The directions in development for small towns in Podkarpacie considering the contemporary needs of their inhabitants

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Abstract The article presents three challenges. It focuses on the issue of small towns in the Podkarpacie region, which until recently was perceived as an area of stagnation. Today its potential is becoming increasingly recognised as a result of, among others, landscape values, pro-health and environmental conditions, natural resources, the good condition of the natural environment and the low pollution of air and waters. The second trend concerns small urban centres which, because of limited access to services, including important centres and jobs, are more difficult to promote as significant for the development of city tourism. Very often, they remain in the shadow of larger urban centres, unable to specialise in a given function. The opinion of their residents on housing conditions as well as the needs directed to an inhabited area is another important issue for determining the directions of development for small towns, which is another research problem of the paper. The article presents the results of sociological research carried out in selected urban centres. They concern the assessment of the quality of the residential environment made by respondents – the residents. Their opinion undoubtedly influences the determination of the directions in development for the cities indicated for research.

1 The contemporary role of the city

Nowadays, a city is a primary place in the life of man. Each of the urban centres strives for progress, as evidenced by the prospect of spatial development. Therefore the competitiveness between them rises. The priority of the cities is sustainable and balanced development, spatial and social cohesion with a respect for history, identity and the culture of the place. These actions are aimed at ensuring comfortable living conditions - a higher standard of living and access to attractive spaces and architectural structures.

This is a complex issue. As indicated by 2016 data, it concerns the life and needs of a population of over 7.3 billion people (7323 million) [1]. The US Intelligence Agency presented figures for the most densely populated countries in the years 1950-2016.

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According to these statistics, China, followed by India, EU and US are the most inhabited areas (table 1).

<table>
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<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>AN APPROXIMATED NUMBER FOR POPULATION IN MILLIONS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>1314</td>
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<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>1157</td>
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<td>EU</td>
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<td>USA</td>
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The number of inhabitants is relevant for the scale of human interference in the state of the natural environment, whose value and significance are more and more noticeable. Today, we observe and experience the threats connected with the destructive actions towards natural elements. Some of them include climate warming and the increased pollution of air and water. The activities of humans has a significant impact on the transformation of nature, which as a result of their actions changes into an anthropogenic environment rather than a natural environment.

Because of the ongoing changes to the natural environment, such as climate conditions, we face an obligation to prevent its destructive transformations. This approach is expressed by the principles of sustainable development that counteract the social and economic crisis [3].

Another critical challenge for European cities is to strive for the spatial cohesion of these centres forming polycentric networks with harmonious management. It serves a cohesive society respecting their rights and obligations, in order to satisfy social interests in a global as well as individual sense. In cohesive cities, economic unity provides jobs for the residents and environmental harmony with an appropriate ecological balance.

Regardless of their size, cities are areas of concentration for spheres of activity and spaces characterised by diversity - these are the two most important factors determining their development. The city, as a collection of sociological phenomena and related economic behaviours, is an area of investment, production and consumption. Its attractiveness depends on the indicated fields. They are closely related to each other through a number of interactions. At the same time, social relations and the preferences of the residents concerning the inhabited area seem to be a priority [4].

The city is primarily people who happily choose it as their place to live - an environment in which they satisfy (at least in large part) their needs, and so, the participatory process seems so important. It provides an opportunity to express the opinions of the residents in the inhabited area, their preferences and their expectations [5]. In polycentric city systems, small centres have a chance to be perceived as desirable areas of residence. On the one hand, they provide access to city attractions, and on the other, they enable contact with nature to a greater extent than large city centres. The advantage of small urban centres is their intimate atmosphere, quietness and peace.

### 2 Small cities in Podkarpackie - directions of development

The Podkarpackie voivodeship is located in the eastern, cross-border part of Poland. Its position ensures the cooperation and exchange of goods and experiences between the region and its neighbours - Slovakia and Ukraine. It is the least urbanised area in the...
country (about 41% of the population lives in cities). The average population density is 119 people per km² [6]. The region is characterised by the richness of the environment [7].

Almost 45% of the province is occupied by legally protected areas. They include 2 national parks (Magurski and Bieszczadzki), 94 nature reserves, 10 landscape parks, 13 protected landscape areas, 28 documented sites, 361 ecological sites, 9 nature and landscape complexes and 1,411 natural monuments [8]. Moreover, due to the abundant resources of curative waters, there are spas, such as Iwonicz Zdrój, Rymanów Zdrój, Połańczyk Zdrój and Horyniec Zdrój. The voivodeship is an agri-industrial region, where electromechanical, chemical and food industries are developing first and foremost [9].

Although agriculture is a leading economic branch, it should be emphasised that it is characterised by high agrarian fragmentation.

Although small towns in this region are struggling with many problems mainly related to the limited availability of jobs, they can be perceived as attractive places of residence. Above all, their advantages include landscape values, proximity to natural elements, excellent condition of the natural environment, favourable microclimate and cleanness of air and water. Apart from the indicated strengths of the region, the development strategy should also take into account the cultural values of the voivodeship and its small towns, which allow residents to be identified with their living environment, culture and tradition of that place. Many of the small urban centres have exceptional architectural objects, such as the Castle in Baranów Sandomierski, the Potocki Palace in Łańcut, the sanatorium facilities in Iwonicz Zdrój (Photo 1) or the town hall in Dukla (Photo 2). These monuments not only provide an identity for that place but also decide on the development of tourism, becoming a magnet attracting people willing to visit not only them, but also the city centres in which they are located.

Photo 1. Old Łazienki in Iwonicz Zdroj. Photo: Justyna Kobylarczyk).
3 Needs of the residents of small urban centres of Podkarpackie Voivodeship

In 2013, surveys which included 28 factors related to urban issues were carried out in the Podkarpackie area [10]. (Similar urban research was performed in 2015 in two Cracow housing estates - Olsza II and Ugorek) [11]. The assessment of the respondents – the residents, covered the following issues 1) The composition of urban layout - responsible for the readability of spatial solutions, thus for an easy orientation in the space. 2) The aesthetics, which makes urban space likeable, easy to identify with. The high aesthetic values affect the quality of the space, the willingness to visit it.3) The greenery- the type, variety and amount. Green areas not only allow for the active spending of time - recreation and physical activity, but also positively affect the mental well-being of people. Greenery improves the microclimate and reduces the concentration of air and water pollutants. Open green areas are to a limited extent available in residential areas and replaced by small green spaces, often in the form of green roofs and walls that provide the required percentage of biologically active surfaces. Campaigns to protect natural resources, including greenery, are becoming a priority today, which is in line with the idea of sustainable development, that emphasises the need of compliant relations between the anthropogenic and natural environments. 4) A beautiful view from the window has an direct influence on the prices of apartments.

Nowadays, common spaces have become increasingly appreciated. Therefore, one of the assessed factors included the way in which neighbourly social areas are developed. They allow deepening interpersonal relationships - 5). Other evaluated factors included access to basic services 9), access to health centres and pharmacies 12), access to educational facilities 10), intimacy and peace 19), security, 20) adequate yard size, 22) ventilation hygiene.

These are just some of the listed elements, phenomena and factors that were evaluated. The research used 3100 questionnaires, in which 28 factors were assessed. The residents defined their impact on the quality of the living environment using the following rating scale: very large impact (5 points), large (4), medium (3), small (2), very small (1), none (0). The results of the research are presented in Figure 1 [12].
Fig. 1. Research results on the assessment of the impact of individual factors on the quality of the inhabited environment (J. Kobylarczyk, Assessment of the quality of the living environment in selected cities of the Podkarpackie Province after the “transformation” period in the first decade of the 21st century, Cracow University of Technology, Cracow 2013 p.111).

On the basis of the research results, it can be assumed that factors, elements and phenomena that have a very large impact on the quality of the housing environment include safety, access to health centres and pharmacies, attractive view from the window, access to basic services, intimacy and peace.

Everyone wants to feel safe and secure in their place of residence, especially when the awareness of security threats is increasing. In the descriptive part of the questionnaire, respondents were to indicate which of the dangers they consider to be the most onerous. Among those mentioned were the threat of theft, vandalism, and bad communication solutions. Acts of vandalism, followed by poor communication solutions (lack of or extremely limited access to parking spaces, limited access to common means of transport and the poor technical condition of both roads and pedestrian routes) were considered to be the most serious. However, the most severe threat is generated by the arterial roads running through the strict city centre, dividing the communicational space of the town into two independent parts. Not only does the market square loses its character, but also poses a threat to safety and becomes a troublesome place due to noise, air pollution and vibrations. Access to health centres and pharmacies is essential in small urban centres, which often constitute a direct neighbourhood of the village, an area that lacks institutions that care for the health of the residents.

Subsequent factors selected as those having the most significant impact on the quality of the housing environment are the most prominent values of a small city. They include an attractive view from the window, which to a much greater extent is provided by a small urban centre rather than a large city with the ever-increasing compactness and intensity of housing. Detached houses are still the predominant type of residential buildings in small towns, but the analysed areas were also characterised by multi-family housing with a historical character or in the form of blocks. Modern multi-family complexes are less frequent in small towns in the Podkarpackie voivodeship. In large cities, the view from the window affects the price of a flat. Its attractiveness is important for people purchasing real
estate, especially when the view of natural elements compensates for a limited access to open green areas that are progressively transformed into parking spaces for an increasing number of vehicles.

Although small towns are not able to provide so many urban attractions and access to the so-called specialised functions, they meet the requirements for the availability of essential services such as close and easy access to the grocery store, greengrocer’s, school, kindergarten and clinic. In this respect, small cities meet the criteria for a high assessment of residential comfort, which is noticed and appreciated by the residents themselves.

The intimacy and calmness, which distinguish small city centres from increasingly crowded, large urban centres, are equally important. The excessive stimuli generated in urban spaces cause a desire for rest, to seek peaceful places that are in close contact with the natural elements.

The results of the research allowed the identification of elements, factors and phenomena that, in the eyes of the citizens themselves – the users of urban spaces are the most vital in the housing environment, and have the most significant impact on its quality.

4 Conclusions

In order to adapt to all the needs of users, the city, being the most inhabited area of residence, undergoes many transformations. It seems that today small towns can be perceived as an attractive place of residence for modern man. The fact that they are inhabited by 50% of the population proves this claim. It should be emphasised that apart from the most apparent values, such as the proximity of the natural environment or beautiful landscape, small urban centres have their unique character built by the atmosphere – a cameral mood, slower pace of life, intimacy and valuable architectural objects.

Field studies carried out in 2013 (urban analysis and sociological research, interviews and surveys) conducted in the area of 38 small towns in Podkarpacie proved that small towns of this province could be perceived as attractive places of residence. Unfortunately, the promotion of these cities requires a proper tourist base, which is difficult due to the unfavourable economic situation, as well as a deeply rooted opinion on the stagnation of the Podkarpacie region, which to some extent, is correct. Despite the many advantages of small urban centres of the Podkarpackie voivodeship, it should be noted that these centres are struggling with numerous problems that boil down to poor communication solutions, the neglect of historical objects and downtown areas, and flaws in space management. The route of national roads running through the historic centre of the cities [13] can be considered as the fundamental communication problem of the small towns of this region. These routes not only generate increased traffic but also pose a threat to safety. However, new ecological solutions such as the idea of Green Transport supported by Green Logistics are struggling with those detrimental phenomena [14].

Due to such inconveniences, it seems necessary to develop guidelines and new development directions that would allow identifying and, more importantly, using the strengths of small urban centres in the Podkarpacie region.

The quality of the living environment is affected by many factors that to a different extent influence the comfortable use of the space. However, safety has been assessed as the most vital one.

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Strengths of small urban centres in the Podkarpacie region.

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