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2. LOCAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE ROLE OF SMALL TOWNS IN SPACE ORGANISATION IN CONTEMPORARY POLAND

2.1. Introduction

In Poland, a town/city is a settlement unit distinguished by urban form, with predominance of compact settlement pattern, performing non-agricultural functions and having city rights. In urban studies, towns are usually classified on the basis of their functions, e.g. industrial towns, capital cities, port towns, metropolises etc. Another criterion for categorisation of urban settlements is population size – a commonly accepted division is into large, medium and small towns. Generally, small towns have a population up to 20 000, but some other population thresholds are mentioned in literature – quite often it is 10 000, and much more rarely above 20 000. According to GUS (Central Statistical Office) data (as of 1.01.2013), there are 688 towns with up to 20 000 inhabitants in Poland. They play an important role in space as they constitute

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75.8% of Poland's urban settlements. Small towns are settlement units that generally are stable in terms of population, economy and space (Figure 2.1). It happens relatively rarely that a small town enters a path of dynamic growth leading to economic boom. Today, small towns form a set that is highly diversified as regards their economy, functions and growth potential.

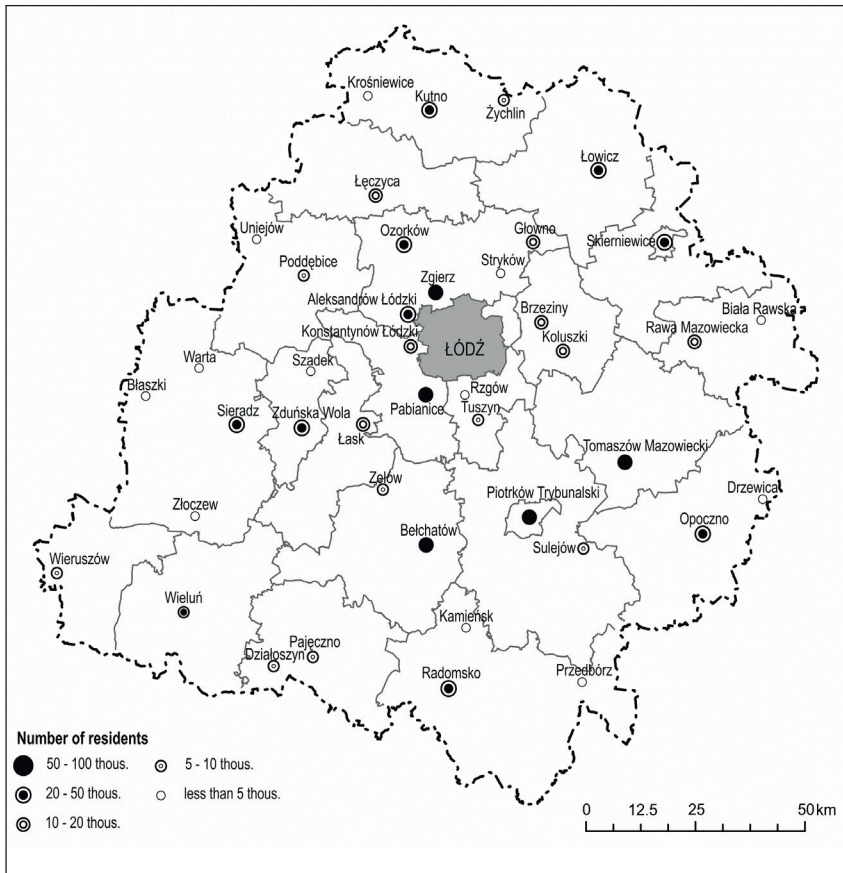


Figure 2.1. Small towns in the settlement network of Łódź Voivodship

Source: own elaboration

2.2. Local centres as the subject of research conducted by Łódź geographers before 1990

Research on local centres has been actively pursued by Łódź University geographers, especially in the last two decades, but it was originated much earlier by Ludwik Straszewicz, who laid the foundations for the development of socio-economic geography in Łódź after World War II. In the late 1950s and in the 1960s, L. Straszewicz, who headed the Department of Economic Geography of Łódź University, was engaged in research in Opole Silesia investigating issues in rural and urban settlement, and conducted comprehensive urban field studies largely for the purposes of spatial development plans. This was applied research, but was usually followed by publication of the findings. The publications produced in this way include socio-economic monographs on a number of small and medium-sized towns in the Opole region, such as Kluczbork, Gorzów Śląski and Praszka (Straszewicz 1964b, ed. 1970). Among the leading topics was analysis of local functions of small towns and their sphere of influence, measured using the method of population flows and transport connections (e.g. Liszewski 1966, 1967, Liszewski and Pączka 1971). Among the researchers working with L. Straszewicz in the Opole region were E. Dziegieć, S. Liszewski, S. Pączka and J. Dzieciuchowicz, who published studies on Głubczyce (Dziegieć et al. 1964), Nysa (Pączka and Szczygielski 1965), Prudnik (Dzieciuchowicz 1969), and Koźle (Liszewski 1971). The publication series based on this research also included two large monographs in book form (Straszewicz 1956, 1962).

In the 1970s, studies concerning local centres were continued on a much smaller scale and were limited to small towns in the Łódź region, e.g. Poddębice (Liszewski and Zajac 1970) and Przedbórz (Michalski 1980), and towns in the region of a brown coal mine in Bełchatów (Michalski 1985).

A characteristic feature of urban studies focusing on small towns, conducted in the 1980s, was their empirical character (they

were based on rich material collected in the course of field research) and emphasis on identification of their spheres of influence. The extent and intensity of external ties was regarded as a major (besides employment) measure of the local function.

2.3. The role of Łódź University in research on small towns at the turn of the 20th century

In the past 20 years there has been increasing interest in research on small towns, which is reflected in numerous studies published by a number of Poland's academic centres. Extensive urban studies were conducted, exploring the history of small towns, conditions of their development, their functions and contemporary problems. There were also many conferences dedicated to issues concerning small towns, among which the leading role was played by annual conferences organized jointly, since 2004, by the Department of the Built Environment and Spatial Policy of Łódź University and the Department of Space Management of the Economic Academy in Katowice. The meetings were held alternately in Łódź and in Katowice. They provided a useful forum for the exchange of views, ideas and research findings, and for discussions on determinants and directions of small towns development as well as their growth prospects. The meetings were attended by researchers from all the country, and resulted in numerous publications (Heffner and Marszał eds. 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2011, Marszał ed. 2009a, b, Bartosiewicz and Marszał eds. 2011a, b, c, d).

All these studies, publications and conferences have an interdisciplinary character, which enables a broader perspective and formulation of diagnoses based on knowledge accumulated within different academic disciplines. The authors of works published in recent years are mainly geographers, but also representatives of urban studies and economists dealing with spatial and urban issues. There are also several publications by representatives of legal sciences and practitioners.

Some of these studies (both theoretical and practical) adopt a thematic approach while others are focused on the experiences of particular small towns or groups of urban settlements in particular regions. A review of works published after 1990 gives an indication of major research directions and topics concerning small towns.

2.4. A historical perspective in research on small towns

Researchers from the University of Łódź have been engaged in monographic urban studies (Kulesza 1995, Marszał 1995, Lamprecht and Marszał eds. 2009), research on historical determinants in small towns development and related demographic and ethnic problems (particularly important until WWII), analyses concerning functional and spatial issues (Kulesza 1997, 2003, Matczak and Szymańska 1997, Matczak ed. 1999, Rembowska 2004, Groeger 2009), and studies on historical urban structures constituting elements of the country's cultural heritage (Kulesza and Kaczyńska 2011).

The evolution of urban settlements, besides common characteristics, has exhibited some specific features resulting from their history, cultural tradition, level of economic development and socio-political changes. Towns emerged mainly in the Middle Ages and developed performing various functions (Dylik 1971, Kulesza 1995, 1999, 2001a, b, Marszał 1995, Koter and Kulesza 1998, 1999). The traditional function was to provide services to surrounding agricultural areas and rural population. Trade and commerce contributed to the raising of their status, which led to some of them also performing the administrative functions (Kulesza 2001a). With time, small towns became centres of social and cultural life of the surrounding rural areas. Along with socio-economic development there was progressing differentiation of towns in terms of their functions and socio-cultural roles. In the mid-19th century small trade started developing in towns. Nevertheless, for the greater part of their existence, towns were relatively small settlement units and apart from short periods of prosperity they generally did not play a very significant role in the socio-economic life of the region.

With regard to conditions determining the development of small towns, particularly important was World War II and its consequences: population loss, change of the political regime, and economic policy pursued under the centrally-planned economy.

The second half of the 20th century was a period of stagnation for many small towns in Poland. In some of them certain pro-development elements appeared (e.g. the industrialisation trend in the 1960s), but usually they were temporary and did not correspond to the scale of particular towns and their locational features. The period of a centrally-planned economy brought destruction of the elements conditioning the existence of small towns: private services, trade and small industry. Despite a difficult past, many towns have retained considerable potential as regards townscape, urban form and architecture.

In the late 1980s the urbanisation processes slowed down (Kulesza and Marszał 1998, Lamprecht 2009), which was connected with economic recession in the final phase of communism in Poland.

2.5. New conditions and chances for development of small towns after 1989

The systemic changes in Poland initiated in 1989 created a new situation for the functioning and development of small towns. The decreasing importance of agriculture caused stagnation and often decline of many towns whose economy relied strongly on the surrounding agricultural areas (Lamprecht 2005). In many cases the industrial functions, too, experienced a decline, as for instance was the case with the towns of the Łódź region, where the textile industry collapsed after the loss of traditional eastern markets (Jakóbczyk-Gryszkiewicz 2011). As a result of radical political and economic changes in Poland and its opening up to global markets, industrial enterprises were faced with the need to restructure, reduce employment and introduce new technologies. Many industrial

plants, which often were main local employers, were closed at that time. The condition of industry has been reflected in changes in the use of industrial land – some areas have been partly or totally taken over by other functions or abandoned as industrial fallow (Jakóbczyk-Gryszkiewicz 2001, Lamprecht 2008, 2009). For many of the towns in this group the economic situation is unstable, although some of them may become locations for new investments connected with foreign capital. On the other hand, the political and economic transformations spurred the emergence of small local entrepreneurship. There also was the growth of services, especially those connected with the hinterland of towns (Turczyn 2005, Nowak and Turczyn 2009). A considerable proportion of towns, including many tourist destinations and settlements located within the sphere of direct influence of large cities have successfully survived the transformation period and have good growth prospects, while others are still seeking their path to socio-economic advancement.

Small towns are not independent entities, neither in economic nor social terms. Their economy is directly dependent on the economy of the surrounding region. The concept of urban hinterland can be regarded from three perspectives: as an area surrounding a town which depends on it for a wide range of services, an area cooperating with the town, and an area changing under the influence of the town's development. Generally, the scale of an urban settlement conditions its influence on the surrounding areas. The larger the town, the stronger its impact on rural areas and the better the growth prospects. A town is not only a place serving the needs of a region, it also is a factor actively shaping the local space. The condition of small towns affects the development of their hinterlands, but is also affected by changes in these areas (Lamprecht 2004, 2005, Lamprecht and Marszał eds. 2009). Thus, chances for development look differently for towns situated in agricultural, tourist-oriented and metropolitan areas. Settlements in the vicinity of large urban agglomerations change as a result of the residential function that they assume, but this cannot provide a basis for their economy. Many

towns see their future as health or tourist resorts. In each case there are different problems to be resolved. To pursue the chosen direction of development, a town must seek competitive advantage. The role of local bodies and organisations, such as local authorities, business enterprises, associations etc. is also very important, as it is essential to secure funding, especially for infrastructural investments.

What should be emphasized is the positive social changes that have occurred – consolidation of self-government and the resulting sense of responsibility have stimulated the initiative of local communities and strengthened the awareness of place identity and ties with the place of residence, thus becoming an important pro-development factor (Pielesiak 2008).

Another major growth factor is the increasing level of entrepreneurship in many small-town communities and the related increase in the number of business enterprises in the last two decades, especially in the trade and services sector. The appearance of new business entities in the situation of industry decline in these settlements is a sign of positive structural changes that stimulate economic growth (Milewska 2001, Marszał ed. 2003 a, b, Turczyn 2005, Nowak 2011). Equally important for the development of towns is innovativeness and capacity for introducing new solutions (Marszał 2011).

The beginning of the 21st century has seen increasing interest in public space as a common good which contributes to the quality of life, local identity and place attractiveness. EU aid funds have been allocated for projects aimed at rehabilitation of public spaces in Polish cities. All these efforts have resulted in revitalisation, after decades of post-war neglect, of central places in many small towns, and in creation of new spaces serving the needs of the general public (Kozłowski and Marszał 2009, Heffner and Marszał eds. 2011, Kowara 2011, Kulesza and Kaczyńska 2011, Wojnarowska 2011, Wojnarowska and Kozłowski 2011). The changes that have taken place are diverse and may be evaluated differently – some of the outcomes are very good and can be models for future efforts in other towns, but there also have been less successful revitalisation attempts. Nevertheless, what is important is the growing awareness

which translates into policy of urban renewal (improvement of living conditions, townscape protection and infrastructural investments). It is important to note that revitalisation should be oriented to elimination of barriers to growth and to the strengthening of the position in the settlement system. Discussion on revitalisation processes in small towns, based on analysis of revitalisation programmes postulates, existing constraints and utilisation of EU funds, is reflected in publications on this subject (Kozłowski and Marszał 2009, Heffner and Marszał 2011 eds., Klima 2011).

2.6. Small towns in the vicinity of metropolises

There is extensive research on the situation of small towns lying within the sphere of direct influence of large cities. In the context of frequently presented opinions on the need for multifunctional development of small urban settlements, some authors draw attention to monofunctional transformations taking place in towns in close proximity to metropolises – such settlements grow only in demographic and spatial terms, while in functional terms they only develop the residential function (Jakóbczyk-Gryszkiewicz 2001, Milewska-Osiecka and Ogródowczyk 2011). This is due to two factors: transport accessibility and environmental quality, which is why residential space (and its attractiveness) in small towns lying close to large cities has been the subject of numerous studies (Jakóbczyk-Gryszkiewicz 1998, 2011, Frykowski and Jażdżewska 2004, Milewska and Ogródowczyk 2006, 2011, Kozłowski and Marszał 2008, Groeger 2009, 2011, Ogródowczyk 2011).

There also are publications which argue that small settlements lying near metropolitan centres and within their major development zones do have chances for growth not only in demographic but also in economic terms (Marcińczak 2011).

Another major problem addressed in the literature is the evolution of the commercial function in towns within the sphere of influence of large cities. They are facing competition from commercial centres located in the external zone of the agglomeration and

along major trade routes, and in consequence the trade function in small towns is shrinking. In the light of access to services, the ties between small towns and the metropolis can be regarded as an important element of creating cohesion (integration) of a metropolitan area (Bartosiewicz 2012).

As far as growth dynamics of small towns within the metropolitan area are concerned, they depend on the growing domination (economic, social and cultural) of the metropolis. Local governments should seek ways to minimize the negative impacts and take advantage of positive effects of this situation (Jakóbczyk-Gryszkiewicz 1998, Szymańska and Matczak 2002, Hefner and Marszał eds. 2007, 2008, Wójcik 2011).

2.7. Spatial and functional structure

An important strand in urban research is the study of the effects and directions of functional transformations in local urban centres, especially their location with respect to the transport and settlement networks (Jażdżewska 2001, 2007, Pielesiak 2011, Bartosiewicz 2012), and more specifically, transport accessibility of small towns and the importance of this factor for their development (Bartosiewicz and Pielesiak 2009). Concentration of logistics centres, their land-intensity, demand for labour and ties with the local economy are important factors of change, improving prospects for socio-economic growth of towns and municipalities. Poland, being situated in the central part of Europe, on routes along which goods, people and funds are flowing from west to east and from north to south, is a scene of intensive development of various logistics centres. A good example of a dynamic growth of this type of activity and the resulting spatial transformations is the municipality of Stryków – one of Poland's largest logistics centres (Lamprecht and Marszał 2009, Bartosiewicz and Wiśniewski 2011).

Another major research topic was the process of transformation of the industrial function and the related problems connected with decline of industry, especially in central parts of small towns,

where the industrial function is being replaced by services, which creates the need for functional transformation of post-industrial sites (Matczak ed. 1999, Lamprecht 2009, 2011). In functional studies on small towns much attention has been devoted to the development of services not connected with the agricultural sector (Kowara 2011, Nowak 2012).

2.8. Tourism and recreational functions of towns and local development

Intensive tourist traffic impacts the economic, spatial and social development of towns and regions. In Poland, too, many small towns see their future as tourist destinations, recreation centres or health resorts, which, however, requires adequate potential, i.e. attractive natural and cultural resources and tourist infrastructure (Fischbach 1989, Matczak 1989, Liszewski 2006). Tourism offers chances for economic revival of areas with tourism potential, but to be successful, towns must provide or expand sports and recreational facilities and tourist accommodation services as well as develop recreation-ally attractive areas – create bicycle paths, trekking routes etc. Local governments are well aware of development chances based on this function, which is reflected in all local development strategies.

Towns in southern and northern Poland have the greatest potential as regards development of the tourism function. The most favourable are locations in mountainous regions because of the scenic beauty of the landscape. Also seaside locations and, to a smaller degree, lake districts are touristically attractive areas (Kaczmarek and Liszewski 1989).

Cultural assets, too, are important attractions for tourists, but small towns have them only to a limited extent. These are mostly sacral and secular objects of historic interest, and, rather rarely, urban forms and structures. The transformation made it possible to enhance these values. Many towns are trying to join the group of tourist resorts by restoration of old castles and palaces (Musiaka 2011).

Despite various efforts undertaken by local governments, tourist attractiveness of small towns is rather limited. Visitors mainly come in the summer period and stay for a short time to visit places of historic interest and museums, and to view the landscape from designated viewpoints. The most successful are towns which have unique sacral heritage and attractive natural environment (forest and water complexes).

Health resorts are a special group of towns developing the tourist function. This type of activity appeared in Poland in the second half of the 19th century, mainly in locations having mineral water springs. Spa towns usually are small settlements. Today there are 45 statutory spas in Poland (Figure 2.2). Because of this status, they are governed by rules different from those applicable to other towns – it results from the need to protect the natural health-improving resources. Environmental factors, such as climate, microclimate and landscape are also important conditions for development of spa activity.

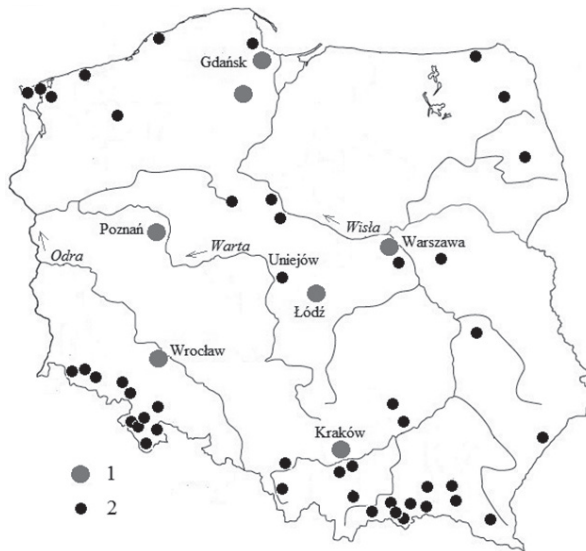


Figure 2.2. Location of health resorts in Poland

1 – main towns, 2 – health resorts

Source: own elaboration

After World War II spas were developing as recreation centres for the employees of large industrial plants. Over the last 20 years the situation of health resorts became difficult due to decreasing income from publicly-funded sanatoriums and growing popularity of privately financed spa and tourist services. Today, the main policy objective is to enhance their attractiveness for tourists through investments in environment protection and improvement of the medical services, sports and recreational facilities, catering services and cultural programmes.

A very interesting research object is Poland's youngest spa – Uniejów. It is a small town, with a population of a little above 3000, lying on the river Warta in the central part of Poland. It is intensively developing the tourist and recreation function on the basis of geothermal water. It was discovered in 1978 and has since been used for balneologic and heating purposes, becoming an element of the town's dynamic growth. In 2012 it was granted spa status, which further spurred its development. The impact of new functions on the life of the inhabitants of towns and regions is among topics investigated by Łódź University researchers (Latour and Smętkiewicz 2012, Kowalczyk et al. 2013, Kucharski et al. 2013, Lamprecht et al. 2013). The studies include spatial development of towns as a result of functional changes (Lamprecht 2012, Koboжек 2013). Uniejów is an example of a small town which in recent years has enhanced its position in the settlement network. During only a few years it rose from the position of a small settlement important only for the nearest neighbourhood to the position of a town prominent, on account of its spa and recreation function, on the regional and national scale.

2.9. Natural environment in the context of spatial development of towns

The natural environment is an important factor that affects the image of towns. Natural conditions, such as river valleys, hills, etc. have always played a major role in locational decisions (Kulesza 2001,

Kobojeck and Pietrzak 1996). In present times, small towns are more dependent on the natural environment than large urban settlements.

Until the 19th century, towns were small in terms of area. Dynamic changes in their space occurred in the 20th century, and have intensified since the 1990s, including residential building as well as logistics and business premises construction. Spatial transformations in suburban areas consist mainly of single-family housing construction. Housing investment in small towns of the Łódź voivodship constitutes 28% to 67%. Business premises account for 20–30% of new construction, and investment in other economic activity – 5–25% of total investment (Turczyn 2005). In recent years, new housing is mainly constructed on the outskirts of small towns and along outgoing and circular roads (Milewska and Ogrodowczyk 2006). 40% of all new housing built in the Łódź voivodship in the period 1990–2005 have such location (Ogrodowczyk 2011). The situation is similar in other regions of the country. Housing construction activity was often undertaken in areas where it was easiest to carry out, without any spatial coordination. Residential areas are built up in a chaotic way, without spatial order or ecological sense. This is particularly visible in the spatial structure of small towns, where individual housing is the dominant type (Milewska and Ogrodowczyk 2006). Poles seem to be very sensitive about the right to private ownership of property, which was reintroduced after a long period of break. Local authorities are faced with strong resistance in all actions involving restrictions on private ownership. In peripheral locations rural and agricultural areas are gradually being transformed into enclaves of single-family housing and business-oriented development.

Housing development often takes place in areas that environmentally are ill-suited for that purpose or in protected areas, which generates multiple problems (Figure 2.3). These are areas that have never before been designated for residential use, such as flood plains, forests or bogs (Kobojeck 2013). They were formerly regarded as uninhabitable due to environmental constraints. The demand for cheap land for residential development is so great that that even local plans allow construction of houses on flood plains.

The building up of river valleys, apart from the risk of flooding, results in the breaking or narrowing of environmental corridors and in disruption of the water system. Other types of land, which until the end of the 20th century were used as pastures, meadows or just lay waste, now are also under strong pressure to allow residential use.

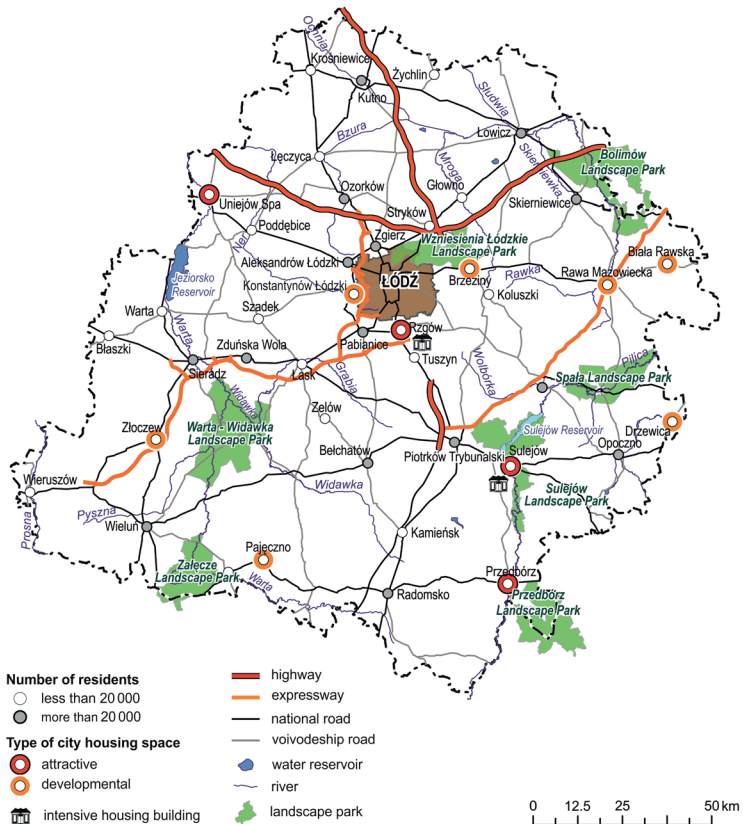


Figure 2.3. Location of small towns with beneficial housing space in Łódź Voivodship

Source: own elaboration based on A. Ogrodowczyk (2011) and L. Groeger (2013)

New construction, mainly housing, is also carried out in protected areas. Investors prefer easily accessible, environmentally attractive locations (Figure 2.3). In the Łódź voivodship, most of the new houses were built near places of high natural and cultural value, such as Sulejów (Cistercian Abbey), Zalew Sulejowski (Sulejów artificial lake) with landscape park nearby, or Tuszyn (nature reserve) (Ogrodowczyk 2011). The situation is similar in other regions of the country, for instance near Poznań. Urbanisation results in fragmentation of forests and isolation of woodland.

2.10. Conclusions

The majority of small towns are undertaking efforts to redefine their role and position in the spatial structure of the region through finding new opportunities for growth and for improvement of local communities' living conditions. The choice of appropriate growth strategy based on the right diagnosis of the situation, taking advantage of the opportunities and mobility of the local community will be decisive for the position of each town in the settlement network. Activation of small towns must take place on many planes – direct efforts to forward socio-economic growth and improve spatial development should be accompanied by increased environmental awareness.

The main positive effects of the past two decades of transformations in small towns include greater sense of responsibility for the neighbourhood and enhanced quality of urban space, particularly the improvement of urban infrastructure and housing conditions.

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