



University of the
National Education
Commission, Krakow


Agnieszka Kwiatek-Sołtys UKEN Prof. dr hab.

Department of Spatial Management and Urban Studies


A horizontal, painterly illustration of a small town in Poland. It shows a row of buildings along a street, with a large, ornate building on the right. The style is soft and impressionistic, with muted colors. The text 'Small towns in Poland' is overlaid in the center.

Small towns in Poland

European lecture series organized by the AESOP Thematic Group Small Towns
03.11.2025-01.12.2025



The structure of the presentation



- small towns in the urban settlement structure of Poland
- small towns' size categories
- new towns in the settlement structure
- land use and land ownership structure of new towns
- small towns population dynamics
- population shrinkage as the present challenge methods
- the level of socio-economic development – rank of towns
- leaders and those trailing behind
- development level versus function
- conclusions

The main aim of the presentation is to introduce the role of Polish small towns in the urban settlement structure of the country and state the factors influencing the development level of small towns in the light of planning and development strategies

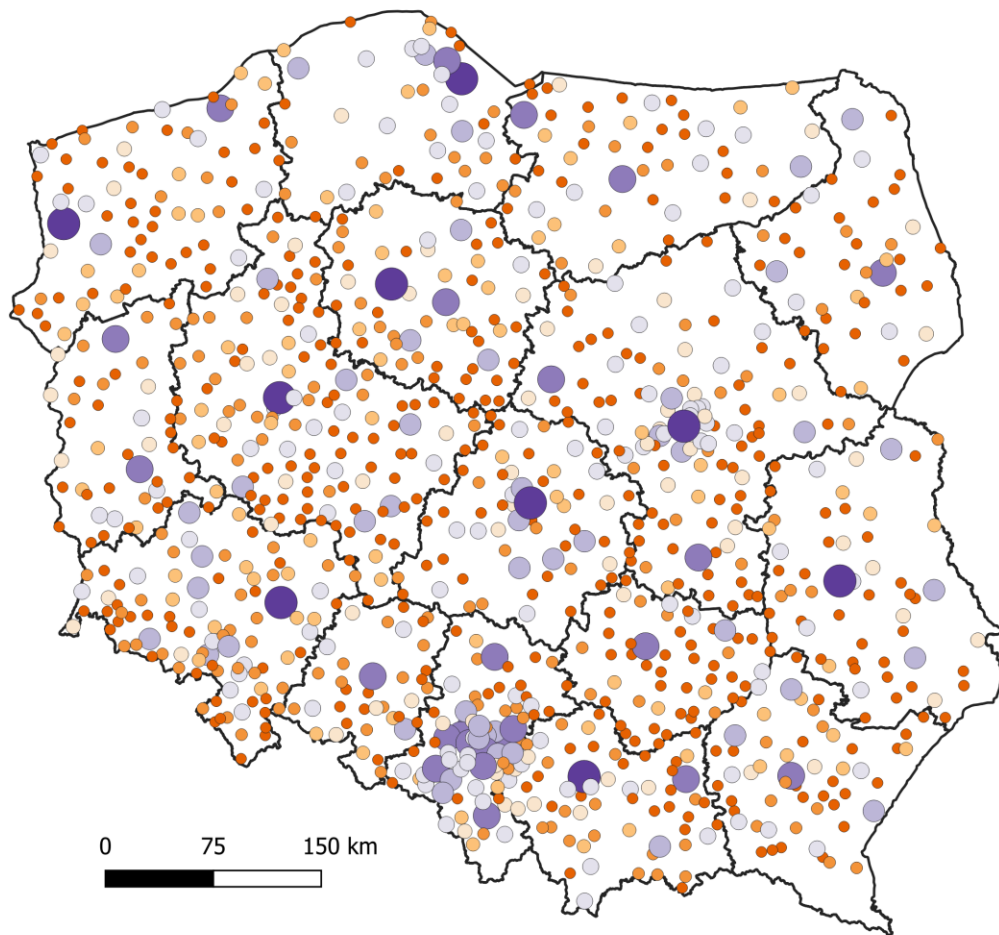


Bibliography



- Brzosko-Sermak, A., Kwiatek-Sołtys, A., (2025). Shaping the Residential Attractiveness of Towns in Lesser Poland in the Context of Urban Shrinkage, *Housing Environment*, e2025031. <https://doi.org/10.2478/he-2025-0031>
- Kwiatek-Sołtys, A. (2023). Small towns in Poland, the present problems and challenges. *CITY. HU Várostudományi Szemle 2023/III. évfolyam 1. szám*, 35.
- Bartosiewicz, B., Kwiatek-Sołtys, A., & Kurek, S. (2019). Does the process of shrinking concern also small towns? Lessons from Poland. *Quaestiones Geographicae*, 38(4), 91-105.
- Kwiatek-Sołtys, A. (2017). *Własność gruntów a poziom rozwoju małych miast w Polsce. Ujęcie typologiczno-przestrzenne*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego, Kraków
- Kwiatek-Sołtys, A. (2011). Small towns in Poland-barriers and factors of growth. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 19, 363-370

Urban settlement structure in Poland in 2024



[population 2024]

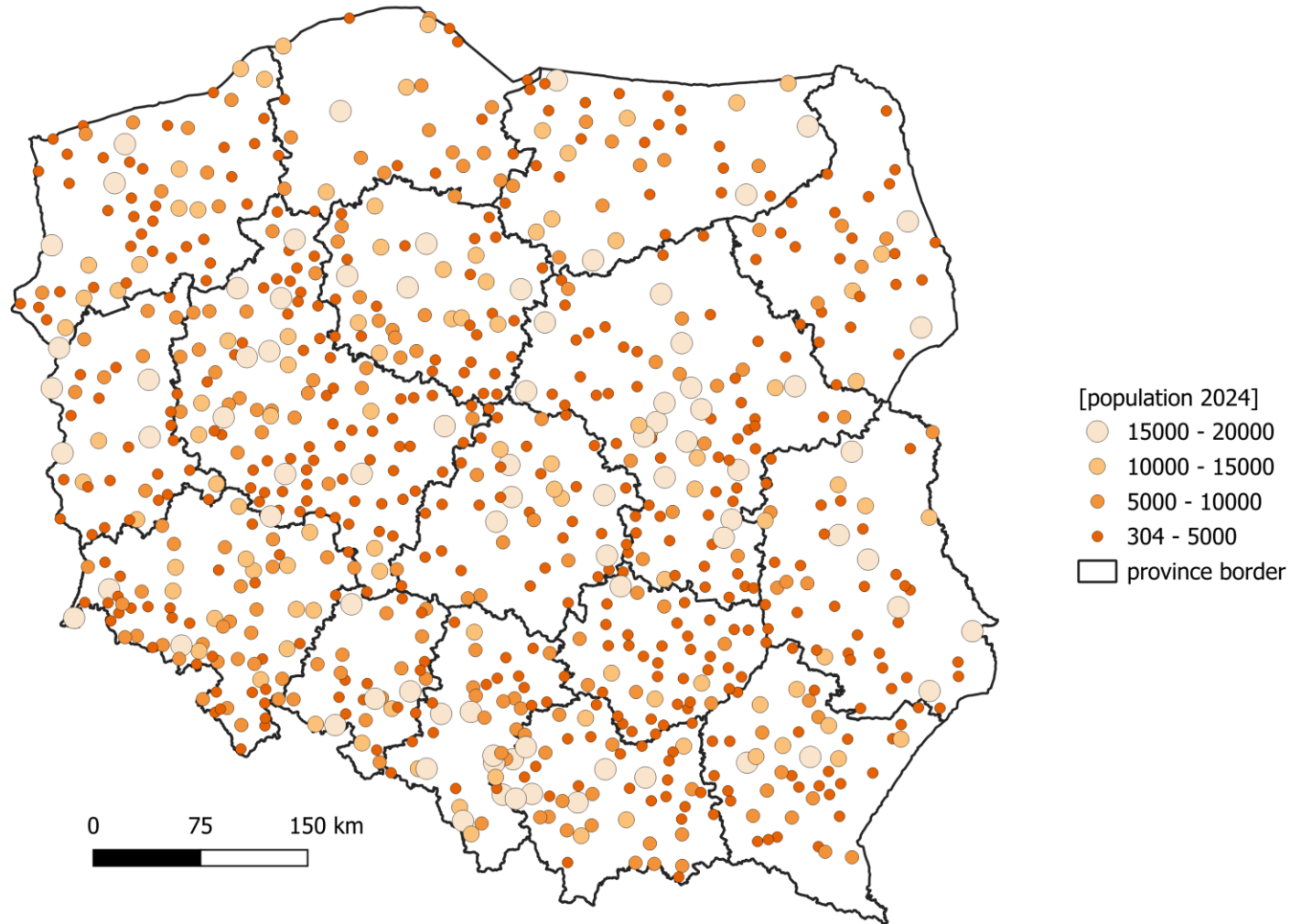
- 300000 - 1863845
- 100000 - 300000
- 50000 - 100000
- 20000 - 50000
- 15000 - 20000
- 10000 - 15000
- 5000 - 10000
- 304 - 5000

□ province border

pop.	cities	% of cities	pop.	% urban pop.	% all pop.
< 20000	805	79,5	5020154	22,5	13,4
20000-10000	174	17,2	7137759	32,0	19,0
100000 and >	34	3,4	10118054	45,4	27,0
all	1013	100	22275967	100	59,4

Sours: Author's based on Local Data Bank, Statistics Poland

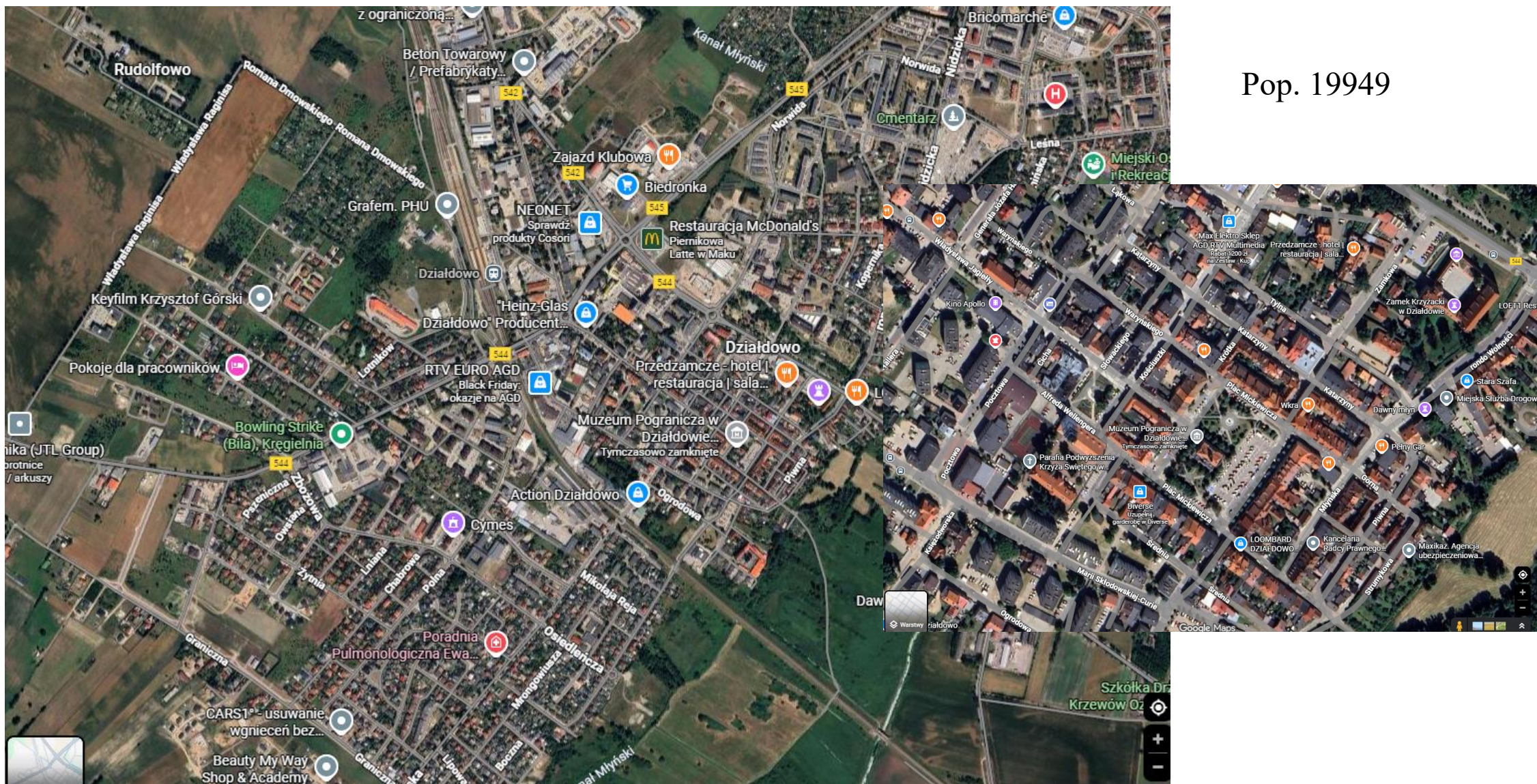
Small towns in Poland in 2024



pop.	cities	% of cities	pop.	% urban pop.
< 5 000	446	44,0	1169471	5,2
5000-10000	182	18,0	1303259	5,9
10000-15000	98	9,7	1203621	5,4
15000-20000	79	7,8	1343803	6,0
Small towns	805	79,5	5020154	22,5

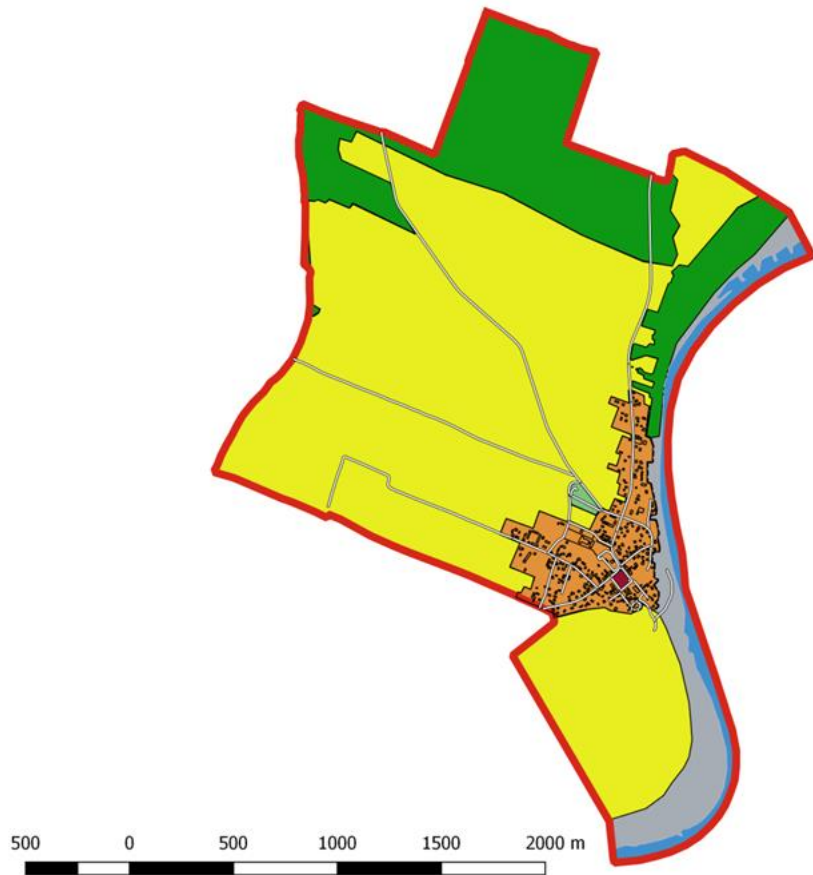
Sours: Author's based on Local Data Bank, Statistics Poland

The district town of Działdowo

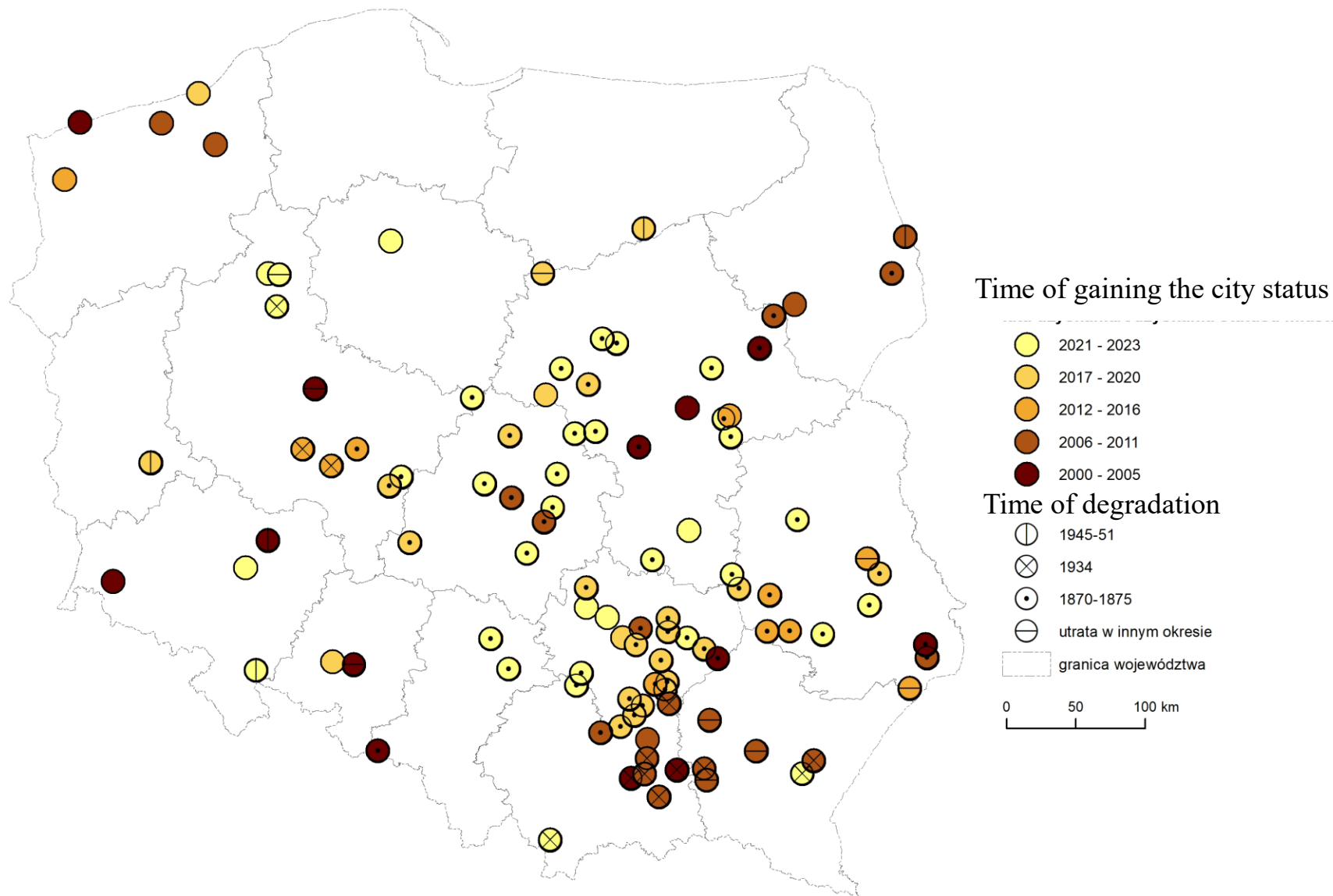


Pop. 19949

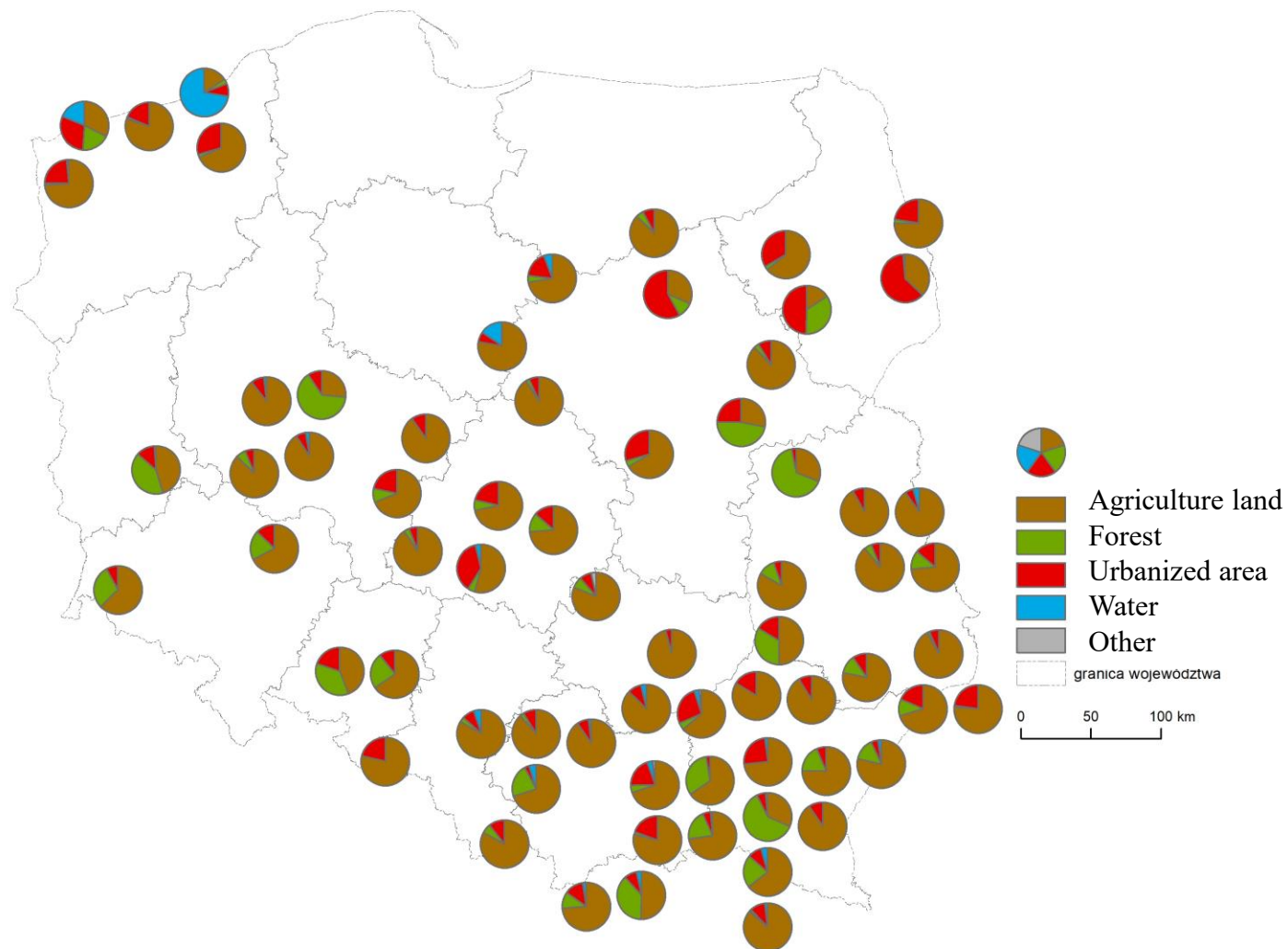
The smallest Polish town of Opatowiec



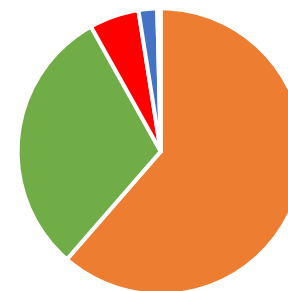
Towns which gained their city status between 2000 and 2023



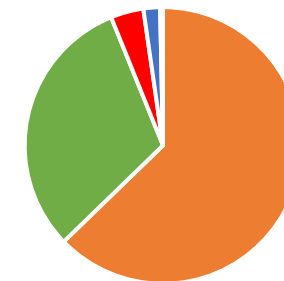
Land use structure



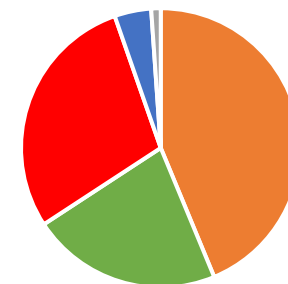
Poland



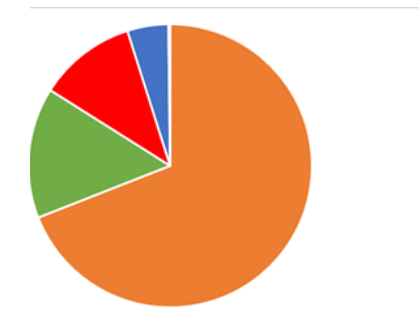
Rural areas



Cities

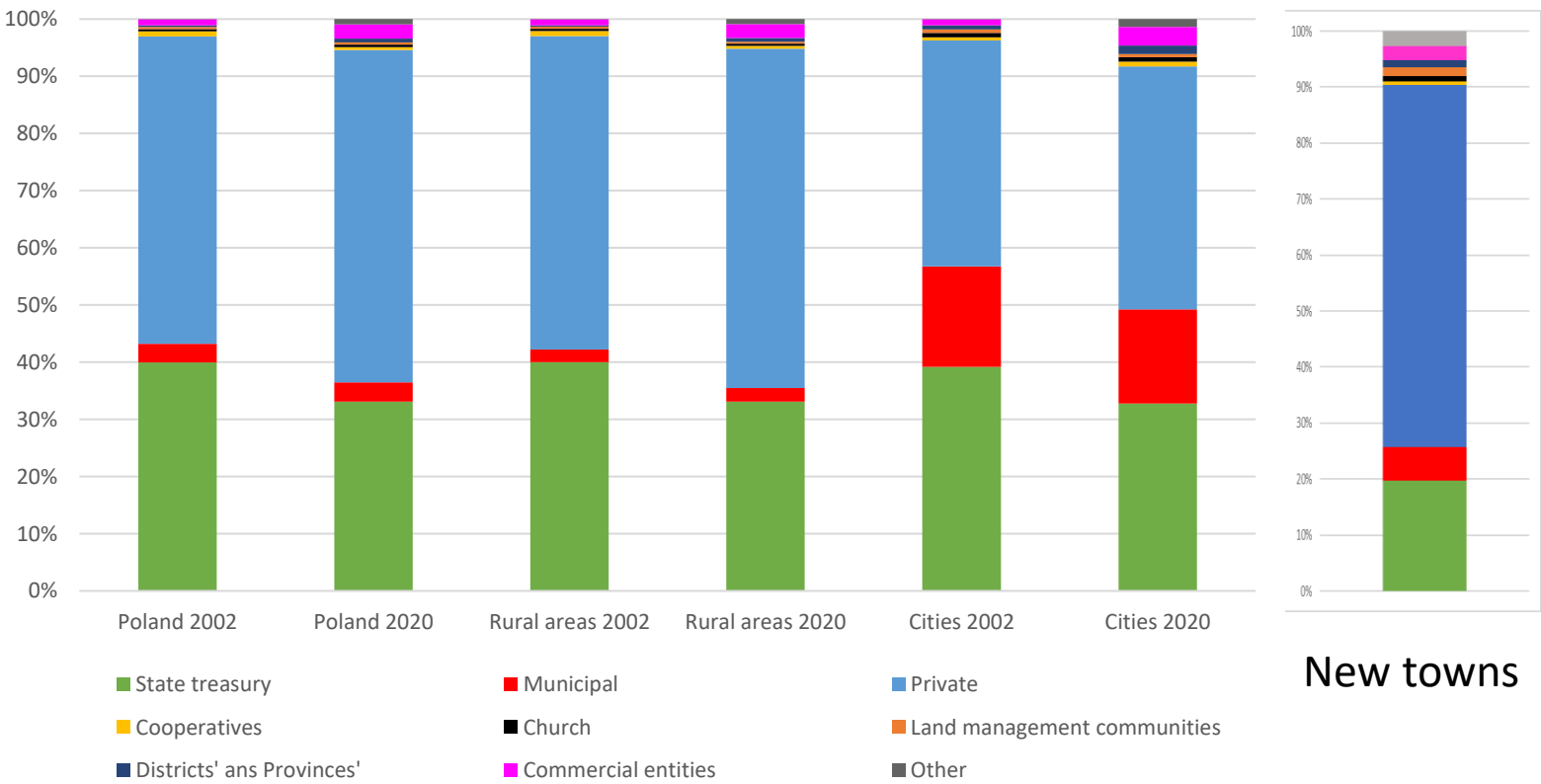
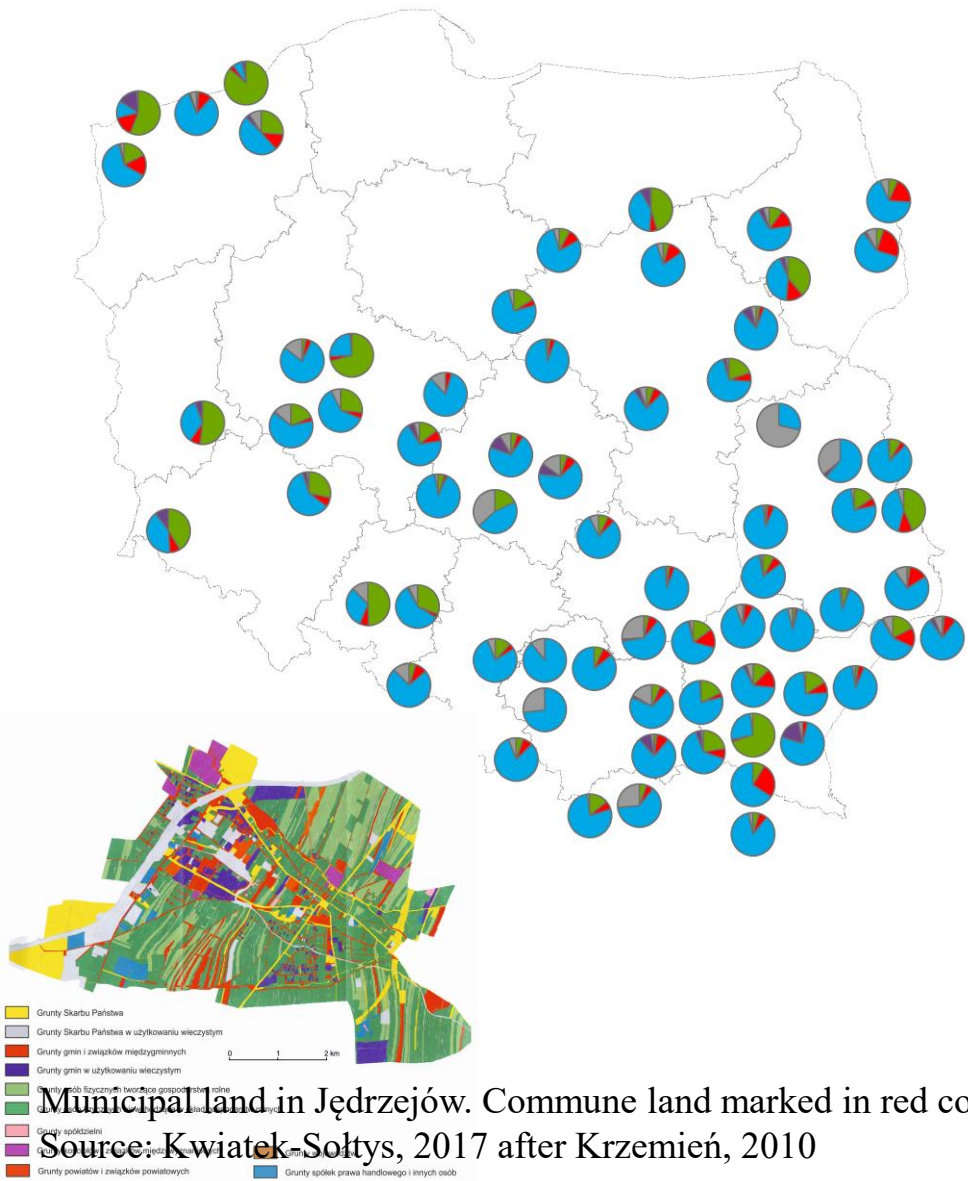


New towns





Land ownership structure

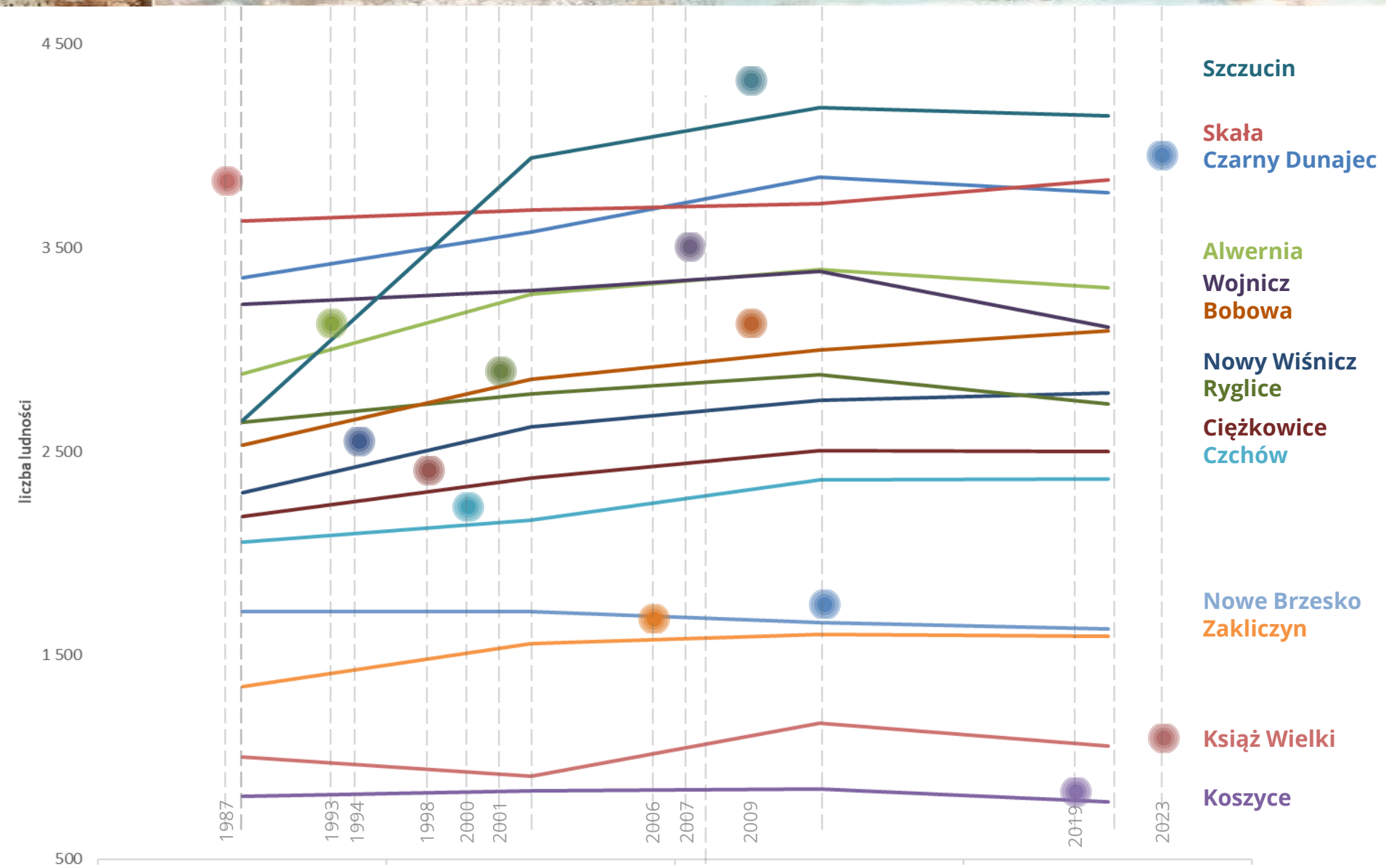


Municipal land in Jędrzejów. Commune land marked in red colour.

Source: Kwiatek-Soltys, 2017 after Krzemień, 2010

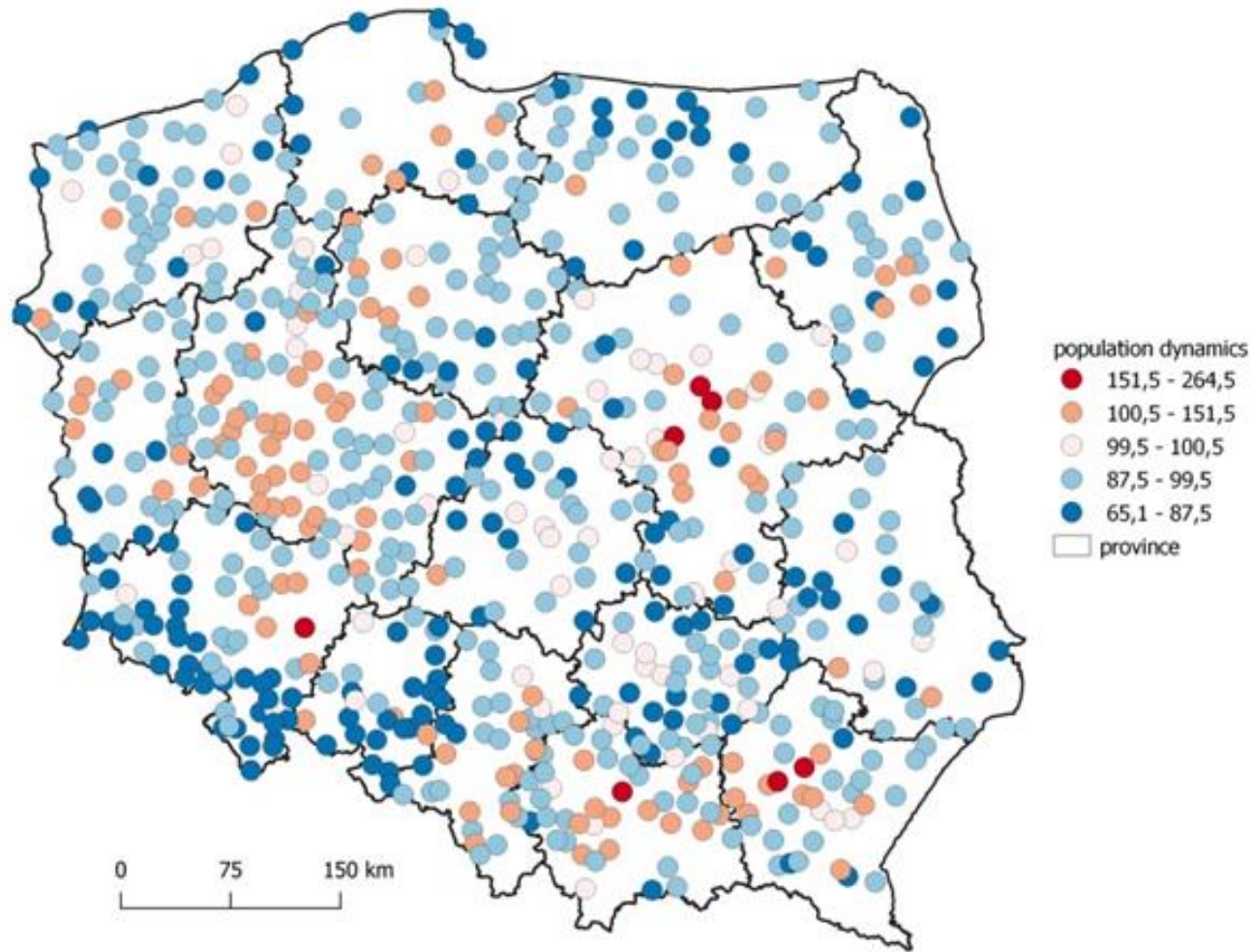


Population changes in restituted towns of Malopolska Province



Source: Jasińska A., 2025, data based on National Censuses 1988, 2002, 2011, 2021. The year of restitution is marked by a dot

Small towns' depopulation in the 21st century



77,5% depopulation

49,0% pop. dynamic index 2000-2024 below 90

Pop. dynamics index for small towns	93,4
new towns	97,2
medium towns	95,0
big cities	92,0

Reasons:

- small towns follow global trends
- Emigration
- Covid-19
- Rapid population aging

Sours: Author's based on Local Data Bank, Statistics Poland



Depopulation or shrinkage?

Previous research conducted by B. Bartosiewicz, S. Kurek, and A. Kwiatek-Sołtys (2019) showed that in the case of small towns, one cannot speak of shrinking, in the sense of a comprehensive depopulation process with signs of economic crisis.

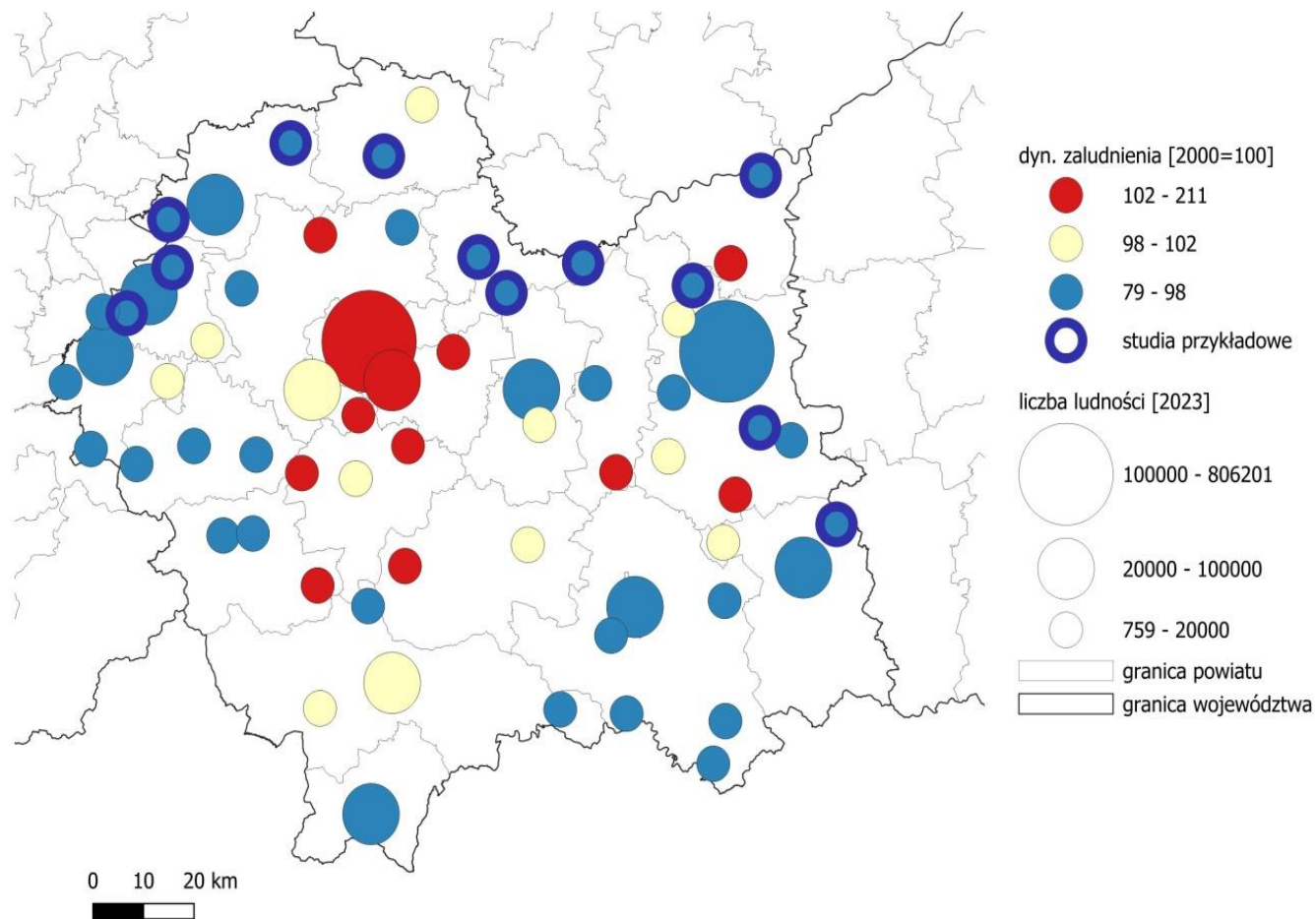
The research identified only a few shrinking small towns.

These towns were characterized by:

- a peripheral location
- a population of less than 5,000
- local functions not extending beyond their own municipality

Małopolska Province example

The most difficult situation is faced by small towns which are permanently losing inhabitants, both in towns themselves and in the immediate surroundings (communes).



Town	Pop. dynamics 2000 =100%	
	town	rural commune
Wolbrom	87,11	96,74
Bukowno	87,39	97,68
Libiąż	89,69	99,04
Biecz	90,84	96,89
Proszowice	90,86	95,74
Miechów	91,96	94,16
Trzebinia	95,27	92,25
Żabno	95,59	97,40
Nowe Brzesko	96,11	96,58
Szczucin	97,15	91,80
Tuchów	97,31	98,53
Koszyce	97,56	95,49

Source: Brzosko-Sermak, A., Kwiatek-Sołtys, A., (2025)

Residential attractiveness in planning documents

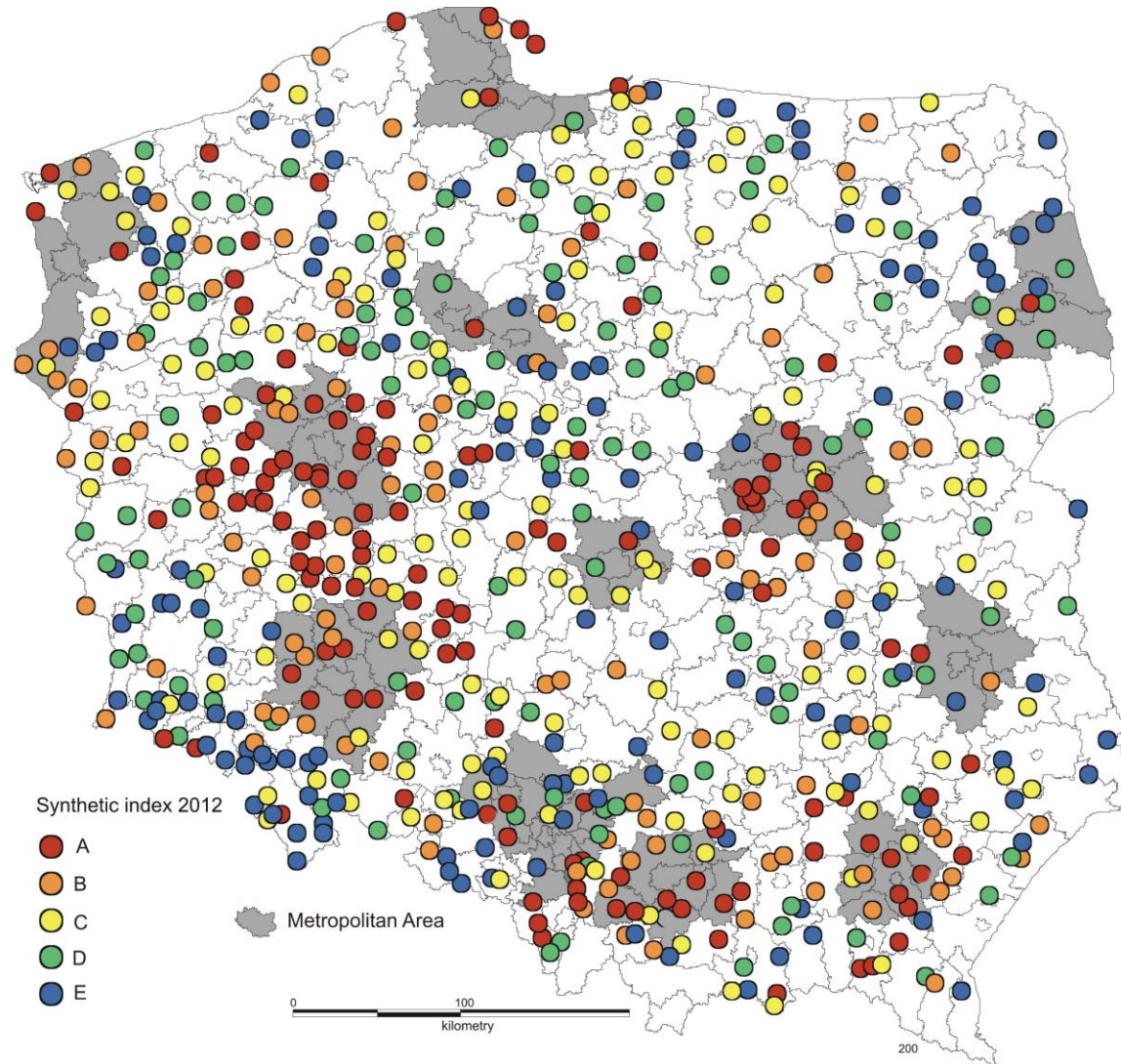
These towns should focus on creating attractiveness. It seems the local authorities understand the threat and see the solution in creating residential attractiveness.

According to the analyzed strategic and planning documents, the residential attractiveness of studied towns is supported primarily by:

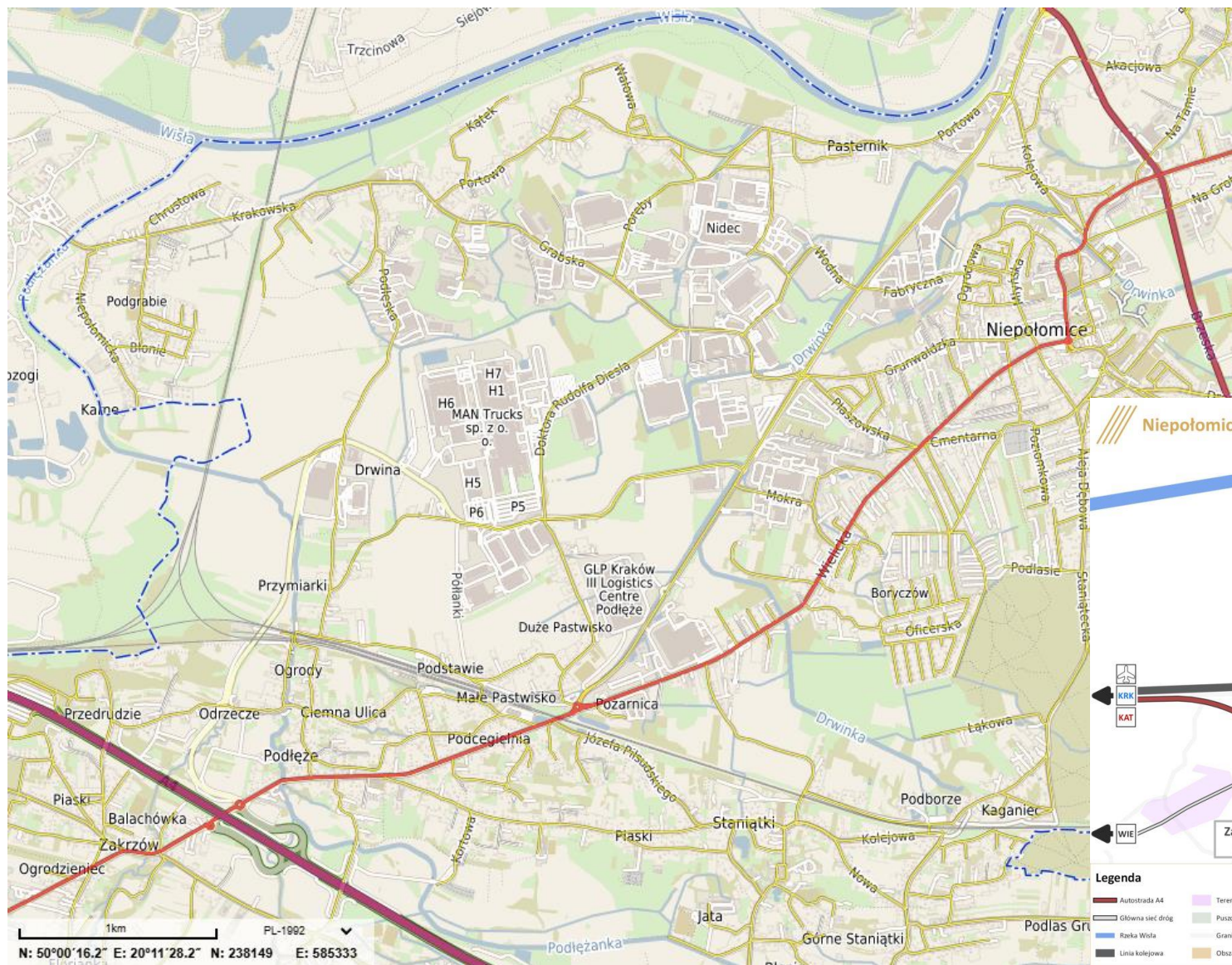
- investment in housing resources
- quality public spaces
- development of leisure activities
- building a positive image and brand
- improving the quality of life
- care for the natural environment

Town	new residential areas in local development plan	adaptation of unoccupied dwellings	increasing residential attractiveness	preventing urban sprawl
Wolbrom	X	X	X	X
Bukowno			X	X
Libiąż	X		X	X
Biecz	X			
Proszowice	X/-		X	X
Miechów	X			X
Trzebinia	X			X
Żabno	X			
Nowe Brzesko				
Szczucin			X	
Tuchów				
Koszyce	X			

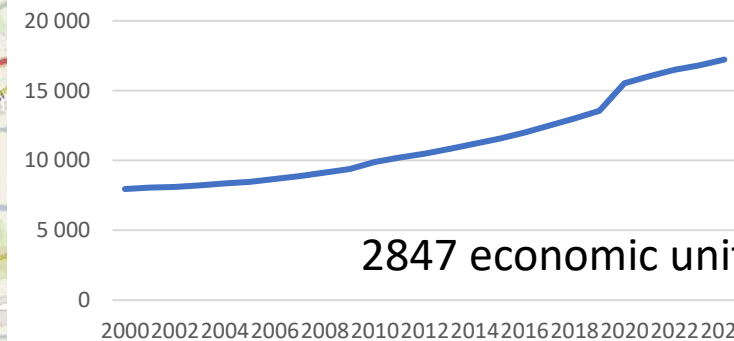
The development level rank of towns



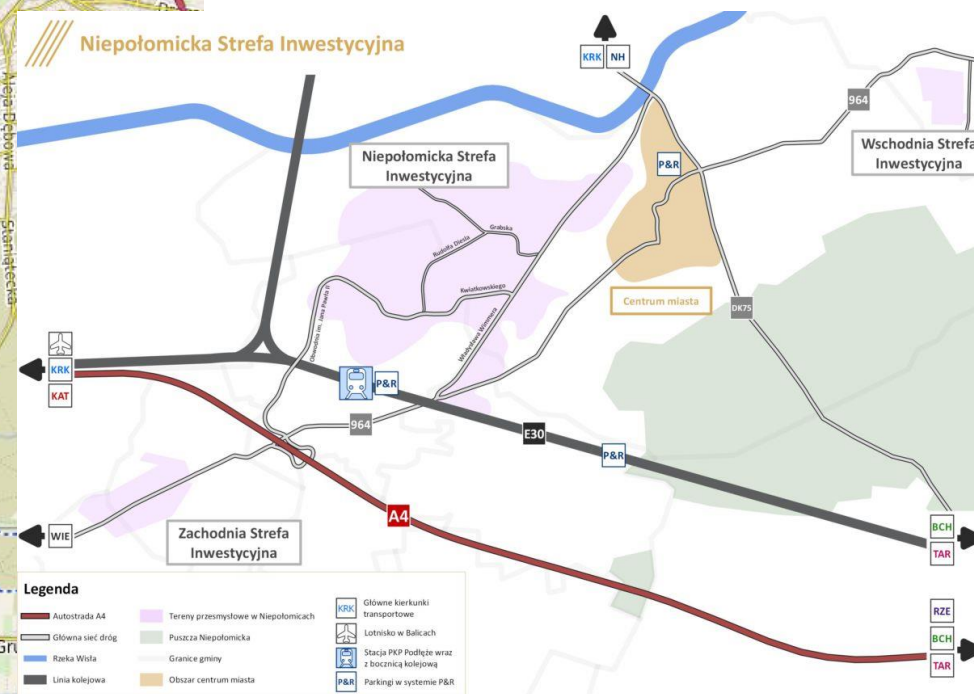
Niepołomice case



Population changes



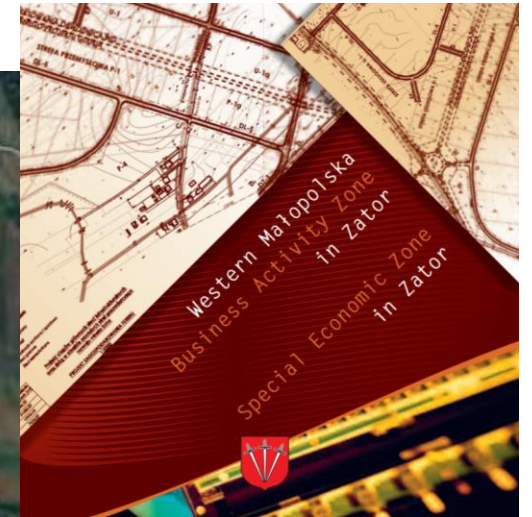
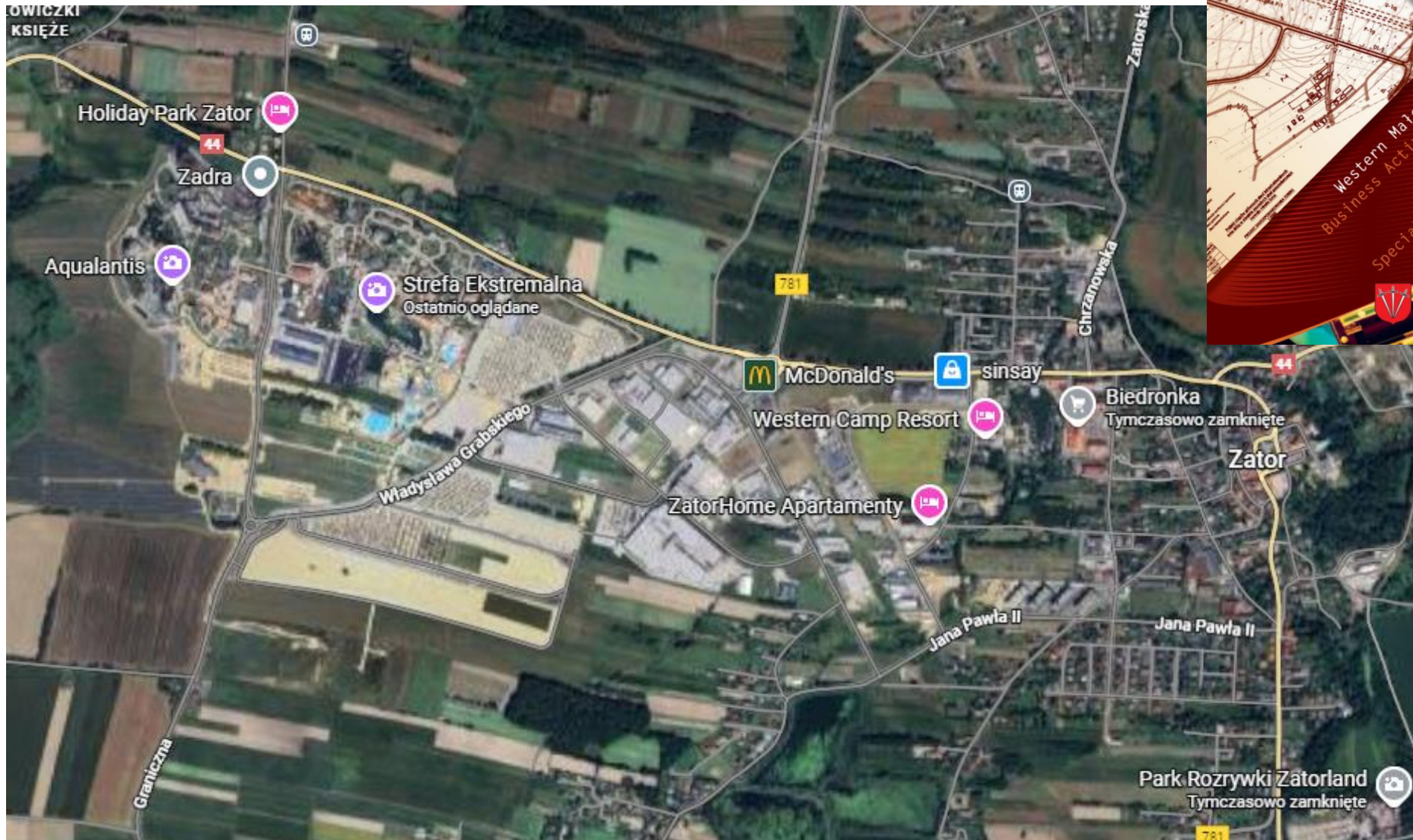
2847 economic units



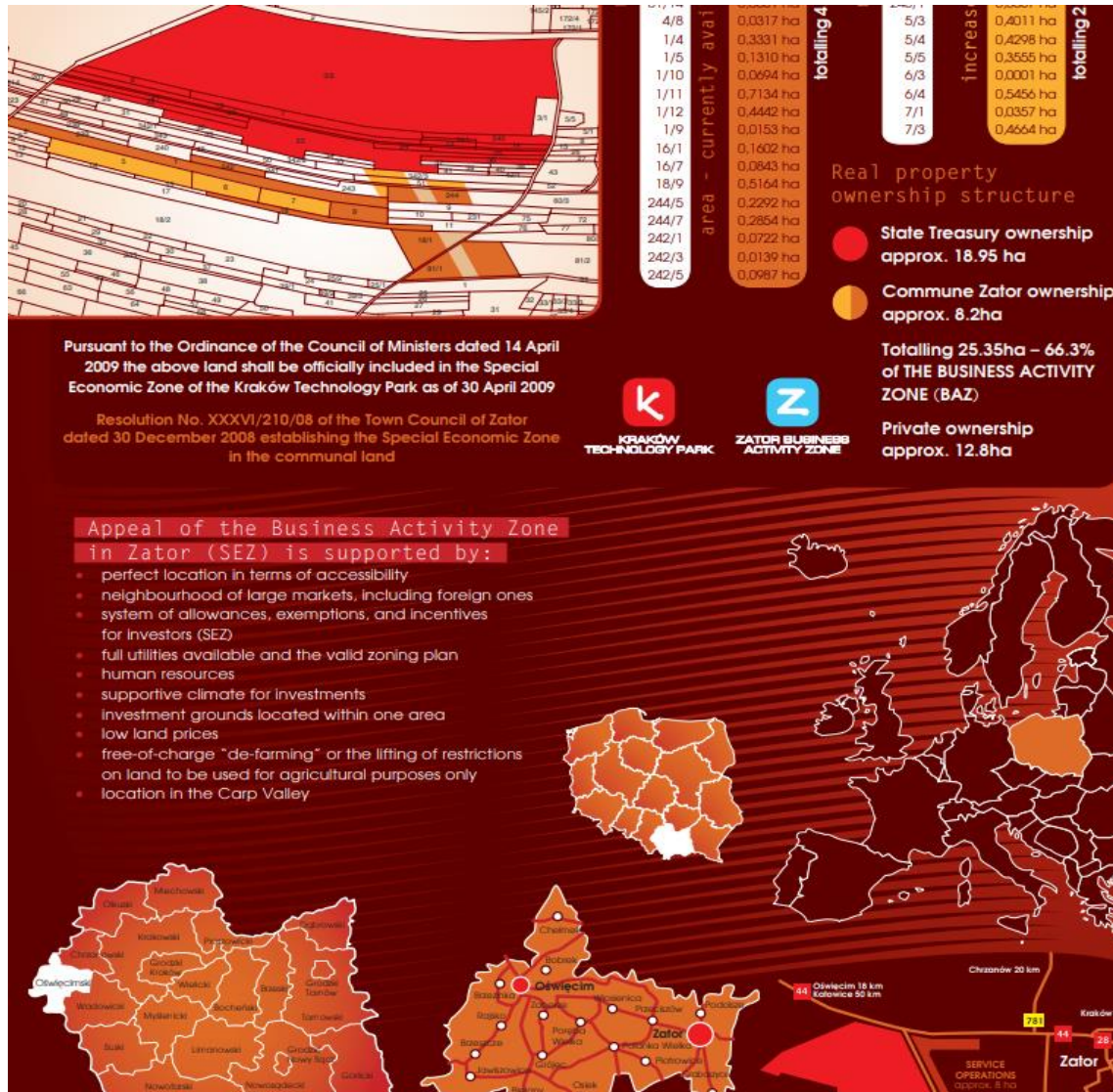
<https://niepolomice.e-mapa.net/>

https://www.niepolomice.eu/biznes_i_rozwoj/niepolomicka-strefa-inwestycyjna/

Zator's economic zone example



Zator's success story?



Attractiveness of the Business Activity Zone in Zator (SEZ) is supported by:

- perfect location in terms of accessibility
- neighbourhood of large markets, including foreign ones
- system of allowances, exemptions, and incentives for investors (SEZ)
- full utilities available and the valid zoning plan
- human resources
- supportive climate for investments
- investment grounds located within one area
- low land prices
- free-of-charge "de-farming" or the lifting of restrictions on land to be used for agricultural purposes only
- location in the Carp Valley

New built up areas in the suburbs of Krzeszowice



According to the IRM publication (Sroka, 2021), 12% of shrinking small towns are experiencing sprawl, which poses a significant challenge for local governments.

Local Development Program



ZWIĄZEK
MIAST
POLSKICH

As part of this program, the Association of Polish Cities will implement Poland's largest training and advisory project for local governments of small and medium-sized towns from 2019 to 2024, entitled "Building the institutional capacity of small and medium-sized towns in Poland for the implementation of effective local development policies."

"The 'Local Development' program is addressed to small and medium-sized towns, identified by the Polish Academy of Sciences as having the most challenging socio-economic situation in the country. It is intended to address the most important challenges faced by these cities, such as implementing accessibility standards and supporting entrepreneurship and the local economy"

The program's budget is €117 million, of which €102 million will be allocated to urban development projects. Funding for the development of Polish cities comes from the European Economic Area and Norway Grants.

Source: <https://www.miasta.pl/aktualnosci/fundusze-na-rozwoj-dla-malych-i-srednich-miast>

Cieszyn, **Hajnówka**, Hrubieszów, Jarocin, Jarosław, Jasło, Jelenia Góra, Kędzierzyn Koźle, Konin, Krosno, Łomża, **Nisko**, Opoczno, Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski, Ostrów Wielkopolski, Piła, Przemyśl, Rydułtowy, Stalowa Wola, Starachowice, Tarnów, Tomaszów Mazowiecki, Włocławek, Zabrze, Zawiercie, Zgierz, **Złotów**, Żary, Żywiec



Conclusions

The rank of towns presented shows a relatively good socio-economic position of small towns developing under the direct influence of the country metropolises.

The main factor influencing the synthetic index is a demography one.
The group of residential and suburban towns is well seen.

Some of the small towns take advantages from their location by looking for new functions often connected to creating new zones of economic activity.

The landownership and reprivatisation appear as an important factor of the differentiation and the barrier of growth for many small towns.

Competence and need for action of local authorities is of a crucial importance.



Uniwersytet Komisji
Edukacji Narodowej
w Krakowie

Agnieszka Kwiatek-Sołtys UKEN Prof. dr hab.

agnieszka.kwiatek-soltys@uken.krakow.pl

The background of the slide is a horizontal painting of a town square. It depicts a large, multi-story building with a central archway, surrounded by trees and a group of people in the foreground. The style is impressionistic with visible brushstrokes and a muted color palette.

Thank you for your attention

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