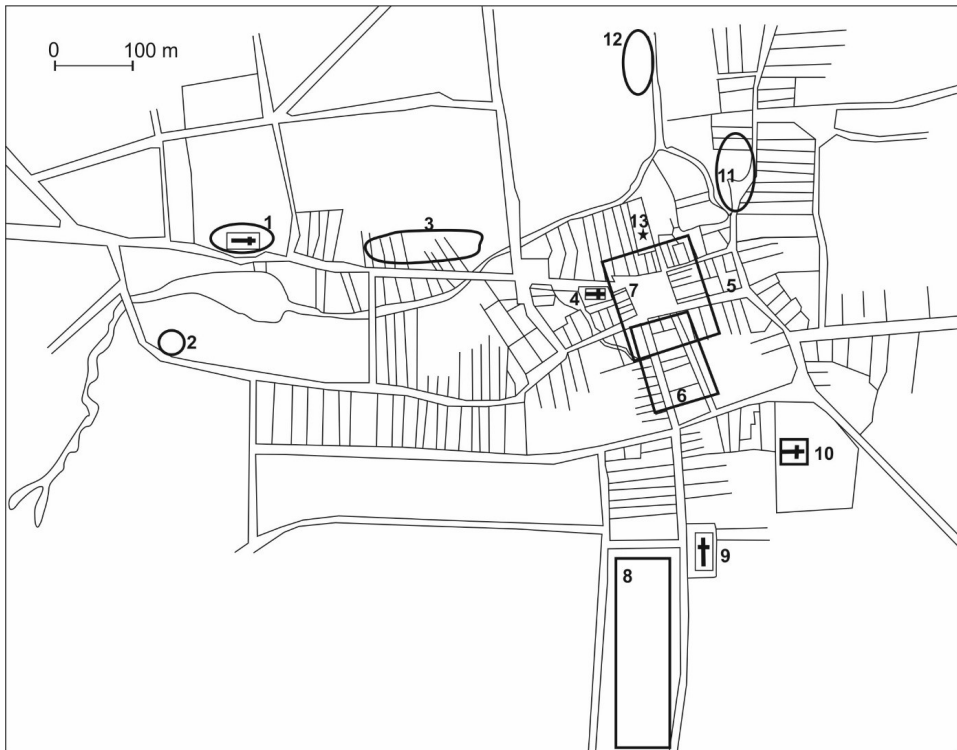
Heritage is usually an integral element of revitalisation processes, e.g. as an inspiration and background for them (Murzyn-Kupisz 2013). Revitalization is an attempt to overcome a crisis and includes a range of actions based on active cooperation between the public sector and the local community (Figlus 2011). According to S. Kaczmarek (2001), revitalization is a process of change of the functional and land-use structure of territories which, as a result of various circumstances, have undergone a serious crisis and are not able to maintain their former function. It is therefore necessary to equip such an area with new functions, different from the former ones, by means of planned and coordinated investment actions.

To summarize, it is worth emphasising the pivotal role of cultural heritage understood as the relations between the past and the present and between nature, people, and different cultures. Heritage is also a matter of choice and acceptance by those that inherit it. Heritage is not everything that is left by previous generations, but what those that inherit it want to accept and take responsibility for (Broński 2006). Additionally, in a democratic system, the task of protecting heritage is performed by public authorities of different levels, conservation authorities, foundations, non-governmental organizations, companies, and private individuals. What is important, local governments are essential cells, even indispensable elements necessary for the proper functioning of a heritage protection system (Zamoyski 2011).

6.3. The role of minorities in land development of Brzeziny

The present-day layout and buildings of the town are the outcome of the long-lasting process of its development (Fig. 3). The known history of Brzeziny started in early Medieval times, but first confirmed records about the town date back to the year 1139 and referred to a contemporary parish. The foundation charter did not survive, but historians assume that it occurred at the end of the 13th century.

In the 13th and 14th centuries, Brzeziny became a castellany (a contemporary administrative unit) and a significant trade centre (Nowak, Rosin, Wiklak 1997; Herman 2014). At the start of the 14th century, the town already had a distinct layout of a town settlement built based on a foundation charter. Brzeziny had a trapezoid-shaped market square with 8 streets leading to it, including Żydowska Street (Jewish Street) (Kowalski, Ror-Maziarz, Bartosiewicz 2011; Herman 2014).



1 – the Church of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (12th c.), 2 – the Town (circa 12th c.), 3 – Likely location of a trade settlement, 4 – the Church of the Holy Spirit (15th c.), 5 – the market, 6 – the Old Town, 7 – the foundation charter town, 8 – the New Town (16th c.), 9 – St. Anna's Church, 10 – the monastery of Reformed Franciscans, 11 – Górki suburbs (14th c.), 12 – Szydłowiec – a town set-up on location privileges (1524), 13 – a synagogue (18th c.)

Figure 3. Location of the synagogue against relicts of the original settlement on the territory of contemporary Brzeziny

Source: own work based on M. Kulesza (2001), M. Kowalski, P. Ror-Maziarz, B. Bartosiewicz (2011).

National minorities played a prominent role in Brzeziny's development. Among the nations arriving to the town throughout the centuries were Jews and Germans, among others. The development of Brzeziny was particularly fostered by the town's location at important trade routes connecting the provinces of

Wielkopolska and Pomorze with Mazowsze, and Podlasie, Rus and Lithuania with Małopolska. In the 15th century, the town was ruled by the Lasocki family, who were the owners of Brzeziny for over 300 years. A humble settlement evolved to become a thriving economic and cultural hub at the beginning of the 16th century. Since the onset of the 16th to the end of the 19th century Brzeziny were also a well-known place for the brewing, cloth, and tailoring industries (Adamczewski et al. 1997).

The oldest references about Jews inhabiting the town came from 1550. They settled in the vicinity of Żydowska Street (Jewish Street) presently named Berek Joselewicz Street. At the end of 18th century Brzeziny was inhabited by around 250 Jews (24% of the population). In 1764, there was a first census of Jews living in the town. They constituted 10.5% of the town's population. Because there was no synagogue, religious ceremonies were practised at homes. By the 19th century Jews had their own organized religious community (Żerek-Kleszcz 1997) (Photo 1–2).



Photo 1. A Jewish cemetery in Brzeziny

Source: photo by K. Leśniewska.



Photo 2. A commemorative plaque at the Jewish cemetery in Brzeziny

Source: photo by K. Leśniewska.

In the first half of the 17th century, Scottish emigrants came to settle in Brzeziny. They ran 3 breweries in Brzeziny. Scots mainly traded for a living. The Scottish emigrants were mainly Catholics. In the second half of the 17th century, typical Scottish family names began to disappear, which could have been a sign of their assimilation (Żerek-Kleszcz 1997).

In 1793, the town lied within the Prussian partition, from 1807 within the Dutchy of Warsaw, and within the Kingdom of Poland since 1815. In the last mentioned period, Izabela Ogińska (family name: Lasocka), the contemporary

owner of Brzeziny, funded a district called Lasocin for German settlers. By doing so she wanted to encourage German craftsmen to come to the town, because they knew the technology of cloth manufacture very well. In 1816, she awarded land to Evangelists so that they could start a cemetery. In 1826, an Evangelical parish was started and three years later a temple was erected (Photo 3). In 1826, the town's owner presented the Evangelists in Brzeziny with a building for a school (Kneifel, Richter 2010).



Photo 3. A former parish house in Brzeziny

Source: photo by K. Leśniewska.

In 1816, next to the parish cemetery in Brzeziny the first Evangelical cemetery was founded. It was made in accordance with an act granting land and rights to German settlers. In 1827, the Evangelical community purchased land in the north-western part of the town for another cemetery (Adamczewski et al. 1997). Tombstones with partly blurred inscriptions have survived until today (Photo 4–5).



Photo 4. Evangelical cemetery

Source: photo by K. Leśniewska

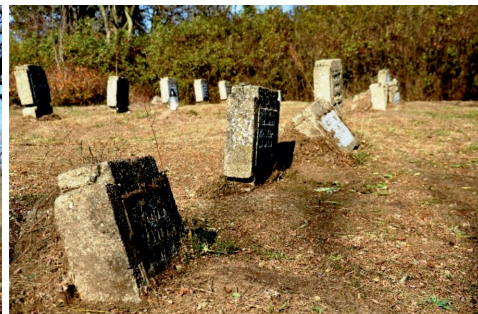


Photo 5. Graves of German soldiers who perished during World War I

Source: photo by K. Leśniewska

During the First World War a bloody battle was fought in the vicinity of the town as a result of which the Russian Army was forced to withdraw. The lasting fights devastated Brzeziny's buildings and the front line cut off export routes for goods manufactured in Brzeziny. In World War I, the Evangelical parish house served as a hospital. The Evangelical church on the other hand was destroyed by Russians, who used it for accommodation (Kneifel, Richter 2010).

In the 20 years of the interwar period, Brzeziny was still considered to be the „tailoring capital”. According to a 1931 census the number of people living in Brzeziny amounted to 13,000, where 52% were Jews, and less than 2% were German Evangelists. After the transformation of Łódź into a textile industry centre, German tailoring in Brzeziny began to slowly decline not being able to withstand the competition (Wachowska 1997).

The period of the Second World War and German occupation completed the social and economic downfall. Brzeziny was bombarded, its residents were devoid of their workshops, and people of Jewish origin (making up half of the pre-war population) were displaced by force and transported to the Łódź Ghetto or the death camp in Chełmno nad Nerem. Set-up in May of 1941, the ghetto consisted around 6,000 people. It was closed in the May of 1942. After World War II finished, the clothing industry started to slowly revive (Jabłoński 1997ab).

After 1945, Evangelical structures and the cemetery in particular began to deteriorate. Its walls were gradually taken down by local residents, who used the material to erect utility buildings. In the second half of the 19th century, Brzeziny was dominated by the Jewish community and tailoring was thriving. Masculine apparel was mainly manufactured and it was exported chiefly to the East.

The urban layout shaped by history takes up nearly the entire central part of the present administrative area, where there are also small clusters of houses mainly along outbound roads radiating in all directions. The remaining part of the town is an open space – mainly farming land and not particularly large forests (*Studium...* 1999–2000). The main cluster of the Jewish-influenced urban layout takes almost the whole centre of the present-day town and it consists mainly one-floor tenement houses. In the town urban arrangement there are both, tight clusters of buildings as well as single constructions (Stępniak 2009).

In Brzeziny many structures such as the synagogue have not survived because of the actions of the occupier in WWII. Due to the war destruction numerous brick buildings were demolished, e.g. in Staszica and Traugutta streets and Jan Paweł II square.

It is worth-mentioning that Jews were often not merely the residents of Brzeziny but they shaped urban space as investors. They initiated the direction for the development of urban space (Liszewski 1991).

6.4. The heritage of national minorities in the light of strategic and land-use plans of Brzeziny

The Act on the local government of communes specifies that the tasks of communes include, e.g. the obligation to fulfil social needs in terms of culture, protection, and taking care of monuments. On the other hand, the Act on monument protection imposes tasks on communes like the duty to protect monuments and care of monuments.

The issue of cultural heritage is part of the *The 2014–2020 strategy for the promotion of Brzeziny*. It outlines the town's vision in the following way: „in 2020, Brzeziny will be a modern, intelligent, independent town conscious of its identity and historical and cultural worth”, whereas Brzeziny's mission is described as „using the geographical position and the historical and cultural potential for creating a town friendly to its residents, tourists, and investors”. As depicted by the vision and the mission, historical and cultural values and their potential and, what follows, also the cultural heritage of cultural minorities are of great importance for the town's authorities. Additionally, operational aims include „the creation of an integrated and unique tourist offer based on the heritage of the region” (*Strategia rozwoju...*).

Furthermore, the Strategy for the promotion of the town in 2014–2020 assumes to accomplish the aim of „promoting the unique and integrated tourist offer resting on the town's heritage”. According to the authors of the document Brzeziny hold a large potential for developing tourism using its rich historical and cultural heritage. Additionally, the Strategy proposes to use the tourist potential under the project of „five cultures” of Polish, German, Russian, Jewish, and Scottish inhabitants (*Strategia promocji...*).

The programme for monument protection specifies the aims and directions of actions and tasks that ought to be undertaken in particular by the authorities and public administrative units in order to protect and preserve monuments. The monument protection programme is a supplementary document for other acts on planning developed by units of the local government (Dobosz 2011).

The authors of the commune programme for the protection of the monuments in Brzeziny aptly pointed that cemeteries in Brzeziny are material traces of the multiculturalism of the people living in the town, who were the followers of Roman Catholicism, the Orthodox Church, Evangelism, and Judaism. The areas of the cemeteries or their relics ought to be protected so that the memory about them survives for future generations.

The aims of the programme directly referring to the cultural heritage are:

- consistent and planned fulfilment of the tasks lying within local government's tasks in terms of protection of monuments as a validation of the meaning of cultural heritage for the town's development,

- exposing the monuments and the values of the cultural landscape,
- integrated protection of cultural and nature's heritage and the landscape as well as establishing adequate rules for land-development,
- creation of the town's image and identity of residents, supporting local activities that aim to respect cultural heritage,
- open education in terms of cultural heritage,
- regulating the formal and legal objects and historical areas,
- preparing owners and holders of historical objects for preservation of the monuments by means of EU's structural funds (*Gminny program... 2006*).

The Local Land-Use Plan of Brzeziny provides the following specifications for the conservation of the natural environment and monuments:

- full and complete protection for the town's layout is granted to areas located within the area of urban conservation (i.e. the town centre and the church complex of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross). In this area, it is not allowed to introduce significant modifications in the arrangement and shape of the layout without a detailed plan of adaptation of the whole complex in terms of individual plots containing also considerations for relations with adjoining areas and streets. Protection is given to: street and square arrangements within historical delimiting lines, historical town layout particularly protected by recording it in the registry of monuments maintained by the Provincial Monument Conservator as well as historical structures, i.e. structures with the status of traditional layout deserving preservation, and, finally, complexes of historical greenery (e.g. a cemetery),
- in areas lying within the protected zone of fundamental elements of urban layout, protection is given to elements of the design and the scale of layout. Within the zone, it is allowed to introduce modifications in the spatial arrangement with observance of the rule of integration of the elements of historical and present-day design. Within the zone, protection is given, among others, to: fundamental elements of the historical layout, the arrangements of streets and squares within historical delimiting lines, historical lines of the layout, monuments and objects taken care of by conservators (*Miejscowy plan... 2004*).

The Local Land-Use Plan of Brzeziny assumes the preservation of the existing Jewish cemetery and it permits the alteration of unused and partly obliterated cemeteries into greenery complexes (with the permission of land owner including the religious community) with preservation of existing structures of cultural and historical values. It is prohibited to erect any permanent dwellings or water intakes for living or household purposes (water intakes for the nurturing of plants). The fulfilment of land development and layout and the adaptation of existing structures ought to occur on the basis of comprehensive documentation on land rejuvenation with the preservation and, optionally, reconstruction of historically developed spatial arrangements (*Miejscowy plan... 2004*).

The assumptions of The local programme for the revitalization of the town of Brzeziny in 2014–2020 specify that the land chosen for revitalization includes about 40% of the town's area and mainly its centre. The parts for the revitalization were chosen taking into account historical, economic, and social issues. In the past, social life concentrated around these places as well as trade with buyers from other countries. It was the place of the most important municipal institutions, religious buildings, and the most important monuments. The main aim of the programme is to bring back the past splendour to the most representative and oldest areas of the town. The programme assumes, among others, the revitalization of the social fabric, modernization of the sources of heat, and the rejuvenation of the local market (*Lokalny Program...* 2014).

6.5. Conclusions

To summarize, it has to be stressed that Brzeziny is a perfect place for developing recreational and educational tourism. It can also become a place of weekend leisure and entertainment for the residents of large nearby cities. Brzeziny is an area with cultural heritage resources with a very rich history.

The town's rich multicultural heritage is an opportunity for development; however, adequate conditions for achieving it have to be created. A poor technical condition of the monuments and the decapitalization of the infrastructure in the historical town centre together with a lack of investors interested in rejuvenating the monuments all pose a range of issues including image issues (Table 1).

The present-day look of the town directly relates to historical circumstances and conditions. The possibility for Jews to settle in the town has considerably fostered its land-development processes and the development of its economy. The multicultural past was to a large extent destroyed during World War II, but the city retained its unique character, which reflects the traditions of the region's religions.

The potential of Brzeziny's national minorities might be utilised, e.g. by popularizing activities of the Municipal Public Library, the Municipal Cultural Centre, and the Regional Museum. Unfortunately, the issue of cultural heritage protection is literally non-existent in the public awareness. It would be worth making use of the local identity and distinctiveness in particular among the elderly.

Finally, Brzeziny is becoming increasingly friendly for its residents and attractive for tourist thanks to investments that have been done in the recent years, especially to revitalize the town areas¹.

¹ The revitalization project of the historical area of Jan Paweł II square in Brzeziny received an award in a competition for urban space development in the Province of Łódź in 2012 organized by the Łódź division of the Society of Polish Town Planners.

Table 1. SWOT analysis of the multicultural potential of Brzeziny

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – attractive location of the town – multicultural history of the town – multinational cultural heritage making it possible to consider Brzeziny as a town friendly to other nationalities – reliable analysis and knowledge of monuments – consideration of the town’s cultural heritage in the documents on cultural heritage protection and planning of the town – the work of the Regional Museum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – neglecting some historical property decreases their aesthetics and positive reception – deteriorating condition of many historical structures due to a lack of protection and financial resources for their restoration – passive promotion of the city – no reliable land-development planning – insufficient focus on the objects of heritage in terms of tourist and cultural purposes – non-aesthetical advertisements negatively affecting the historical values of the monuments – no investors willing to rejuvenate monuments and the centre – increased transit traffic going through the historical town centre
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the commune’s initiative to protect the cultural heritage – development of local initiatives – increase in state spending on monument protection – development of one-day and weekend tourism – the chance to obtain financial means from external sources – creation of tourist cultural routes going also through Brzeziny – large role of local events and festivities – support for social initiatives in terms of creating local museums and tradition chambers – setting off collaboration with foreign partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – insufficient collaboration between the units of local government and national-level authorities – one-sided perception of cultural heritage only in terms of its monument-related value – lack of community’s engagement in cultural heritage protection – insufficient promotion of the monuments

Source: own work.

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