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URBAN ATTRIBUTES OF DEGRADED TOWNS – A CASE STUDY OF WEST POMERANIAN VOIVODESHIP

ATRYBUTY MIEJSKOŚCI ZDEGRADOWANYCH MIAST NA PRZYKŁADZIE WOJEWÓDZTWA ZACHODNIOPOMORSKIEGO

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ABSTRACT: The article presents degraded towns in West Pomeranian Voivodeship and a former urban-type settlement, which lost their urban status and became villages as a result. Five settlements, which today are seats of communes, were analysed in detail, as well as four that performed such a function in the post-war past. First of all, the origin of the emergence as well as the circumstances of the loss of the urban status were discussed. Then the current level of development of the features of urban centres was defined as regards the population, economic and spatial aspects. In addition to the number of population and the structure of the economy, particular attention was paid to the urban layout that co-creates the local cultural landscape. The summary presents the main reasons for the degradation of the discussed centres and highlights those that potentially have the greatest predisposition to regain the urban status.

KEY WORDS: urban attributes, degraded towns, West Pomeranian Voivodeship

ABSTRAKT: Artykuł przedstawia miasta zdegradowane w województwie zachodniopomorskim oraz byłe osiedle typu miejskiego, które obecnie utrzymują status wsi. Szczegółowej analizie poddano pięć miejscowości, które pełnią dziś rolę ośrodków gminnych, a także cztery, które sprawowały taką funkcję w powojennej przeszłości. W pierwszej kolejności omówiono genezę powstania, a także okoliczności utraty miejskiego statusu. Następnie przedstawiono współczesny stopień rozwoju cech miejskich ośrodków z uwzględnieniem aspektów ludnościowego, funkcjonalnego i przestrzennego. Oprócz liczby ludności i struktury gospodarki zwrócono również uwagę na pozostałości miejskich układów przestrzennych, które współtworzą miejscowy krajobraz kulturowy. W podsumowaniu przedstawiono główne przyczyny degradacji omawianych miast oraz wyróżniono spośród nich te ośrodki, które potencjalnie mają największe predyspozycje do odzyskania miejskiego statusu.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: atrybuty miejskości, miasta zdegradowane, województwo zachodniopomorskie.

Introduction

The article deals with the analysis of the level of development of urban features of degraded towns in West Pomeranian Voivodeship, which were defined in the title as

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attributes of urbanity. An attribute is, according to the definition of the Polish language dictionary (sjp.pwn.pl), “a feature of a thing, person or phenomenon that distinguishes them from others” and “the basic feature of the object without which it could not exist or would be unthinkable.” Therefore aspects of urbanity are those features that distinguish urban settlements from other units, such as: “population, functions, morphology and physiognomy, degree centrality, historical past, lifestyle of residents, communication rank or infrastructure” (Szmytkie, Krzysztofik 2011).

The issues of degraded towns in Poland has been widely discussed by Krzysztofik and Dymitrow (2015). According to the authors, such a settlement is: “a town that in the past had city rights or officially granted urban status.” At present, however, it remains, in formal terms, a village or has been incorporated into the borders of another settlement unit. In addition, the authors drew attention to the number of such centers, which they estimated at over 800. The research on degraded towns was also conducted by Drobek at the level of regions such as *Opolszczyzna* [Opole Region] (1986), *Śląsk* [Silesia] (1999) and by Sokołowski for the following voivodeships: *Kujawsko-pomorskie* (2011a), *Łódzkie* (2011b), *Podlaskie* (2013), *Świętokrzyskie* (2015), *Mazowieckie* (2016a), *Warmińsko-mazurskie* (2016b), *Podkarpackie* (2017), *Lubuskie* (2018). West Pomeranian Voivodeship, as one of the few, was not included in this type of analysis. Therefore the aim of the article is to fill the research gap, as well as to assess the level of development of urban features in the centers using various determinants of urbanity.

According to the Act of 8 March 1990 on the local self-government, obtaining status of a town “is carried out in a way that takes into account social and technical infrastructure as well as the urban layout and character of the built-up area.” In turn, the Act of 29 August 2003 on official names of localities and physiographic objects in Poland introduces the distinction between the concept of a village and a city. According to it, an urban settlement is a “unit with dominant dense development and non-agricultural functions, which has municipal rights or the status of a town conferred in the procedure stipulated by separate provisions.” However, these are not very precise definitions, which are not systematized by the Regulation of the Council of Ministers of 9 August 2001, concerning the procedure for submitting applications regarding granting the urban status and documents required in these matters. It merely specifies that the Commune Council as an applicant undertakes to submit a number of documents containing, among others: historical background, basic statistical data and the results of consultations with residents. In this article, guidelines have been examined in terms of available and comparable data.

First, the historical background, presenting the origins and conditions for establishment of towns, was discussed with the use of literature describing the history of urban settlements and the region of Pomerania. In the next part, the centres were examined in terms of the current level of development of urban features, as regards population, economic and spatial aspects. Desk research involved data from official documents of communes, such as development strategies, studies of conditions and

directions of spatial management, care monuments programs and environmental protection programs. Quantitative data regarding the number of population were obtained from relevant units of commune offices. The number of business entities within individual sections of PKD 2007 came from the Local Data Bank of the Central Statistical Office. These data were used to calculate Florence's local specialization indicators, the method used in quantitative research in socio-economic geography. In turn, the spatial aspect mainly concerned the state of preservation of the urban layout that directly affect the perception of particular centres and their cultural landscape. For this purpose, field studies were carried out in individual centres. Spatial structure of settlements was also defined with the help of road and aerial maps available via the Bing portal.

General characteristics of degraded towns

There are 16 degraded towns in West Pomeranian Voivodeship (Figure 1). They were elaborated on the basis of Najgrakowski's list of urban settlements (2009), containing information on dates of obtaining and losing city rights. Most of them are located in Gryfino County (five), Myślibórz and Stargard (four each). For the most part, they lost the original character of small towns, or played the role of urban centres only for a short time, that they did not develop features typical of such centres, which would indicate their distinctiveness to the rural surroundings. Five of the degraded towns, which today are seats of communes, were analysed in detail, as well as four that performed such a function in the post-war period. Nowadays the significant role as an administrative centre ensuring access to basic public services should be treated as a necessary condition for further discussion about regaining the urban status. On the national scale, there were only three examples of obtaining the urban status by centres that were not seats of communes (Szmytkie, Krzysztofik 2011).

Among the degraded towns in West Pomeranian Voivodeship, Banie is the earliest settlement mentioned as urban (Table 1). In 1234, Prince Barnim issued a document handing over the Bańska Land to the Templars, while allowing the organization of a free market in "civitate ipsorum Banen" (Kuhn 1974). The location of the town resulted from environmental conditions, the neighbourhood of marshes and river floodplains. It was an agricultural and trade centre at the intersection of roads to Gryfino, Myślibórz, Pyrzyce and Chojna. The importance of the town was confirmed by the name of the bridge in Gryfino "Banische Brugge" and the grain measure "Banensis mensure" (Rymar 1999). There are also remains of defensive walls preserved in Gryfino and Pyrzyce, both under the name of Bańska Gate. In August 1945, Banie was still considered a town. According to Rymar (1999), the loss of the status ensued "due to the remarkably agricultural character along with the hinterland, as well as the state of destruction and the lack of facilities typical of urban centres."

Another settlement – Stare Czarnowo – was referred to as an "oppidum" in the years 1274-1283. This category meant an incompletely shaped town that did not obtain



Fig. 1. Distribution of degraded towns in the area of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship

Source: author's own elaboration.

city rights, unlike “civitas”. In 1283, Wełtyń and Widuchowa were also mentioned in the same way (“opidis Woltyń, Nienmarketh atque Videchove”), when Bogusław IV abolished the privilege of holding trade fairs in favor of the newly-founded Gryfino (Kuhn 1974). These centers have since lost their importance. Despite the slowdown in development and the dissolution of the Cistercian monastery during the Reformation, Wełtyń in 1647 was referred to as urban “Stadtlein” (Rymar 2005) and Stare Czarnowo maintained the privilege of holding fairs until the 19th century.

Table 1

Period of functioning of particular settlements as urban

Name	Recorded in documents as urban settlement for the first time		Recorded as urban settlement for the last time
	date	referred to as	
Banie	1234	civitas	1945
Stare Czarnowo	1274	oppidum	1283
Golenice	1276	civitas	1608
Wetłyń	1283	oppidum	1647
Widuchowa	1283	oppidum	1945
Wierzбно	1316	oppidum	2 nd half of the 18 th c.
Nowogródek Pomorski	1317	civitas	1 st half of the 17 th c.
Boleszkowice	1337	oppidum	31.12.1971
Trzebież	31.12.1959	urban-type settlement	31.12.1972

Source: author's own elaboration.



Photo 1. Banie (bird's eye view)

Source: banie.pl

Things were different in the case of Widuchowa. On 17 April 1347 it was granted city rights. This gord located on a bank of the Oder River (Photo 2) was on the trade route leading towards Banie and Pyrzyce, as well as on the way from Szczecin to Chojna. In the 19th century, the town was an important centre of processing reeds. During this period Upper, Lower and Old Town were distinguished. After the Second World War, the mayor became the head of the commune, therefore Widuchowa ceased to be treated as a town. This must have been influenced by “war damage, especially the slow pace of reconstruction and settlement process as well as geographic location” (Rymar 1997).



Photo 2. Widuchowa. A view from the Odra River

Source: author's own photo.

Golenice was mentioned in 1276 as “*civitas Schiltberge*”. It was established as a local trade centre between Trzcińsko Zdrój and Myślibórz, along the road from Banie to Myślibórz. For the last time, as a small town – “*Flecken*”, it was mentioned in 1608 (Rymar 2010a). According to Kuhn (1974), the term “*opidi*” for Wierzbno was used for the first time in 1316. Earlier – before 1307 – the urban character was emphasized only in relation to residents (“*cives de Werben*”). The town was created halfway between Pyrzyce and Stargard, to organize the market for the community living east of Lake Miedwie. In 1564, town privileges were confirmed by Prince Barnim IX, and Wierzbno lost its status only at the end of the 18th century (Rymar 2010b). Nowogródek Pomorski as a town (“*civitas*”) appeared in documents in 1317, listed next to Gorzów and Barlinek (Rymar 1998). Nevertheless, in the following centuries it did not become a fully-fledged town, without any defensive walls. The centre began to lose its importance as a result of the decision in 1352 to change the course of the trade route from Szczecin to Gorzów. From that time the road was to lead through Myślibórz with the omission of Nowogródek Pomorski. The final development of the centre was stopped by the destruction that occurred during the Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648), after which it began to be described as a village.

In turn, Boleszkowice appeared for the first time as an “*opidum*” in a list of one of the Neumark Books in 1337. According to Bütow (1930), there was no clarity in the past whether to perceive it as a town or only as a village, which was reflected in documents using both the name *oppidum* and *villa* (meaning a village). At the beginning of the 1930s, Boleszkowice belonged to the group of towns of the Kreis Königsberg, but according to the author (Bütow 1930) the form of the external appearance, as well as the occupational structure of the population, made a greater impression as a village than as an urban settlement. Despite this, after the Second World War, Boleszkowice maintained the urban status, abolished only by the Regulation of the Council of Ministers of 25 November 1971, which came into force on 1 January 1972.



Photo 3. Boleszkowice (bird's eye view)

Source: Nadzikiewicz Tomasz (2017: 7).

Among the studied centres, Trzebież is a special case, which for thirteen years had the status of an urban-type settlement, until the administrative reform introduced at the beginning of 1973. It was an intermediate category between a town and a village, given to units destined for workers and fishermen or spa resorts with at least 1000 inhabitants. Małachowski (1995) emphasized that such settlements were included in the statistics for towns, and as "degraded urban settlements" they could obtain urban status in the future, which was later confirmed by the case of Dziwnów.

Analysis

Population criterion is one of the most important when issuing decisions on granting the urban status. The number of 2,000 people, although informally, is considered as a population threshold (Drobek 2002; Szmytkie, Krzysztofik 2011; Sokołowski 2014). Recently, however, the urban status was regained by Wiślica and Józefów nad Wisłą in 2018, as well as Opatowiec and Koszyce in 2019, which had well below 1 thousand people. Among degraded towns in West Pomeranian Voivodeship only three had a population of over 1 thousand people in 2016 (Table 2). Each of them is the seat of commune and thus a local administrative centre providing access to basic services. The only village that is not the seat of commune, but also reached a significant number of inhabitants, is Trzebież, a former urban-type settlement. It is located in Police Commune, at the Szczecin Lagoon, and was the only one in the discussed group of centres that exceeded 2,000 people in 2016.

Table 2

The level of development of urban features – population and economic aspects

Name	Administrative function (the seat of commune)	Population in 2016	Local specialization in in 2016	
			dominant section	value of Florence indicator
Banie	+	1 912	–	–
Widuchowa	+	1 501	–	–
Boleszkowice	+	1 373	A	5.13
Stare Czarnowo	+	611	O	5.02
Nowogródek Pomorski	+	486	O	10.73
Trzebież	–	2 017	A	5.92
Golenice	–	857	–	–
Węłtyń	–	782	–	–
Wierzbno	–	340	O	5.92

A – Agriculture, forestry, hunting, fishing; O – Public administration, defence, compulsory social security.

Source: own elaboration based on data from commune offices and the Central Statistical Office.

Economic analysis was carried out using the Florence indicator of local specialisation as a quotient of the percentage share of individual sections in the structure of the economy in the centres, and a percentage share of the same feature in a hierarchically higher unit (Runge 2006), all small towns in West Pomeranian Voivodeship. In this way it was possible to compare prevailing economic activities in potential towns with current urban settlements. Against the background of small towns, the discussed centres are characterized by over-representativeness of the sections A and O. In Boleszkowice, the local specialization is associated with agriculture, forestry and hunting activities, and in Trzebież almost exclusively fishing (32 out of the 36 entities in the section). In turn, Nowogródek Pomorski, Stare Czarnowo and Wierzbno were characterized by expansion of public administration. In other centres, there was no domination of one section, they had a more diversified structure of the economy, resembling the structure of small towns.

Apart from the population and economic criteria, the settlement unit can be perceived and classified as urban based on the elements of morphology and physiognomy that make up its spatial structure (Szymytkie 2014). According to Koter (1994), the city's morphology includes its internal structure (layout), external (shape and physiognomy of buildings) as well as the origin and evolution of components. In the case of degraded towns of West Pomeranian Voivodeship, this aspect has been examined in terms of presence and state of preservation of the urban layout.

The location of the villages close to the existing urban settlements is unfavourable for a potential change of their status. The short distance from towns, including seats of counties, proves the lack of a real “self-empowerment”. According to the assumptions

of Szmytkie and Krzysztofik (2016), who designated potential towns in the “non-urban areas”, they should be located outside buffers with a radius of 1 and 2 miles (up to approx. 16 km), which refers to the medieval mile right, a privilege determining the extent of a city’s trade impact. Villages that meet such a criterion the most are Banie, Widuchowa and Stare Czarnowo (Table 3).

Table 3

The level of development of urban features – spatial aspect

Name	Distance to the nearest town [km]	Urban layout
Banie	17	+
Widuchowa	17	+
Boleszkowice	10	+/-
Stare Czarnowo	17	-
Nowogródek Pomorski	12	+
Trzebież	14	-
Golenice	7	-
Wętyń	6	+/-
Wierzbno	11	+/-

+ Means preserved urban layout with a market square and perpendicular streets; +/- partly preserved urban layout; - lack of urban layout.

Source: own study.

Nowogródek Pomorski has the most visible urban layout among the studied centres. In this village, there is the well-preserved form of a closed rectangle, with three streets of the east-west axis and four perpendicular ones intersecting with them. There is also the triangular market square (currently St. Florian’s Square), where the fire-fighting pool is located. Groups of houses sited along the main streets are not typically compact, with examples of farm buildings around.

The urban layout has also been preserved in towns with a long urban history such as Banie and Widuchowa. Banie had a sequence of fortifications and a moat, and later also defensive walls with entry gates and towers, which, however, were mostly dismantled in the second half of the 18th century. The town was founded on a plan of an oval, with a network of perpendicular streets, which together with the market square (currently Jagielloński Square – Photo 5) have survived to this day. This area appears in the register of historic monuments as the old town. On the other hand, in the register of historic monuments of the commune, there are numerous residential complexes dating from the 18th and the 19th centuries. They have been preserved, although the total post-war destruction was estimated at 35% in 1945 (Rymar 1999). This area should, however, be revitalized with the buildings being renovated.



Photo 4. St. Florian's Square and the centre of Nowogródek Pomorski

Source: author's own photo.



Photo 5. Banie – Jagielloński Square with a monumental oak

Source: author's own photo.



Photo 6. Banie – square by the Tywa River in the area of the former mill

Source: author's own photo.



Photo 7. Widuchowa – a historic tenement house

Source: author's own photo.



Photo 8. Half-timbered houses at Grunwaldzka Street

Source: author's own photo.

Initially, Widuchowa had a linear form which was transformed into a multi-road village with the market square. During the Second World War, 80% of the town was destroyed. The register of historic monuments includes the area of the old town, which consists of, among others, buildings at Grunwaldzka Street (Photos 7 and 8), a church, a hillfort and remains of a castle. There are also seven barns listed in the register of historic monuments of the commune, concentrated in the area of the “barn district”, which was described as “one of the largest and most valuable complexes of such buildings in Western Pomerania” (Rymar 1997). The presence of a complex of farm buildings affected the definition of the Widuchowa layout as urban-rural. To this day, the former market square (currently Mieszko I Square) has survived, but it does not fulfil its original function, being only an extension of the neighbouring park. This area should be revitalized; so should be the surrounding buildings with low aesthetic values, requiring numerous additions.



Photo 9. Bolesław Chrobry Square in Boleszkowice

Source: author's own photo.



Photo 10. Bolesław Chrobry Square in Boleszkowice

Source: author's own photo.

Three more villages have some fragments of the former urban layout, largely transformed or obliterated. In Boleszkowice, there is a market square (currently Bolesław Chrobry Square – Photos 9 and 10), with a two-storey tenement house, which was the former town hall. However, this town did not have defensive walls or an urban layout, and its significance was limited to the organization of trade fairs. Wełtyń has a preserved network of perpendicular streets, along with a built-up area in an oval-shaped form. The composition of triangular market square has become blurred. Wierzbno was located parallel to the shore of Lake Miedwie, within three streets leading from north to south, cut by perpendicular ones. Opposite the church there is a former market square (Photo 12).

Golenice, Stare Czarnowo and Trzebież do not have an urban layout. Golenice is a multi-road village with irregular organisation of its spatial structure. Stare Czarnowo has a large number of farm buildings – warehouses, cowsheds, barns, which are also on the list of the register of historic monuments of the commune. Trzebież



Photo 11. Buildings in Weltyń

Source: author's own photo.



Photo 12. Area of the former market square in Wierzbno

Source: author's own photo.

consists of two parts: Wielka and Mała. The first one is a fork-shaped settlement, where the buildings are located within two main streets, which, forking, form a characteristic letter V.

Summary

Most of the centres considered in this article rightly maintain the status of villages, which results from the insufficient number of population, specialization of local economic activity in the field of agriculture and administration, and the different state or a lack of urban layout. A detailed analysis of degraded towns in West Pomeranian Voivodeship also allows finding out what caused the loss of their status. The main reasons for the degradation of towns in the past include: changes in the course of the main communication routes bypassing the given towns (Nowogródek Pomorski, Wierzbno), close proximity to larger centres, e.g. the seats of land counties (Golenice, Weltyń), numerous fires and epidemics devastating the settlements, destruction during the Thirty Years' War (Nowogródek Pomorski) or World War II (Widuchowa, Banie). Nowadays they are related to the lack of developed functions of supralocal importance, local specialization in the agricultural sector (Boleszkowice) and population decline (Trzebież). The fact that these were often private towns managed by knights or religious orders caused them to experience a period of stagnation and a socio-economic crisis (Stare Czarnowo) after their collapse.

On the basis of the results obtained, the villages that meet the administrative, size, economic and spatial criteria the most are Banie and Widuchowa. Thus, it should be considered whether they should regain the status of towns. Both villages play the role of commune centres. According to data from commune offices, they were inhabited by more than 1.5 thousand people in 2016. They do not have a local specialization within one section, which proves a more diversified economic structure among the discussed villages. In addition, they are located furthest in relation to neighbouring cities. These

centres also have the preserved urban layout in the form of a network of perpendicular streets, remains of a market square and small-town buildings. Their formal change of the status, however, will depend to a large extent on the determination of respective local authorities and the consent of the residents.

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