

# ‘Slow’ Revitalization on Regional Scale, the Example of an Integrated Investment Project

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**Abstract.** The study arose from question about the future of towns, as well as the possibility of their development. The paper is an attempt to look at the direction in which many towns around the world aim, connecting to a networks, and especially the network of Cittaslow. The author asked a few questions - whether the Cittaslow network actually helps towns to use their inner potential, build their brand and improve the quality of residents' lives? The starting point for the case study method adopted in the paper is a discussion of examples of urban networks as a background for a wider Cittaslow characteristic. For this purpose, there was conducted literature and *in situ* research on the Cittaslow towns, the query of documents related to Polish Cittaslow, own photographic documentation was collected and a series of talks were carried out in different offices and municipalities. The database constructed in this way, allowed the analysis and conclusions. An important part of the research was the synthesis of information on the integrated project which has been taken in 14 Polish Slow Cities. "The Cross-Local Programme of Revitalization of Cittaslow Town Network in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship" is a unique action on the scale of the entire international Cittaslow network. Each of the participating towns tried to exploit through revitalization its own unique potential for real growth and improve the quality of life of its residents. Through the joint action, even the smallest town could more easily obtain significant funding. The involvement of regional government and understanding of the idea was also crucial. Cittaslow network, although not perfect, may in the long term strengthen linkages and exchange of experience between the *slow* towns and not lead to their unification. Furthermore, as shown by the example of Polish "The Cross-Local Programme of Revitalization of Cittaslow Town Network in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship", belonging to the Cittaslow network could help to raise funds for the implementation of a comprehensive revitalization, as well as to integrate revitalization projects in the whole region. Joint venture naturally consolidated these *slow* towns in the Warmia-Mazury region and facilitated to operate efficiently in the network, as well as to undertake other common "hard" measures. As a result, obtained effect of revitalization is likely to be a more coherent and holistic.

## 1. Introduction

In 2007 urban population exceeded rural population for the first time in the world history. Since then the world has been systematically growing more urbanized. Obviously, both the population distribution and growth are not regular. The population increase currently observed and predicted occurs in all places but Europe. The population number on this continent is projected to decrease by 92 million people between 2015 and 2100 [1]. Moreover, the same report draws attention to the ongoing



process of ageing in European societies. More than 24% of European population is over 60 and the percentage will amount to 34% in 2050. In 1980 the average age in Poland was 29.3, in 2015 it was 39,6 and in 2050 it will probably become 51,8 [2]. Furthermore, the processes of depopulation and society ageing, in connection with globalization processes and focus mainly on the development of metropolises, cause a necessary change in the way of thinking about cities. What is the future of cities, especially small and medium towns? Is there a chance for their development and if so, what kind of development may it be?

In the view of the negative processes mentioned above, the only proper method of development seems to be the quality development and not the quantity one. Development factors based on resources have definitely become less important in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Their place was taken over by quality factors, for instance: differentiation of the economic structure, workers' skills, efficiency of transport and telecommunication infrastructure, administration capability, space value and its quality, and last but not least, life quality. The theory of endogenous development claims that the most permanent and effective development is the bottom-up one, internal and with reduced external influence. Internally inspired processes are based on local potential and therefore they enable a long-term steady development and more independent functioning. The theory of endogenous development states that internal growth factors also include, apart from the existing resources, society – its ability to manage the resources, active engagement, willingness to change and the ability to create development [3]. To create development it is increasingly essential to transfer and take advantage of good practices. An exchange of knowledge, experience and ideas concerning development may take place on a local, regional, national as well as international level by means of establishing discussion platforms and systems of information transfer. In this way cooperation networks arise, which create a suitable space for innovations, including management of a city and city space.

Current concepts of local and regional policy increasingly often underline the importance of the so-called place-based approach, whose aim is a better use of local resources and territorial specialization. Each territory has its own, often extremely differentiated set of features forming the development potential. In accordance with them, it is possible to form a space policy based on the internal development potential and better suited to meet specific local and regional needs, but taking into account spatial, social, economic and environmental conditions as well as the diversity of individual areas. This multidimensionality of development processes included in the place-based approach and based on using endogenous potential, territorial resources and knowledge, enables a more precise adjustment of a regional policy to local conditions [4].

## **2. Town networks**

Town networks are not a new phenomenon. Towns have been cooperating with one another for many years, combining their forces to reach similar goals. They form associations, unions and networks. The Author has analysed numerous town networks in order to find examples of connections and exchange of 'good practices'. In most cases these are not networks comprising one cohesive, relatively small territory (like, e.g. a region or a functional area). Their ranges, depending on the case, are either national or international. The analysed networks differ in priorities, statutes, number and methods of accepting new members as well as in sizes of associated towns. They also differ in the effects of their actions. Some of them are functioning buoyantly, whereas others are inactive and serve as a pose for local government actions. A synthesis of information on town networks has been carried out for the sake of the article.

Cooperation between towns has different forms – from common lobbying for regional development, representing and defending the interests of small towns, developing local government administration to protecting and promoting cultural heritage. Some town networks participate actively in international conferences and EU consultations regarding priorities in such fields as: internal EU policy, regional policy, spatial policy, public services, natural environment or town's partnership. Due to the fact that European funds play a key role in towns' development and still they are difficult to obtain, some town networks (for instance the European Network of Small Towns) strive for a better

adjustment of financial means to the realization of their tasks. A separate group consists of town networks which concentrate their actions on a narrow range of endogenous factors, for example on cultural heritage. They mainly serve to maintain and strengthen the historic character of their member towns, to exchange experiences connected with archaeological research, tourism, promotion, to consider historic structures in urban planning as well as to apply for European funds and to participate in European projects together. This group includes, among others, the Network of European Walled Towns and the Network of the Oldest European Towns. The town networks also differ in the scale of actions – some of them carry out small scale activities which are mostly meaningless for functioning or sustainable development of a town as a whole (e.g. the Network of Art Nouveau Towns) [5].

An example of a town network worth our special attention in this context is ‘Cittaslow – the International Network of Cities of the Good Life’. It is a non-profit organization which associates towns with up to 50 thousand inhabitants, interested in improving various aspects of life quality of their local communities. The Cittaslow idea started in Italy but gradually has found supporters all around the world. Currently there are 228 *slow* towns associated in 30 countries (as of March 2017). Despite the fact that the upper limit to become a member in Cittaslow is 50 thousand inhabitants, a conducted analysis has shown that the majority includes much smaller towns belonging to the category of small towns (to 20 thousand inhabitants), which constitute 76% of the studied totality. On the other hand, the average number of inhabitants in a town belonging to Cittaslow network is 21,738 people. Although Cittaslow towns represent different geographical types, they are connected by the fact that as many as 91% of them have historical centres and/or protected areas. Cultural heritage, valuable landscape, typically rural elements, culinary heritage as well as local culture and language are valued by local governments, inhabitants and tourists. Therefore, *slow* towns especially emphasize all those values by means of which they gain their specific character. However, it does not mean that those towns are oriented only towards monuments, history and past, although the historic tissue of Cittaslow towns is undoubtedly an essential development factor. Field studies have proved that ‘towns of the good life’ put great emphasis on innovations and use new technologies in order to improve the quality of natural and urban environment. The towns, which are supposed to be comfortable to live in, promote hospitality as a real bond with the environment and its specificity. They remove spatial and cultural barriers which could threaten a complete and universal use of town’s resources.

Apart from the cultural and natural heritage mentioned above, Slow Cities have other important endogenous advantages: generally unappreciated social bonds and awareness as well as cooperation abilities, which result from a deep sense of belonging to the inhabited place. The conducted observations prove that such an attitude gives them greater vitality and efficiency in realizing goals in comparison to big cities [5]. In small towns there occurs a feedback – the society’s identification with the vision and strategy of the town’s development, which contributes to building an even stronger local identity and that, in turn, influences positively the development of a social capital for the local development.

### 3. Polish Slow Cities

The International Network of Cities of the Good Life includes 18 national networks. In 2017 there are 26 towns belonging to Cittaslow in Poland. As many as 20 towns are situated in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship. The most numerous group – almost a third of Polish Cittaslow towns – are in the range between 10-15 thousand citizens. 7 towns have below 5,000 inhabitants. The two smallest Polish *slow* towns have a population slightly over 2,000 people. Three towns are inhabited by more than 20 thousand citizens, which means that they are of medium size according to the classification adopted in the article.

The factor that makes Polish Cittaslow towns similar to foreign cities in the network and at the same time differentiates them from other Polish towns is the degree to which the natural and cultural potentials are used. The conducted field studies have shown that Polish Cittaslow towns boast well-protected and cherished cultural heritage, which creates an interesting character of the towns. Renovated market squares and districts draw our attention to their unique character, and rebuilt as well

as refurbished Gothic castles play nowadays various roles (e.g. cultural centres, museums, local libraries, galleries, artists' workshops, hotels and restaurants). High-standard hotels are situated, among others, in Gothic castles in Lidzbark Warmiński, Reszel and Ryn, attracting plentiful tourists. Cittaslow towns display their uniqueness and history through unusual museums, among others: the town's heritage museum in historic townhouses in Dobre Miasto or the Interactive Museum of the Teutonic Order in Działdowo. One of the *slow* towns based its unique character on the status of a resort town, another one diversified its touristic offer by taking advantage of the natural resources of geothermal water. It is worth noticing that a characteristic feature of all Cittaslow towns is also their attractive geographical position, a degree of using natural benefits and of tourist infrastructure development. Those towns attract tourists who are willing to spend their time actively in quiet (*slow*) places, travelling between them on canoe routes. Tourists are also attracted to one of more significant investments in recent years in eastern Poland, i.e. the Eastern Bicycle Trail "Green Velo". It connects 7 Cittaslow towns in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship.

In the Polish National Network of Cittaslow Towns there are many interesting and positive urban projects undertaken in connection with acceding the Network. One of them is the "Urban Programme of Buildings Aesthetics", which has been realized in Lidzbark Warmiński since 2010. The objective of the Programme is to select in an open contest the best project of refurbishment or modernisation of historic and private buildings. Thanks to it their owners may receive a grant to fund the planned project and the town benefits from an increasing number of renovated buildings which are aesthetically consistent with the surrounding urban architecture. Positive effects of the Programme were so obvious that in November, 2016 the City Council in Lidzbark Warmiński decided to continue it and decreed the "Urban Programme of Improving Buildings Aesthetics between 2017-2020". In accordance with the new Programme, the grant-aid for one applicant cannot exceed 50% of all incurred expenses and cannot be higher than 100 thousand zlotys (about 23 thousand Euros) [6]. Similar programmes are already in operation in other Polish towns. The action is worth following because it has an impact on spatial order and aesthetics, extremely important in such units as small and medium towns.

Among other types of projects realized in Polish *slow* towns, we may enumerate initiatives aimed at popularizing family cycling and everyday bicycle transport, e.g. in Działdowo. A long-term action plan postulates connecting all parts of the town and its essential public facilities with a system of cycling paths and, in turn, connecting them with the paths in neighbouring districts (e.g. Działdowo-Kozłowo-Nidzica), as well as constructing a cycling circuit of the 'pumptrack' type. Another example of a project inspired by belonging to Cittaslow is the 'Reconstruction of the Defensive Walls of Chełmiński Bishops Castle in Lubawa and Construction of an Educational Route'. The works were realized in three stages between 2013 and 2015 thanks to an endowment from the Minister of Culture and National Heritage.

#### **4. Cross-local programme of revitalization**

The endogenous potential mentioned above consolidates naturally slow towns in Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship and facilitates effective functioning in the network as well as undertaking common endeavours. In 2015 14 Polish Cittaslow towns established the association of "Polish Cittaslow Towns". The association (contrary to the Polish National Network of Cittaslow Towns) has a legal personality, thanks to which it may apply for external funds to realize its goals. It may also be a partner of a province in the range of the "Regional Operational Programme of the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship between 2014-2020". In cooperation with the Marshal's Office the Association has drawn up the "Cross-Local Programme of Revitalization of Cittaslow Towns Network in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship", which includes, among others: a general description of the Association towns, a social diagnosis and needs identification, delimitation of degraded areas selected for revitalization, a list of proposed revitalization projects and so on [7][8].

The objective of the “Cross-Local Programme of Revitalization of Cittaslow Towns Network” is coordinated, parallel and directed revitalization of towns belonging to the Association in the area of Warmia and Masuria so that they could preserve their unique characters and values and at the same time offer their citizens a comparable life quality.

“The Cross-Local Programme” was developed to improve the life quality of local communities, therefore individual districts are obliged to ensure participation of the society, non-governmental organizations, entrepreneurs and other parties at each stage of its development and implementation. The social aspect of the revitalization is especially emphasized in the “Regional Operational Programme of the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship between 2014-2020” as well as in other European documents connected with the financial perspective 2014-2020. Local governments are also obliged to approve and realize the tasks in the “Cross-Local Programme” concerning a given town. Urban revitalization programmes as strategic documents with operational elements are its integral parts. The organization which implements the “Cross-Local Programme of Revitalization of the Cittaslow Towns Network” is the Association Polish Cittaslow Towns.

At the end of 2016 the Association signed initial contracts for 23 projects, which will be realized within the revitalization of Cittaslow towns in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship. The towns will receive external financial support with the accumulated value of 51,1 million Euros, mainly from the European funds, among others the European Fund for Regional Development (EFRD) and the European Social Fund (ESF). The revitalization works may be financed within the Regional Operational Programme of Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship between 2014-2020 as well as the domestic operational means: the “Operational Programme Infrastructure and Environment” (2014-2020), the “Operational Programme Knowledge Education Development 2014-2020”, the “Operational Programme Eastern Poland 2014-2020” and the “Operational Programme Digital Poland 2014-2020” [8].

The 23 approved projects include among others: reconstruction of fragments of Chelmiński Bishops Castle in Lubawa, including the building’s two wings, management of the basement and adaptation of the facilities in the Centre of Social Activities (the cost of 16 million zlotys), adaptation of the historic Lidzbarski Gate in Bisztynek for the needs of the Youth Social Integration Club (the cost of 2 million zlotys) or modernization of the waterfront of Ryńskie Lake in Ryn (the cost 4 million zlotys). In Reszel the municipal park near the castle will regain its leisure purpose (almost 10 million zlotys). In Nowe Miasto Lubawskie there will arise the Manufacture of Old-Time Professions in the building of the Municipal Cultural Centre (3 million zlotys) and in Pasym the market square will be revitalized (4 million zlotys). Lidzbark Warmiński will receive funds for continuing works in the historic centre, among others preserving defensive walls and managing the dry moat (the cost of the works is about 3.5 million zlotys) [8]. Comparing the data, we may state that a part of the projects initially proposed by towns was overestimated financially at least twice or thrice. For instance, in Olsztynek the planned expenses for revitalising a historic water tower were corrected from former 7 to 4 million zlotys. Moreover, some of the projects proposals were not compliant with the requirements imposed on the process of renovating towns by the revitalization act. According to this Act “The district area in a state of crisis due to a concentration of negative social phenomena, especially unemployment, poverty, crime rate, a low level of education or social capital as well as an insufficient level of participation in public and cultural life, may be designated as a degraded area in the case of occurrence at least of one of the following negative phenomena: economic, environmental, spatial and functional, technological”, [9].

Despite some imperfections of the “Cross-Local Programme” and a need to correct the already decreed revitalization programmes of individual towns, it is obvious that a joint and parallel action in all of the 14 towns will be more visible and effective than singular and small-scale processes, and it will help to build a common image of those towns. Furthermore, the realization of the “Cross-Regional Programme” is a part of the “Strategy of Social and Economic Development of the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship until 2025” [10] and also directly continues the “Concept of National Landscape Planning 2030” and its objectives. Among others, such objectives as: “an improvement of



internal cohesion and territorial sustainability of national development by promoting functional integration, creating conditions for propagating development factors and using internal potential of all territories”, as well as “restoring and preserving spatial order” [11]. The enterprise also follows the priorities of the “Domestic Urban Policy” included in the “National Strategy of Regional Development 2010-2020”. Among others: “developing public areas of high quality and revitalizing towns meant as a coordinated, complex and long-term process implemented in the town’s problem areas, being an element of a development policy and aimed at counteracting the degradation of urbanized areas and crisis phenomena” as well as “boosting development and quality changes through an increase in social and economic activity, improvement in the housing environment and protection of national heritage while following the rules of sustainable development” [12].

## 5. Conclusions

Every town is specific. It is commonly known that it is not a good idea to copy solutions adopted elsewhere. However, in a search for a possibility of quality development of small and medium towns, we may be inspired by Cittaslow – the International Network of Cities of the Good Life. Cittaslow is first of all a certain awareness and attitude of both local governments as well as whole urban communities. Analyses show that the network may in the long run strengthen links and experience exchange between slow towns, at the same time avoiding their unification. Although individual towns develop according to the same set of criteria, which is simultaneously a criterion for development standards, it is still so extensive that an individual formation of a local specialization is possible.

Every town has its own, unique potential, which in proper conditions may contribute to a real development and rise in life quality of inhabitants. “The Cross-Local Programme of Revitalization of Cittaslow Town Network in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship” is an example of an integrated enterprise, interesting on an international scale. It is one of the few very specific, ‘hard’ projects undertaken in town networks. Thanks to a united action, understanding for the idea and engagement of regional authorities, towns were able to gain significant funding and to realize planned revitalization activities on a scale of the whole region. By means of revitalization each of the engaged towns have tried to use its own, unique potential for real development and increase in inhabitants’ life quality.

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