

Article

Cittàslow as an Alternative Path of Town Development and Revitalisation in Peripheral Areas: The Example of the Lublin Province

Sebastian Bernat *  and Małgorzata Flaga

Institute of Socio-Economic Geography and Spatial Management, Faculty of Earth Sciences and Spatial Management, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, 20-718 Lublin, Poland

* Correspondence: sebastian.bernat@mail.umcs.pl

Abstract: The aim of the present study was to assess the possibilities of developing the Cittàslow network in the Lublin Province, a peripheral region in Poland, and to determine the status of revitalisation activities in the region. In the study, a socio-economic typology of towns was prepared based on Ward's agglomerative clustering method. Next, a survey was carried out using a questionnaire addressed to the authorities of the investigated towns. Finally, we conducted a case study of the towns which declared interest in joining the Cittàslow network in the survey. An analysis of revitalisation programmes proposed in those towns was carried out. The present survey shows that the idea of Cittàslow is supported by few towns in the Lublin Province. There is definitely more interest in revitalisation activities. This is mainly due to the fact that revitalisation projects for areas in crisis can be financed by external funds. The conclusions reached in this paper can be of use in planning development and revitalisation measures for small towns, especially in peripheral regions. The Cittàslow network may offer an alternative development path for the towns of the Lublin region. In addition, it may contribute to increasing opportunities for revitalisation.

Keywords: Cittàslow network; revitalisation; small towns; Ward's agglomerative clustering method; Poland



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1. Introduction

1.1. Essence of Revitalisation Processes and Cittàslow Movement

The economic, cultural and social changes initiated during the transformation of the Polish political system have led to progressive depopulation and spontaneous suburbanisation of many Polish urban centres. Similar trends are observed in other countries in this part of Europe, e.g., Ukraine, which is characterised by a low level of socio-economic development [1]. The above-mentioned phenomena are closely related to one another and occur in parallel. One of the reasons for the depopulation of cities and towns are the dynamic processes of suburbanisation. Suburbanisation is understood as the development of cities beyond their administrative boundaries, leading to the creation of specific “urban–rural areas” [2]. It is a stage, form or phase of the urbanisation phenomenon, associated with the relocation of urban residents along with their lifestyles, landscape forms and land use, urban infrastructure and jobs to rural areas surrounding the city [3]. During the process of suburbanisation, certain links between the city and suburban areas develop, resulting in the emergence of new functions in the suburban zone. Suburbanisation is one of the most important processes changing the structure of the landscape of rural areas in the hinterland of cities, especially in Central and Eastern European countries [4]. It visibly manifests itself in the growth and spatial expansion of development in the vicinity of the city, by which it is referred to as the “spillover” of the city into the countryside. Suburbanisation is taking place in the areas surrounding urban centres in Europe, leading to the depopulation of cities and towns [5]. When there is a significant drop in population, depopulation

takes the form of a multidimensional process of urban shrinkage. Urban shrinkage is a multidimensional process of socio-spatial transformation occurring under conditions of continuous population decline [6]. Several co-occurring causes of urban shrinkage can be identified, including effects related to economic transformation, deindustrialisation, globalisation, structural transformation, suburbanisation, demographic transition or environmental contamination [7]. These factors can occur singly or in conjunction with each other, and differently in each unit. It should also be noted that factors that are the basis of socio-economic development in some cities can be the cause of shrinkage in others [8]. The issue of “shrinkage” of cities has been researched in Europe, especially in Germany [7], but also in the United States [9] and globally [8]. The studies have focused on cities with populations over 100,000. Urban shrinkage has particularly affected those cities that have become both “post-industrial” and “post-socialist” cities as a result of systemic transformation. Urban shrinkage and suburbanisation are related but not identical processes. One speaks of the dichotomy of the urbanisation process, also referred to as the process of urban shrinkage sprawl [10,11]. Urban shrinkage gives rise to adverse socio-economic changes and unfavourable transformations of the spatial structure [12,13]. Depopulation blights approximately 68% of all urban centres in Poland, including approximately 70% of medium and small towns. The situation is the worst in the Świętokrzyskie, Opole and Lublin Provinces (voivodeships), where urban centres experiencing a population loss constitute over 90% of all cities and towns [5]. The last of these provinces is a distinctly peripheral region as it is located at the eastern border of the European Union. It is one of Poland’s least urbanised provinces and is characterised by clearly negative demographic processes.

Urban depopulation and suburbanisation are some of the key challenges for sustainable development, especially with reference to small towns. The literature does not provide an unambiguous definition of the concept of “small town” [14]. Some authors believe that small towns have fewer than 5000 inhabitants, others that they have up to 50,000 or 20,000 inhabitants. This shows that there is a great deal of variation in defining the size of small towns. Nowadays, more and more authors assume that a small town is an urban centre of up to 20,000 residents. The statistics of the Polish Central Statistical Office (GUS) and the United Nations use the size class of up to 20,000 in the classification of urban settlements. Small towns are mainly mono-functional settlement centres which provide services to the surrounding rural areas. A small town is also a spatially compact grouping of a small number of buildings in a small area that has a clear layout, and a small grouping of people who use these buildings, as well as interactions between and within these elements [15]. Small towns are relatively unstable objects in the geographical space: they can undergo rapid transformations, both progressive and regressive [16]. The growing importance of small towns for individual regions and entire countries is undoubtedly a 21st century trend.

Peripheral areas, i.e., ones with a low level of economic development, poor infrastructure and a low population density, are characterised by a high concentration of negative spatial phenomena. Peripherally located small towns are most often depopulated areas, which are perceived as offering no job prospects, and thus not attractive to settle and live in [17]. In recent years, the socio-economic problems affecting small towns have encouraged the search for new development paths [18]. It has been proposed that membership in the International Cittàslow Network, known as a network of “towns offering a good quality of life”, could be an alternative development path for small towns. The Cittàslow movement emerged over 20 years ago in Italy, and over time, it has spread to 33 countries, connecting over 287 towns around the world. In Poland, 36 towns belong to the Cittàslow network as of 15 July 2022. The idea of slow towns is part of the so-called “slow movement”, which is a response to the progressing globalisation and the paradigm of sustainable development [19].

In recent years, the attractiveness of towns has been boosted by revitalisation (or regeneration), understood as a process involving spatial, social and economic transformations of degraded neighbourhoods, aimed at improving the quality of life of their residents, restoring spatial order, reviving the economy and rebuilding social bonds. Revitalisation is

a long-term process that brings back to life spatial structures in all their dimensions: urban, architectural, technical, cultural, aesthetic, social and natural. Revitalisation is associated with the concept of sustainable development since it is a comprehensive approach that takes into account the ecological, social and economic aspects of urban life and puts emphasis on improving the quality of life of town residents [20]. Through comprehensive activities involving the reconstruction of space and social, economic and cultural revival, revitalisation often helps protect important assets of the cultural landscape [21]. The most noticeable effect of revitalisation is the improvement of the quality of public spaces to the benefit of residents and visitors.

A review of scientific publications from recent years shows that the issues associated with the Cittàslow movement, including revitalisation, have been an area of growing research importance [22–26]. Cittàslow towns in various European countries have been analysed in studies conducted in Italy [27–30], Germany [31–33], Poland [22,24,26,30,34–43], Ireland [44], Spain [45] and Scandinavian countries [46], among others, as well as outside Europe, including in Australia [47,48], New Zealand [49] and Turkey [50]. Some of them are single-case studies. Several of these publications assess the possibility of selected towns joining the Cittàslow network [51,52] or evaluate the implementation of the idea of Cittàslow in specific towns [18,53]. So far, no such research has been carried out on the towns of the Lublin Province, especially with regard to the relationship between Cittàslow and revitalisation. The only issues that have been investigated are spatial problems, development plans and the attitude of the province's small town authorities toward the Cittàslow network [54].

1.2. Revitalisation and Cittàslow in Poland

In Poland, the first interventions aimed at bringing degraded urban spaces back to life date back to the early 1990s [55]. The political transformations taking place at that time sparked interest in urban regeneration as a response to the economic, social and infrastructural crisis.

The National Urban Policy 2023 (NUP), adopted in 2015, identified revitalisation as one of the top ten priorities for the development of Polish cities and towns. The Revitalisation Act, passed in the same year, provided local governments with new tools for urban revitalisation, including municipal revitalisation programmes and special revitalisation zones [56]. In this Act, revitalisation is defined as “the process of rescuing degraded areas from crisis through integrated intervention for the benefit of local community, space and local economy, that is territorially focused and carried out by the stakeholders of this process, on the basis of a municipal revitalisation programme” (Art. 2, clause 1).

This long-awaited Act boosted interest in the issues of revitalisation in Poland [57]. Local authorities were quick to realise that activities in this area could be financed from EU funds, which resulted in the development and adoption of a large number of revitalisation programmes. According to the provisions of the Act, these programmes should define what activities help solve social problems in cooperation with various groups of stakeholders. In addition, it is important that the revitalisation process be a comprehensive tool for urban renewal, in which the modernisation of infrastructure is not an end goal, but a means of improving the quality of life of the inhabitants. Key to regeneration activities is a comprehensive diagnosis aimed at identifying areas that need a new lease of life. Such a diagnosis allows for concentrating public interventions where they will bring about lasting socio-economic changes [58]. A revitalisation area covers “all or a part of a degraded area, marked by a particular concentration of negative phenomena [...], which a commune/municipality intends to revitalise due to its considerable importance for local development” (Art. 10 clause 1). Revitalisation areas must not cover more than 20% of the area of a given commune/municipality and must not be inhabited by more than 30% of its inhabitants (Art. 10 clause 2). Degraded areas are areas that are “in a state of crisis due to the concentration of negative social phenomena, in particular unemployment, poverty, crime, a low level of education or social capital, and an insufficient level of public

and cultural participation [...], and which, additionally, are facing at least one of the [...] negative economic [...] or environmental [...], spatial-functional [...] or technical phenomena" mentioned below (Art. 9 clause 1), and for which no area limits or population limits have been established. The negative social phenomena in question include unemployment, poverty, crime, a large number of inhabitants with special needs, a low level of education or social capital and an insufficient level of public and cultural participation. Negative economic phenomena relate to a low level of entrepreneurship and a poor condition of local business. Negative environmental phenomena are associated with exceedance of environmental quality standards and the presence of waste posing a threat to the environment and human life and health. Negative spatial and functional phenomena include insufficient technical and social infrastructure or its poor technical condition, lack of access to basic services or their poor quality, maladjustment of urban solutions to the changing functions of the area, lack of infrastructural adjustments to accommodate people with special needs, a low level of transport services and a shortage or a low quality of public areas. Negative technical phenomena encompass degradation of the technical condition of buildings, including residential ones, and a lack of technical solutions enabling the effective use of buildings, in particular with regard to energy efficiency, environmental protection and accessibility to people with special needs (Art. 9 clause 1).

Until the end of 2023, areas can be regenerated as part of a revitalisation programme other than a municipal revitalisation programme. The legislator left the choice of the procedure to municipal councils, assuming that at the initial stage of implementing the Act, the instruments it provides should only be tried out by those municipalities in which the nature and scale of the needs justify the use of those instruments. However, it must be emphasised that the legislative instruments provided by the act can only be used in implementing a municipal revitalisation programme developed on the basis of the Revitalisation Act. At the same time, it should be underlined that the principal body for conducting and coordinating revitalisation activities within a given administrative unit is the local self-government. Preparation, coordination and creation of appropriate conditions for the implementation of a revitalisation programme, as well as the implementation itself, are all the (non-mandatory) responsibilities of a municipality. Revitalisation projects planned under municipal revitalisation programmes (MRPs) or local revitalisation programmes (LRPs) are the key activities aimed at achieving the objectives of revitalisation.

By the end of 2018, almost 1500 revitalisation programmes had been developed throughout Poland, among which LPRs were the main type of programme. In total, revitalisation areas were inhabited by over 6 million people, i.e., 15.84% of the Polish population. On average, these areas covered 3.62% of the area occupied by municipalities. At the provincial level, the largest revitalisation areas are found in the Kujawsko-Pomorskie, Świętokrzyskie and Lublin Provinces. Revitalisation in urban–rural communes is concentrated mainly in urban areas or urban and rural areas at the same time, and accounts for about 82% of all planned revitalisation projects [57,58]. The dominant type of project are investment projects, which represent 61.3% of all planned tasks. Revitalisation activities are perceived to be an important element of the urban development policy. Appropriately targeted tasks can increase the attractiveness of spaces, thus stimulating the local economy, the activity of the inhabitants, etc.

On average, in Poland, there are 21 projects per revitalisation programme, with a median distribution of 14. The average number of revitalisation projects increases with the size of the urban centre. In small towns, on average, three times fewer projects are planned per programme than in large cities. The average number of projects is 16 in small urban centres (median = 12), 28 in medium centres (median = 19) and 61 in large centres (median = 44).

Poland ranks second in the list of countries with the largest number of Cittàslow towns. The Polish National Network of Cittàslow towns, operating since 2006, currently has 36 member towns (<https://cittaslowpolska.pl/index.php/pl>, accessed on 20 July 2022). They include 26 towns from the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Province, 2 from the Opole Province

and 1 town each from the following six provinces: Wielkopolskie, Śląskie, Lublin, Pomorskie, Zachodniopomorskie, Łódź and Mazowieckie (Figure 1). These are mainly small towns of up to 20,000 residents. Only four of the Polish Cittàslow towns (Bartoszyce, Działdowo, Prudnik and Szczytno) have a population of more than 20,000 inhabitants, and 14 are county (powiat) capitals. Member towns represent different levels of development, but they are mostly moderately or poorly developed urban centres [59]. The town with the highest population and economic indices is Murowana Goślina in the Poznań agglomeration, and the town with the highest leisure and tourism indices is Ryn in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Province. The least favourable socio-economic situation is that of the town of Rejowiec Fabryczny, in the Lublin Province [60]. Apart from Murowana Goślina, the towns of Rzgów and Barczewo, located in suburban zones of large cities, also stand out in terms of the level of development.

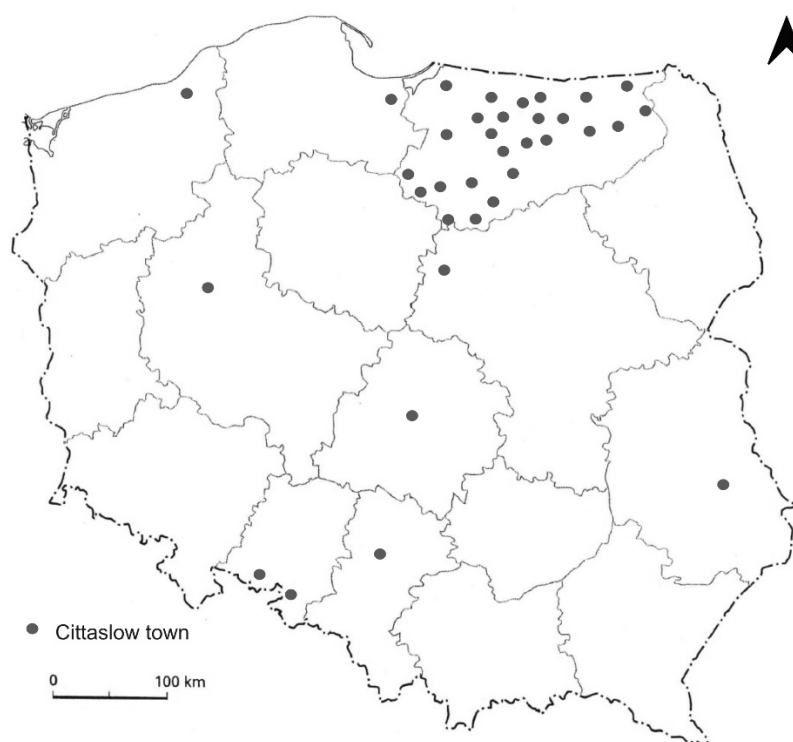


Figure 1. Geographical location of Cittàslow towns in Poland. Source: Author, based on <https://www.cittaslow.org/>, accessed on 20 July 2022.

Pursuant to Art. 8 of the Cittàslow International Charter (2014), all towns with under 50,000 inhabitants that meet the qualification requirements approved by the association can join the network as ordinary members. Additionally, it is assumed that a “slow” town should not be a town holding the status of a county (a county capital forms a separate supralocal settlement subsystem that encompasses an area larger than the area of a municipality [61]; this is mainly related to the well-developed commercial, educational and administrative functions of those urban centres). Membership in the organisation is granted to towns and municipalities whose applications have been approved by the International Coordinating Committee upon the initiative of national coordinating groups. Having paid the registration fee within four months of admission, a town acquires the status of a Cittàslow member town. In the application to join, the candidate town declares to accept, without reservations, the organisation’s charter. Additionally, the candidate must meet at least 50% of all the requirements for excellence by complying with at least one requirement in each of the seven categories shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Cittàslow certification criteria.

Category 1: Energy and environmental policy	
➤	water and air quality conservation systems *
➤	drinking water and electricity consumption control systems
➤	selective waste collection plans *
➤	promotion of composting of industrial and domestic waste
➤	wastewater treatment plants *
➤	energy saving plans for residential and public buildings
➤	electric energy production from renewable sources
➤	traffic pollution and noise reduction systems
➤	biodiversity conservation programmes
Category 2: Infrastructure policy	
➤	efficient cycle paths
➤	total length of cycle paths similar to that of the roads located within the town area *
➤	parking lots for bicycles
➤	planning ecomobility as an alternative to private vehicles *
➤	projects for removal of architectural barriers *
➤	support programmes for families and activation of women
➤	good access to medical services
➤	“sustainable” supply of merchandise to urban centres
➤	commuter support planning *
Category 3: Quality of urban life policy	
➤	interventions for improving the quality of urban life and recovering civic centres (tourist signs, street furniture) *
➤	recovery or creation of social green areas using productive plants and/or fruit trees **
➤	requalification or reuse of marginal areas *
➤	service desk for bioarchitecture
➤	monitoring and reduction of pollutants
➤	plans for the development of telecommuting
➤	promotion of private sustainable urban planning *
➤	promotion of social infrastructure
➤	protection of workshops; creation of natural shopping centres *
Category 4: Agricultural, artisan and tourist policies	
➤	promotion of the development of organic farming **
➤	prohibiting the use of GMO in agriculture
➤	protection of local handmade and labelled artisan production *
➤	promotion of traditional crafts and working techniques *
➤	plans for increasing accessibility to resident services
➤	promotion of local (organic) products in public catering services, e.g., school canteens *
➤	taste education programmes and programmes promoting local products
➤	conservation and creation of local cultural events *

Table 1. Cont.

Category 5: Policies for hospitality, training and awareness	
➤	good welcome (tourist signs, employee training) *
➤	transparency of commercial offers and prices *
➤	availability of “slow” routes (leaflets, websites)
➤	Cittàslow training programmes for administration officials **
➤	health education programmes (civilisation diseases)
➤	ongoing provision of information to residents that their town is part of the Cittàslow network (also when the town is a candidate member) *
➤	active involvement of associations cooperating with the administration in matters related to Cittàslow
➤	participation in Cittàslow * programmes
➤	use of the Cittàslow logo on posters, headed paper and websites *
Category 6: Social cohesion	
➤	anti-discrimination programmes
➤	programmes associating people with disabilities
➤	child poverty prevention programmes
➤	creating opportunities for multicultural integration
➤	youth activity areas and youth centres
Category 7: Partnerships	
➤	support for Cittàslow activities and programmes
➤	cooperation with other organisations promoting organic and traditional food
➤	support for twinning projects and cooperation for the advancement of developing countries, related to promoting the philosophy of Cittàslow

* = mandatory requirement. ** = prospective requirement. Source: Adapted by authors from the Cittàslow International Charter, 2014.

To check whether these requirements are being fulfilled, members are verified every five years [31]. Mazur-Belzyt [62] believes that the most difficult task related to joining the network is to raise the awareness of residents so that they understand the benefits of belonging to the network and want to participate in activities aimed at improving their quality of life.

Cittàslow is a concept that promotes town development focused on local diversity rooted in historical and cultural heritage and local traditions; slow towns attract people with their relaxed pace of life [28,29,49]. The Cittàslow movement, rather than proposing radically new measures, stresses the connections among many existing challenges. Joining the network does not mean a town has to abandon economic development. Cittàslow towns put emphasis on innovation and use new technologies to improve the quality of the natural and urban environment [34]. Their mission is also to create a unique urban landscape, rich in high-quality public spaces, embodying the genius loci of the town and enhancing its character. The Cittàslow movement aims at restoring public spaces, enhancing the image and the quality of the landscape, maintaining a clear identity of member towns and combining tradition with innovation and progress [36].

Mazur-Belzyt [34] points to other commonly underestimated endogenous advantages, such as the strong community bonds and social awareness of the inhabitants of Cittàslow towns resulting from their deep sense of belonging to their place of residence. That author believes that each Cittàslow town has its own unique endogenous potential, which, under the right conditions, can contribute to the actual development and improvement of the quality of life of its population. Citizens of Cittàslow towns are proud of belonging to the network, respect local traditions and culture and promote local economy, traditional crafts, products and cuisine, while being hospitable and open to the world. Life in Cittàslow towns moves at a slow pace; it is calmer, more attentive and healthier, and it is lived with respect for the natural environment, landscape and historical, artistic and cultural heritage. It is a

less frantic, more human-like and environmentally correct way of living that is considerate of present and future generations [19].

Thus, Cittàslow falls within the concept of a sustainable city [63], as it helps to reduce the harmful effects of globalisation and maintain the identity of the place, which is important for sustainable tourism [31]. Cittàslow towns should have ample green areas, contributing in this way to the elimination of the negative effects of urban life [37]. The “slow” movement, which encourages good interpersonal relations, promotes the creation of new, high-quality public spaces for local communities to spend their free time in [64]. The value of Cittàslow also lies in the way it supports local gastronomy, products, events and small businesses, promoting social participation and creating a network of cooperation between residents, entrepreneurs and the local self-government [31]. Still, Batyk and Woźniak [65] believe that accession to the network is a purely promotional act, the main purpose of which is to raise funds and advertise a town’s participation in international events. Nevertheless, we can assume, similarly to Zadecka [36], that there are six categories of benefits that accrue from the implementation of the “slow city” model. They are economic, social, environmental, spatial, organisational and image-related benefits. The balance of benefits may, however, be different for different cities and towns.

Cittàslow is a coherent strategy of shaping the image of towns, which is supposed to be a stimulus for reviving their economy and activating their communities. As part of the network, towns cooperate, among others, in revitalisation activities. The cooperation may involve exchanging good practices, raising funds for revitalisation, organising events and celebrations in regenerated areas, adopting measures for increasing the number of visitors and creating and promoting a positive image of towns. Attention should also be paid to outcomes such as the development of network ties between towns, the expansion of the network tourism product, better promotion and recognisability of the network, and, above all, an increase in the role of the network in the region’s competitiveness and as an impulse for development. An additional advantage is that local authorities and institutions gain practice in designing and implementing revitalisation initiatives on a new scale, i.e., the scale of a network of urban centres [66].

The aim of the present paper was to assess the possibility of developing a Cittàslow network in the Lublin Province, which is located in eastern Poland and is one of the peripheral regions of the European Union. An additional goal was to evaluate revitalisation plans for selected towns of the region which are aspiring to join the Cittàslow network. It was assumed that the study would allow us to determine the relationship between Cittàslow and revitalisation. We also wanted to develop a typology of the investigated small towns of the Lublin Province and find out how familiar their authorities were with the Cittàslow approach.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study Area

The Lublin Province is counted among the European Union’s peripheral regions. It is an area of a distinctly agricultural character. Its peripheral nature manifests itself, among others, in the demographic and social dimensions through a poor condition of the population, which is characterised by demographic weakness and social backwardness [67]. The region is losing inhabitants and is threatened with depopulation [68]. The long-lasting decline in population results in a gradual regression, which is visible on various levels of socio-economic life and in geographical space and often leads to the complete disappearance of localities. As a consequence, local production potential is weakened and development opportunities are limited. Permanent changes in the landscape are also observed, which lead to the disappearance of the values represented by these landscapes [69]. These changes also affect small towns [70].

Due to a low industrialisation level and high unemployment rates, the Lublin Province is one of Poland’s poorest regions. According to an EU classification, it is also one of the poorest areas in the Union, with a gross domestic product per capita representing merely

44% of the EU average. For this reason, the province is viewed to be a part of the so-called Eastern Wall, which is characterised by a high level of poverty [71]. Moreover, like most areas in Poland, the Lublin Province is one of the least competitive EU regions, taking into account the knowledge and creativity of its inhabitants, the condition of the economy and the effectiveness of the labour market. The Province came 217th in a ranking of 296 EU administrative units [72]. The standard of living indices here are below the national level, while inhabitants' quality of life evaluations differ depending on their place of residence and social and occupational status [73].

The Lublin Province has a low urbanisation rate [61]. Its urban network encompasses 51 cities and towns, including four with county rights. As many as 47 of the region's towns have a population of fewer than 50,000 inhabitants, with 40 towns having fewer than 20,000 inhabitants. The urban centres are unevenly distributed—there are more cities and towns in the western part of the region (Figure 2). The cities and towns of the Lublin Province have limited human resources. The only large city is Lublin, the capital of the province, but its population of 340,000 places it only ninth among Poland's largest cities. Lublin accounts for 34% of the region's urban population and is clearly ahead of other cities and towns of the province in terms of population size. The province's second most populous city is Zamość, whose population is only about one fifth of that of Lublin. The dominant type of urban centre in the Lublin Province are small towns with a population below 20,000 inhabitants. They constitute as many as three-fourths of all urban centres in this regions. Many of these small towns have been towns for a relatively short time, having been granted town privileges within the past 20–30 years. The position of small towns in the province's urban network has become somewhat stronger since the beginning of this century, when their number increased by eight, and the share of the total urban population increased by about 8% [74].

Small towns have limited human potential, which is why, despite their large number, they account for only a quarter of the region's urban population. Most of them are towns, with the lowest population of up to 5000 inhabitants, and the population of five of them (Frampol, Goraj, Józefów nad Wisłą, Modliborzyce, Siedliszcze) does not even reach 1500 people (Table 2). Such small towns have grown in number the most since the 1990s, mainly due to the dwindling of the population of larger urban centres, and partly as a result of several villages being promoted to town status. As a consequence of these transformations, the average population of small towns has also decreased. However, in the initial period of economic transformations (until 1995), the population increased in most cities and towns [61].

Table 2. General characteristics of the surveyed towns of the Lublin Province (data as of December 2020).

County	Towns by County	Area in Ha	Population in Number of People	Population Density (People/km ²)	Town Privileges Granted (Year)
bialski	Międzyrzec	2003	16,667	832	1440/41
bialski	Podlaski	1011	5457	540	1779
biłgorajski	Biłgoraj	2110	26,114	1238	1578
biłgorajski	Frampol	467	4041	60	1993 (1736)
biłgorajski	Goraj	762	917	127	2021 (1405)
biłgorajski	Józefów	500	2473	495	1988 (1725)
biłgorajski	Tarnogród	1069	3304	309	1987 (1567)

Table 2. Cont.

County	Towns by County	Area in Ha	Population in Number of People	Population Density (People/km ²)	Town Privileges Granted (Year)
chełmski	Rejowiec	1428	4328	303	1962
	Fabryczny				
chełmski	Siedliszcze	1316	1406	107	2016 (1548)
chełmski	Rejowiec	650	2026	312	2017 (1547)
hrubieszowski	Hrubieszów	3303	17,232	522	1400
janowski	Janów Lubelski	1480	11,661	788	1640
janowski	Modliborzyce	789	1459	185	2014 (1642)
krasnostawski	Krasnystaw	4213	8028	58	1394
krasnostawski	Izbica	947	1933	204	2022 (1750)
kraśnicki	Kraśnik	2610	33,917	1300	1919 (1377)
kraśnicki	Annopol	773	2436	315	1996 (1761)
kraśnicki	Urzędów	1291	1679	130	2016 (1405)
lubartowski	Lubartów	1391	21,636	1555	1543
lubartowski	Kamionka	589	1712	365	2021 (1450)
lubartowski	Kock	1678	3238	193	1919 (1417)
lubartowski	Ostrów Lubelski	2977	2089	70	1919 (1548)
lubelski	Bełżyce	2346	6399	273	1958 (1417)
lubelski	Bychawa	669	4814	720	1958 (1537)
łęczyński	Łęczna	1900	18,675	983	1467
łukowski	Łuków	3575	29,441	824	1369
łukowski	Stoczek Łukowski	915	2480	271	1916 (1546)
opolski	Józefów nad Wisłą	365	902	247	2018 (1687)
opolski	Opole Lubelskie	1512	8320	550	1418
opolski	Poniatowa	1526	8980	588	1962
parczewski	Parczew	805	10,555	1311	1401
puławski	Puławy	5049	46,965	930	1906
puławski	Kazimierz Dolny	3044	2534	83	1927 (14th c.)
puławski	Nałęczów	1382	3727	270	1963
radzyński	Radzyń Podlaski	1931	15,428	799	1468
rycki	Dęblin	3833	15,887	414	1954
rycki	Ryki	2722	9531	350	1957 (1782)
świdnicki	Świdnik	2035	38,763	1905	1954
świdnicki	Piaski	844	2531	300	1993 (1456)
tomaszowski	Tomaszów	1329	18,783	1413	1621
	Lubelski				
tomaszowski	Lubycza	392	2424	618	2016 (1759)
	Królewska				
tomaszowski	Łaszczów	501	2111	421	2010 (1549)
tomaszowski	Tyszowce	1852	2054	111	2000 (1419)
włodawski	Włodawa	1797	12,915	719	1534
zamojski	Krasnobród	699	3074	440	1994
zamojski	Szczebrzeszyn	2912	4962	170	1352
zamojski	Zwierzyniec	619	3101	501	1990

Source: Adapted by authors from <https://bdl.stat.gov.pl/>, accessed on 4 March 2022.

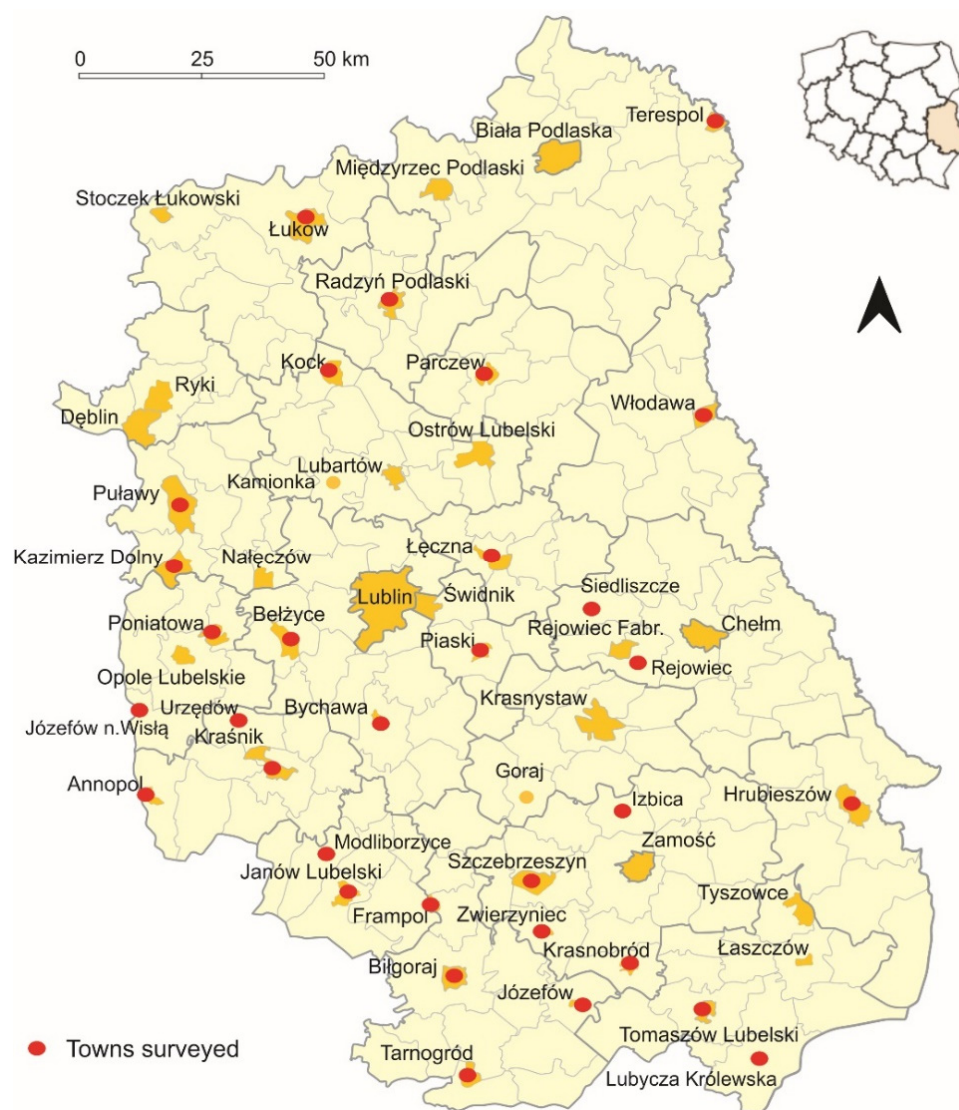


Figure 2. Distribution of cities and towns in the Lublin Province, and the towns participating in the survey. Source: Authors.

2.2. Examination Procedures

The research methods involved an analysis of statistical data from the Local Data Bank of the Central Statistical Office (BDL GUS) [75] for all urban centres of the Lublin Province with a population of fewer than 50,000 inhabitants. In total, 47 towns were surveyed (Table 2).

In the first stage of the study, we evaluated the demographic and economic potential of the investigated small towns of the Lublin Province and identified towns with similar population and economic characteristics. We used Ward's method, which is one of the most common agglomerative clustering methods. This approach allows us to group and separate objects in the most natural way, closely reflecting their actual groupings: from a dispersed community to clusters of elements with ever stronger connections and common features [76]. The graphical representation of the resulting clustering is a hierarchical tree, a so-called "dendrogram" whose branches represent groups of objects with similar characteristics, according to the chosen similarity measure, i.e., a specific taxonomic distance between the objects. Several distance measures can be used with Ward's method. In this paper, we used the Euclidean distance to form clusters. The hierarchical tree we obtained allowed us to visualise the distribution of the grouped objects on a map and to establish their relationships with the geographical space.

In this study, one typology was carried out which referred to the following three planes of city life: demography, economy and public utilities. To characterise the situation in each of these sectors, we selected those indices which described them most fully and were available in the BDL GUS database. To ensure comparability between the quantitative characteristics of the investigated social and economic phenomena which were expressed in different units, the indices were standardised.

The following indices were used in the typology:

1. Change in population size per 1000 inhabitants;
2. Share of pre-working age population in total population in 2020 in %;
3. Share of working age population in total population in 2020 in %;
4. Share of post-working age population in total population in 2020 in %;
5. Post-working age population per 100 working age population in 2020;
6. Feminisation rate in 2020;
7. Average three-year (2019–2020) population growth rate in ‰;
8. Average three-year (2019–2020) net migration rate in ‰;
9. Number of employed people per 1000 inhabitants in 2020;
10. Entities entered in the National Official Business Register (REGON) per 10,000 inhabitants in 2020;
11. Entities newly registered in the National Official Business Register (REGON) per 10,000 inhabitants 2020;
12. Foundations, associations and social organisations per 10,000 inhabitants in 2020;
13. Business support institutions per 10,000 national economy entities in 2020;
14. Share of I&R enterprises in the total number of enterprises in 2020 in %;
15. Number of SME (0–249 people) per 10,000 inhabitants;
16. Number of apartments per 1000 inhabitants in 2020;
17. Average usable floor space per 1 person in m² in 2020;
18. Length of the water supply network in km per 100 km² in 2020;
19. Length of the sewage network in km per 100 km² in 2020;
20. Length of the gas distribution network in km per 100 km² in 2020;
21. Water supply coverage in % of the total population in 2020;
22. Sanitation coverage in % of the total population in 2020; and
23. Gas grid coverage in % of total population in 2020.

Clustering (aggregation) identified numerous groups of cities which were distinct from one another, but showed a large degree of internal similarity with regard to the investigated features. To single out an appropriate number of clusters, corresponding to the actual spatial diversity of features, an appropriate Euclidean distance (12) was determined in the typology. As a result, 5 groups (types) of cities with similar features were obtained.

In the second stage of the study, we conducted a survey using a questionnaire addressed to the authorities of 46 towns of the Lublin Province. One town, Rejowiec Fabryczny, was excluded from the survey since it already was a member of the Cittàslow network, and the aim of the present study was to identify the possibilities of expanding the Cittàslow network in the Lublin Province. The survey was conducted at the beginning of 2022 by e-mail. A request was sent to the official e-mail addresses of municipalities/towns and/or mayors/secretaries of municipalities/towns to fill in the questionnaire. A total of 31 towns participated in the survey (see Figure 2). The authorities of 15 urban centres did not respond to our invitation and two re-invitations to participate in the survey or replied that they were not interested in taking part in it.

The survey questionnaire was not complicated. It contained 5 questions regarding familiarity with the Cittàslow International Network, an evaluation of a given town's compliance with the Cittàslow network criteria in general and with each of the 7 categories of criteria, an assessment of whether the city should be a member of the Cittàslow network (with justification), plans to embark on the process of accession to the Cittàslow network in the following three years (with justification) and a list of the town's currently binding documents. Most of the items were yes/no questions. Only two questions required

a descriptive answer. It should be emphasised that the questionnaire also contained references to the websites of the Cittàslow network and provided space for additional remarks and comments.

The third and last stage of the research was a case study of the towns which declared in the survey an interest in joining the Cittàslow network and were planning to take steps towards membership within the three years following the study. For these urban centres, an analysis of revitalisation programmes was carried out, which concerned the objectives of revitalisation, share of the area occupied by revitalisation areas in the municipality area and the number of revitalisation projects. The analysis also included an assessment of the key revitalisation projects in relation to each of the 7 categories of the Cittàslow criteria, performed using the matrix method (matrix methods are used, among others, in environmental impact assessment of investment projects [77]), which allowed us to evaluate the significant effect of each project on each category of criteria. In evaluating the potential (current condition) of the selected towns, we referred to the typology of the towns of the Lublin Province obtained in this study. We also took into account additional indices: the share of parks, town greens and green areas in neighbourhoods in the total town area (%); the share of green areas in the total town area; accommodation capacity (total number of beds in year-round facilities); the number of public libraries per 10,000 inhabitants; and the number of cultural centres, clubs and community centres per 10,000 inhabitants. All these data came from BDL GUS for the end of 2020. Noise hazard in the selected towns was determined on the basis of assessments of the acoustic climate of the environment of the Lublin Province as well as county and municipal environmental protection programmes.

3. Results

3.1. Typology of the Towns of the Lublin Province

Small towns have always played a key role in the Lublin region as the basic centres providing services to the rural population. Similarly to the rest of the country, they were often much more focused on meeting the needs of the rural hinterland than their own, sometimes relatively small, communities. The main task of these urban centres was to provide people from surrounding areas with trade, healthcare, education, culture and entertainment services and institutions, and the production activity they conducted was usually geared to meet the needs of agriculture. Nowadays, the stimulating influence of small towns on rural areas has been significantly reduced. The weakening of their previous socio-economic ties, as well as the emergence of new economic activation factors mean that small towns differ largely in the extent to which they generate progress in rural areas and determine the directions of local development [78].

In the light of the Regional Urban Policy of the Lublin Province (RPM WL) [79], the unfavourable size structure of towns and the low degree of their “urbanisation” limit the possibilities of self-development of those places and their force of impact. Packages of measures for different categories of urban centres have been proposed (the RPM WL was adopted in 2017 and did not include cities established after 2017: Kamionka, Goraj, Izbica and Józefów nad Wisłą):

- A metropolitan centre designated to boost international and national functions (Lublin) and a local centre participating in the development of metropolitan functions (Świdnik).
- Sub-regional centres (four towns) (Biała Podlaska, Chełm, Puławy and Zamość).
- Local urban centres that play an important role in the functions of the public sector, designated for the strengthening and development of sub-regional functions (six towns) (Biłgoraj, Hrubieszów, Janów Lubelski, Kraśnik, Łuków and Włodawa).
- Local urban centres performing an important public sector function (nine towns) (Biłgoraj, Hrubieszów, Janów Lubelski, Krasnostaw, Kraśnik, Lubartów, Łęczna, Łuków, Międzyrzec Podlaski, Opole Lubelskie, Parczew, Radzyń Podlaski, Ryki, Tomaszów Lubelski and Włodawa).

- Urban centres designated for boosting national and regional specialist functions (nine towns) (Kazimierz Dolny, Zwierzyniec, Nałęczów, Krasnobród, Dęblin, Szczepleszyn, Terespol, Poniatoła and Rejowiec Fabryczny).
- Urban centres in which basic functions are concentrated and which are places of development of supra-local specialist functions (14 towns) (Annopol, Józefów, Kock, Modliborzyce, Ostrów Lubelski, Stoczek Łukowski, Łaszczów, Urzędów, Tyszowce, Tarnogród, Frampol, Lubycza Królewska, Siedliszcze and Rejowiec), as well as centres supporting the diffusion of the metropolitan potential (three towns) (Piaski, Bychawa and Bełżyce).

The key challenge of the Regional Urban Policy of the Lublin Province is to build attractive and friendly urban spaces (a recreation and leisure function). Examples of measures include “increasing the attractiveness of towns and cities as living areas: development of urban attributes”, “revitalisation and restoration of areas and facilities” and “development of recreation and leisure areas and development of recreation and leisure infrastructure”.

Clustering (aggregation) identified numerous groups of cities which were distinct from one another, but showed a large degree of internal similarity with regard to the investigated features. To single out an appropriate number of clusters, corresponding to the actual spatial diversity of features, an appropriate Euclidean distance (12) was determined in the typology. As a result, five groups (types) of cities with similar features were obtained (Figure 3).

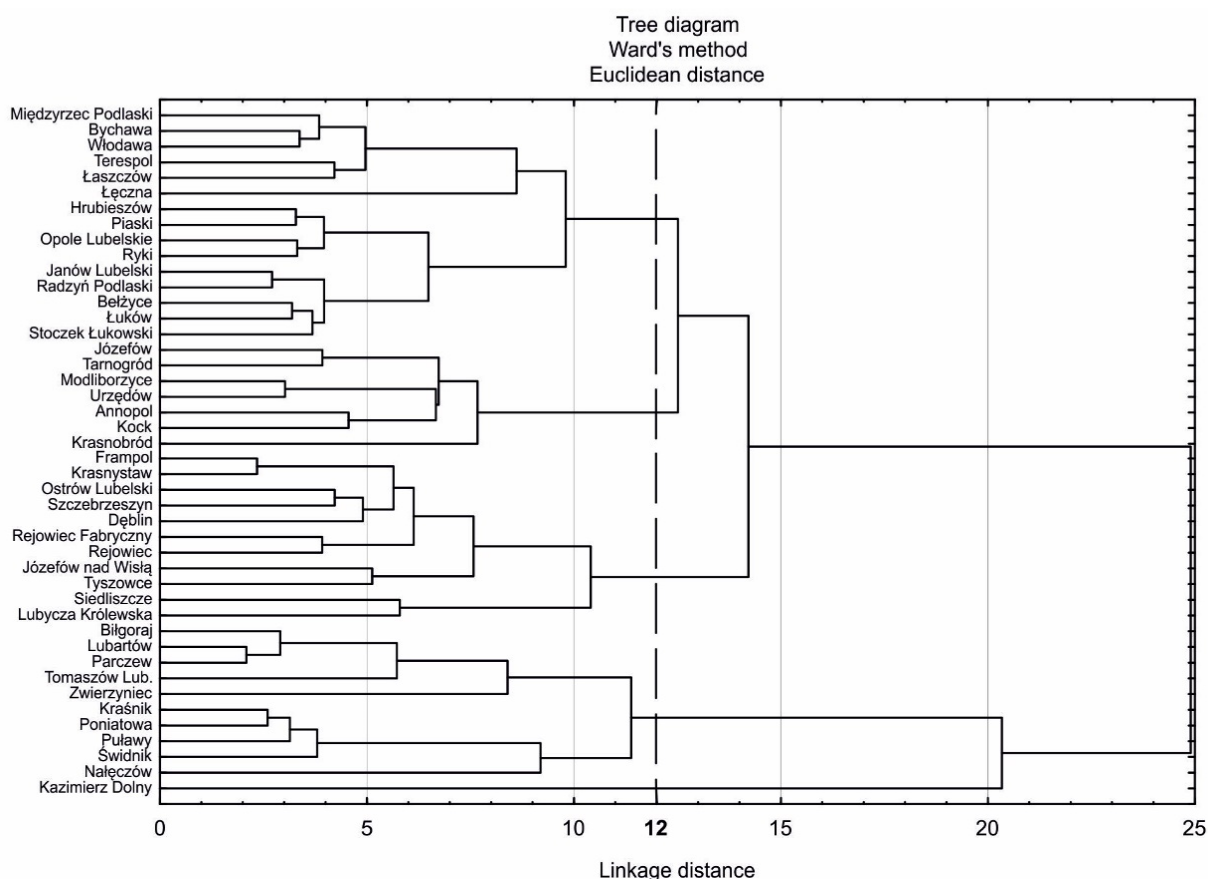


Figure 3. The tree diagram representing Ward’s clustering based on 23 indexes from three areas of city life: demography, economy and public utilities. Source: Prepared by authors based on <https://www.bdl.stat.gov.pl/>, accessed on 4 March 2022.

Figure 4 shows the allocation of the investigated towns to particular classification types, their geographical location in the Lublin Province and their population size.

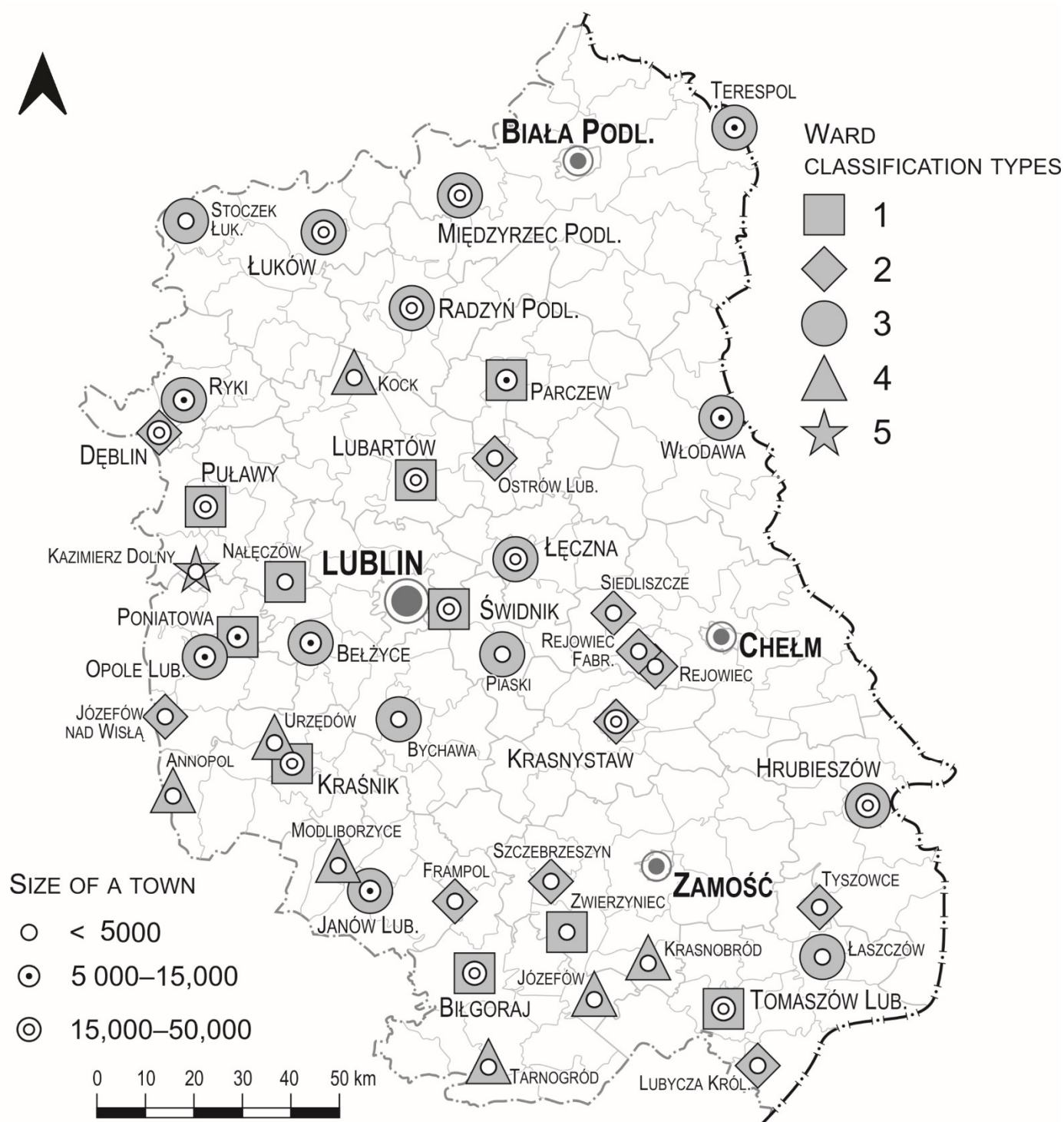


Figure 4. Types of small towns in the Lublin Province sharing a similar set of demographic and economic characteristics, singled out using Ward's agglomerative method. Source: Prepared by authors based on <https://www.bdl.stat.gov.pl/>, accessed on 4 March 2022.

The types obtained as a result of clustering included the following towns with the following characteristics:

Type 1: Biłgoraj, Kraśnik, Lubartów, Nałęczów, Poniatoła, Parczew, Puławy, Świdnik, Tomaszów Lubelski and Zwierzyniec.

These towns had a disadvantageous population structure. First of all, they were characterised by a low share of pre-working age and working age people and a high percentage

of post-working age population. This translated into high demographic dependency ratios. Moreover, these towns had the highest percentage of women among all the examined towns. The high negative net migration rates accompanied by natural population losses contributed to a significant decline in the number of inhabitants in each of these towns.

The towns in this group had an adequate economic situation, though. First of all, they had the highest numbers of employed persons per 1000 inhabitants. Moreover, they had the largest number of economic entities registered in the REGON system per 10,000 inhabitants, including small and medium-sized companies. The business environment was also particularly favourable there, as evidenced by a high number of business support institutions per 10,000 entities of the national economy. It should be noted that a large number of the economic entities in those towns operated in the service sector providing hospitality, catering, cultural, entertainment and leisure services.

Towns of the first type also had the best housing stock and public utility systems. First of all, in most of them, the number of apartments per 1000 inhabitants was higher than average. Moreover, these towns had the largest public utility network with the highest length of water, gas and sewer lines per 100 km². They also boasted the highest percentage of users connected to those networks.

Type 2: Dęblin, Frampol, Józefów nad Wisłą, Krasnystaw Lubycza Królewska, Ostrów Lubelski, Rejowiec, Rejowiec Fabryczny, Siedliszcze, Szczepleszyn and Tyszowce.

The main population problems that blighted those towns were a huge natural decline in population in some and a high negative net migration rate in others. Due to those phenomena, type 2 towns experienced the largest drops in the number of people per 1000 inhabitants among all the towns surveyed. On the other hand, the demographic structure of these urban centres was quite favourable, owing to the optimal proportions of people in the different age groups, as well as a well-balanced women-to-men ratio.

Unfortunately, the economic situation of those towns was one of the worst among all the investigated urban centres. They had low numbers of employed people and low numbers of already operating and newly registered economic entities. A positive element in the socio-economic space of type 2 towns were the foundations, associations and social organisations, the number of which per 10,000 inhabitants did not differ from that in the remaining towns surveyed.

The towns in this group did not come out well in terms of public utility services. Their main problems were the lowest density of public utility networks and the smallest number of users connected to these networks among all the surveyed towns. On the positive side, type 2 towns had a fairly sufficient housing stock, with the number of apartments per 1000 inhabitants being similar to that in the remaining cities.

Type 3: Bełżyce, Bychawa, Hrubieszów, Janów Lubelski, Łaszczów, Łęczna, Łuków, Międzyrzec Podlaski, Opole Lubelskie, Piaski, Radzyń Podlaski, Ryki, Stoczek Łukowski, Terespol and Włodawa.

Type 3 towns constituted the most numerous group. Their specific feature was that, on the one hand, they experienced the lowest population losses, with some of the towns even having natural increases in population, and, on the other hand, they suffered the largest migration losses. It was the latter type of loss that accounted for the highly diversified, yet generally large, declines in population per 1000 inhabitants. The shares of the individual age groups in the total population and the feminisation rates in these towns were close to the survey's average values.

The towns in this group were characterised by high employment rates per 1000 inhabitants. The indices regarding economic entities registered in the REGON system and business support institutions were also relatively high. Some type 3 towns boasted a high share of companies in the hospitality and catering, cultural, entertainment and leisure sectors. Type 3 urban centres had a notably lower number of foundations, associations and social organisations per 10,000 inhabitants than the remaining towns.

Those towns also had poorly developed public utility systems. The only exception was the relatively high density of the water supply network and a high percentage of users connected to this network.

Type 4: Annopol, Józefów, Kock, Krasnobród, Modliborzyce, Tarnogród and Urzędów.

This cluster was small, and the towns it grouped had different population decline rates, which varied over a wide range. This situation was influenced by large differences in net migration rates, which were positive in some of the towns. Type 4 towns had a favourable demographic structure, with high shares of working age people and low percentages of post-working age people, which had a beneficial impact on demographic dependency ratios.

However, the number of employed persons per 1000 population in these towns was among the lowest across all the investigated towns. On the other hand, type four towns had a large number of business entities registered in the REGON system, and were also characterised by the highest numbers of newly registered companies. Type 4 towns were home to numerous foundations, associations and social organisations, but had few business support institutions.

They had the lowest number of apartments per 1000 inhabitants, but these apartments provided relatively ample average usable floor space per person. The density of public utility infrastructure in those towns was similar to the survey's average. By contrast, the percentage of users of each network was high.

Type 5: Kazimierz Dolny.

The demography of Kazimierz Dolny differed from that of the remaining urban centres in that this town experienced a slight population loss due to migration but suffered a high natural loss of inhabitants. The shares of the individual age groups in the total population of this town did not differ considerably from the average values for the remaining localities. However, there was a clear imbalance in the town's demographic structure caused by the higher number of female inhabitants compared to the number of male inhabitants.

Kazimierz Dolny differed from the other cities in the economic sphere. First of all, it was clearly ahead of the other towns in terms of the number of business entities, as well as entities newly registered in the REGON system. Compared to the other towns, a much larger proportion of those enterprises were service sector companies providing hospitality (hotels and catering companies), cultural, entertainment and leisure services. Kazimierz Dolny did not have a rich business support base, but had a several times larger number of foundations, associations and social organisations per 10,000 people than the other towns.

The town differed from the other localities in its housing stock and access to public utility services. On the one hand, the town had an outstandingly high number of apartments per 1000 inhabitants, and the average usable floor space in the apartments was large. On the other hand, Kazimierz Dolny was characterised by exceptionally low densities of the water supply and sewage networks, and thus, also a low percentage of users of these networks.

3.2. Findings of the Survey

The results of the survey addressed to the 46 towns of the Lublin region provided initial information on the possibilities of expanding the Cittàslow network in the province. Only 70% of the towns responded to the survey questions, but even such incomplete results give a certain picture of the network and how much interest municipal authorities in the Lublin region show in joining it.

Of the 33 towns that ultimately took part in the survey, the authorities of only 15 declared they were familiar with the Cittàslow network and its principles. The towns in question were: Bełżyce, Bychawa, Izbica, Józefów, Józefów nad Wisłą, Janów Lubelski, Kock, Krasnobród, Kraśnik, Lubycza Królewska, Łuków, Poniátowa, Puławy, Tomaszów Lubelski and Urzędów. The authorities of one town, Międzyrzec Podlaski, expressed their lack of interest in the Cittàslow movement.

Fifteen towns affirmed that they met the general criteria for joining the network, but interestingly, several of those centres admitted they had no previous knowledge of

this organisation. At the same time, four towns, whose authorities were familiar with the criteria for joining the network, reported that though generally they did not meet these criteria, they nevertheless implemented certain sectoral policies recommended for Cittàslow towns. Many of the towns we surveyed pursued activities in the fields of social integration (18 centres) and infrastructure (16 centres). Fifteen towns declared they carried out activities in the area of hospitality, education and awareness, and fourteen in the area of urban policy and partnership. As it turned out, the towns of the Lublin region were the least engaged in pursuing appropriate energy and environmental as well as agricultural, craft and tourism policies. Twelve urban centres each declared they were active in those sectors.

Among the towns whose authorities were familiar with the Cittàslow network, the following seven stood out as fully or largely meeting the criteria for membership in the organisation: Bełżyce, Izbica, Józefów, Kraśnik, Lubycza Królewska, Łuków and Tomaszów Lubelski. It is worth mentioning three other towns, whose authorities admitted they had not been familiar with the network's assumptions, stated that these localities met most of the membership requirements. They included Kazimierz Dolny, Modliborzyce and Włodawa.

Since the towns participating in the survey showed different potential to meet the requirements of the Cittàslow network, the authorities of those urban centres also had different views of whether or not their town should apply for membership. Representatives of 10 localities stated firmly that their town should become a member of the network, 9 expressed the opposite opinion, and 12 did not give an unequivocal answer—they had different outlooks on the network itself and its philosophy (Figure 5).

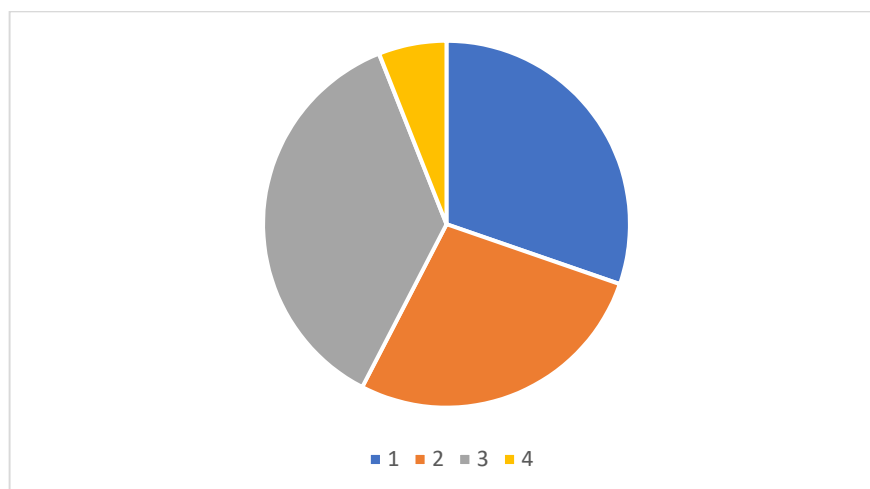


Figure 5. Assessment of the town's predisposition to belong to the Cittàslow network as a percentage of towns surveyed (1—yes, 2—no, 3—ambiguous, 4—no answer). Source: Authors.

The main argument in favour of joining the network was the fact that the towns already met the basic membership criteria and were implementing various projects that were in line with Cittàslow principles (Poniatowa and Włodawa). The towns that had the potential to become members sought to ensure the best possible living conditions for their residents and pursued pro-social and pro-environmental activities, thus implementing the goals of sustainable development (Bełżyce, Kraśnik, Modliborzyce and Poniatowa). In addition, emphasis was put in those towns on cultivating the unique character of the place and its local cultural heritage and fostering local production, using modern technologies and innovative ways of organising the town (Bełżyce, Kraśnik and Poniatowa). Potential membership in the Cittàslow network was perceived as giving towns the opportunity to show off their assets, increase tourism movement and revive their economy (Janów Lubelski, Kraśnik and Włodawa).

In the case of the urban centres whose authorities believed that the town should not apply for membership in the network, the main reason for this belief was the fact that the towns did not meet the Cittàslow criteria (Frampol, Kock, Krasnobród, Łęczna, Parczew and Urzędów). Another reason for not planning to apply was that the towns were unable to cover the high costs of participating in the network (Parczew, Tomaszów Lubelski). Finally, some towns stated that they were already implementing projects under earlier adopted strategies and programmes, and did not plan to start new or modify existing projects (Annopol, Kraśnik).

In responses of towns whose authorities did not hold a specific position regarding membership in the Cittàslow network, attention was drawn to the lack of knowledge about the network (Radzyń Podlaski) or to the discrepancies between the town's main strategic goals and the principles of Cittàslow (Puławy). In addition, some responses to the survey raised the important question of the potential benefits of membership in the network or lack thereof as a factor that encouraged or discouraged towns from applying (Józefów).

Despite numerous responses in which the authorities expressed their opinion that their town should join the Cittàslow network, only six towns declared that they would apply for accession within the next three years (Figure 6). They were Bełżyce, Janów Lubelski, Lubycza Królewska, Łęczna, Poniatowa and Włodawa. Fifteen towns decidedly rejected such a possibility, and the authorities of 10 towns had not conducted any analyses regarding joining the network and did not have a clear opinion on this matter.

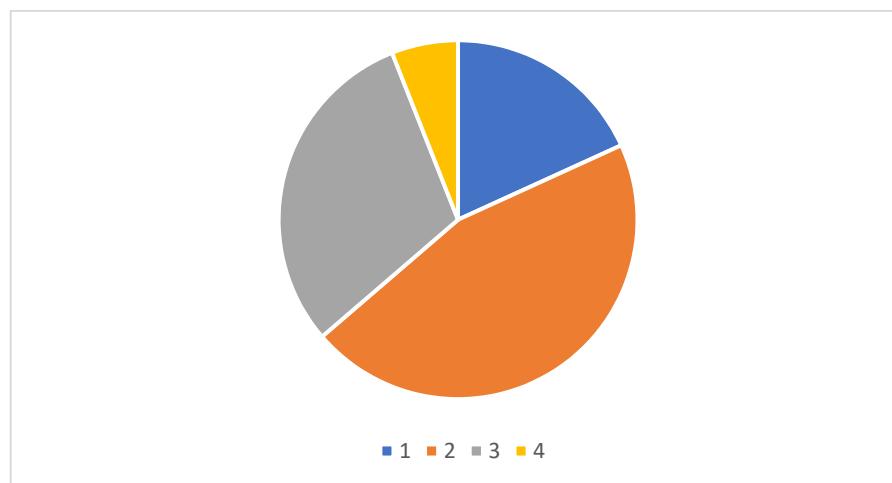


Figure 6. Declarations of efforts to include the town in the Cittàslow network in the next 3 years as a percentage of towns surveyed (1—yes, 2—no, 3—ambiguous, 4—no answer). Source: Authors.

According to the authorities of the urban centres surveyed, the main benefit that towns can gain from joining the network is the opportunity to show off their natural assets, culture, traditions, etc., to other members and use them to promote themselves and develop (Bełżyce, Łęczna, and Włodawa). Another important benefit is that members of the network can cooperate to find a common course of action and exchange their experiences (Poniatowa, Włodawa). The implementation of the development policies formed in this way would improve the lives of the inhabitants of member towns (Janów Lubelski).

The authorities of the towns in which no plans to apply for accession to the Cittàslow network were made justified their position by saying that the towns were unable to meet the required criteria and cover the financial costs associated with joining the network (Frampol, Kock and Parczew). Another argument was that the towns were already carrying out numerous investments, and therefore did not intend to start any new projects which had not been fully tried and tested in Poland (Annopol, Józefów and Krasnobród).

A separate issue examined in the survey was whether the towns had up-to-date documents regulating their functioning and setting directions for development. Out of all the towns that responded to the survey, Modliborzyce was the only one that did

not have any such documents. All towns, except Izbica and Modliborzyce, had a local spatial development plan. When it came to revitalisation documents, 20 towns had a local revitalisation programme, and eight had a communal revitalisation programme. One town, Bełżyce, had adopted an advertising resolution.

3.3. Case Studies

The following four towns were selected for the case studies: Bełżyce, Janów Lubelski, Poniátowa and Włodawa. According to the survey, the authorities of these towns believed that they should belong to the Cittaslow network and declared that they would make an effort for the towns to join the network within the next three years. The oldest of these towns were Bełżyce (15th century) and Włodawa (16th century), and the youngest was Poniátowa (20th century). Janów Lubelski and Włodawa were both county capitals.

Bełżyce was the largest town, area-wise, and Janów Lubelski was the smallest (Table 2). Włodawa was the most highly populated of the towns, and Bełżyce had the smallest population. When population density was considered, Janów Lubelski placed first and Bełżyce placed last in the ranking (Table 2).

As far as the diversity of the socio-economic situation is concerned, the typology of towns we obtained using Ward's method assigned the four urban centres to two different categories. Poniátowa was classified as a type 1 town, which means that it had an unfavourable population status, especially with regard to demographic structure and changes in the number of inhabitants. On the other hand, the town was in an acceptable economic condition and had a favourable situation in the housing and utilities sector.

Bełżyce, Janów Lubelski and Włodawa were classified as type 3 towns, which indicates that they sustained quite heavy population losses. The economic situation of those towns was good, but they had poorly developed public utility systems.

Next, we analysed the indices directly related to the functioning of the Cittaslow network (Table 3). The values of the indices for green areas were not high. The share of parks, town greens and green areas in neighbourhoods in the total area of the investigated towns was slightly below or above the average for all the towns of the Lublin Province, which was 1.42%. The highest values of these indices were obtained for Włodawa and Bełżyce, and the lowest for Janów Lubelski and Poniátowa. A similar situation was observed for the share of green areas in the total town area. With regard to tourism indicators, Janów Lubelski and Poniátowa were in the lead, while Bełżyce stood out with its high number of cultural centres.

Table 3. Selected infrastructural indices for the investigated towns (status as of 2020).

Town	Share of Parks, Town Greens and Green Areas in Neighbourhoods in the Total Town Area (%)	Share of Green Areas in the Total Town Area (%)	Number of Beds in Year-Round Accommodation Facilities	Number of Public Libraries Per 10,000 Inhabitants	Number of Cultural Centres, Clubs and Community Centres Per 10,000 Inhabitants
Bełżyce	2.3	3.22	no data	3.1	1.6
Janów Lubelski	0.7	2.66	288	0.9	0.9
Poniátowa	1.3	2.21	160	1.1	1.1
Włodawa	2.0	3.86	0	1.5	0.8

Source: Compiled by authors based on <https://www.bdl.stat.gov.pl/>, accessed on 13 May 2022.

Ambient noise monitoring studies were conducted in the years 2018–2020 only in Włodawa (2020) and Bełżyce (2018). In Bełżyce, no exceedances of the noise standard were recorded, and in Włodawa, daytime and nighttime exceedances reached 4.4 dB (L_{AeqD}) and 2.5 dB (L_{AeqN}), respectively. Exceedance of the long-term day/evening/night noise level was $L_{DEN} = 1.8$ dB.

An analysis of environmental protection programmes showed that road traffic was the main source of the noise. The investigated towns are intersected by commune, county and provincial roads. Janów Lubelski has the best access to road connections as it is situated close to the S19 expressway and is intersected by the provincial road 74. Bełżyce and Poniadowa are not connected to heavy traffic roads. Of the four towns, Poniadowa is the only one with a railway line, which is used for tourism purposes. Minor local noise may be generated periodically by commercial and production facilities located in the vicinity of residential areas. The same is true of industrial noise hazard, especially in the towns of Poniadowa, Janów Lubelski and Włodawa. Additionally, the vicinity of Włodawa (Okuninka) is, characteristically, affected by entertainment noise, especially at night. The other towns are also occasionally exposed to this hazard during mass gatherings.

An analysis of revitalisation programmes for the four towns showed that they had the following regeneration objectives:

- To improve the quality of life of the inhabitants of the revitalisation areas (Bełżyce, Janów Lubelski, Poniadowa and Włodawa);
- To develop local entrepreneurship in the revitalisation areas and increase the level of economic activity of its inhabitants (Bełżyce, Janów Lubelski, Poniadowa and Włodawa); and
- To ensure a high-quality of the environment, among others, by increasing the cleanliness and aesthetics of green areas (Bełżyce, Janów Lubelski and Poniadowa).

Other goals mentioned were as follows:

- To increase the attractiveness of the revitalisation areas by ensuring a high quality and availability of technical, transport and socio-economic infrastructure (Bełżyce and Janów Lubelski);
- To improve safety (Janów Lubelski and Włodawa);
- To counteract social exclusion by limiting social pathology in the revitalisation areas (Włodawa and Poniadowa);
- To improve the technical condition and energy efficiency of public buildings and housing stock (Janów Lubelski); and
- To revive tourism through the use of local resources and to design attractive and functional public spaces, equipped with appropriate infrastructure to serve the needs of residents and entrepreneurs (Poniadowa).

In terms of the size of the revitalisation areas, Włodawa placed first and Janów Lubelski placed last among the four investigated towns (Table 4). Bełżyce had the largest number of regeneration projects and ranked above the average for all the small towns of the Lublin Province.

Table 4. Selected revitalisation indices for the investigated towns.

Town	Programme Type M—Municipal C—Communal	Percent of Town Area under Revitalisation (%)	Mean for Lublin Province Towns with <50,000 Inhabitants	Number of Projects	Mean for Lublin Province Towns with <50,000 Inhabitants
Bełżyce	M	1.10	8.78	24	20.5
Janów Lubelski	M	0.8		7	
Poniadowa	M	10.5		18	
Włodawa	M	18.63		15	

Source: Compiled by authors based on <https://rpo.lubelskie.pl/>, accessed on 13 May 2022.

To determine the relationships between the revitalisation projects and the Cittaslow criteria, we carried out an analysis using a specially prepared matrix, in which only significant effects were identified (Supplementary Materials Table S1). The analysis showed that most of the proposed projects were related to the infrastructure policy, urban quality policy

and social integration. Fewer projects were related to hospitality, education and awareness or agricultural, crafts and tourism policies, and the fewest projects were associated with the energy and environmental policy. No relationships were found for the partnership criterion. These relations differed for the individual towns.

4. Discussion

In a survey conducted in 2019, five towns from the Lublin Province reported interest in joining the Cittàslow network: Międzyrzec Podlaski, Nałęczów, Rejowiec, Tyszowce and Zwierzyniec. Additionally, three towns indicated the matter was worth considering: Poniatowa, Bychawa and Krasnobród [54]. That survey was carried out at the beginning of the term of office of the local government. At that time, however, county towns were not taken into account. The present survey was conducted at the end of the term of office. Only four towns that had participated in the previous survey showed interest in joining the network this time: Bełżyce, Poniatowa and the county towns of Janów Lubelski and Włodawa. The present study demonstrates that few towns of the Lublin Province support the idea of Cittàslow. Revitalisation enjoys much more interest. This is mainly due to the fact that revitalisation projects can obtain funds for areas in crisis and rely on the support of provincial self-governments and state administration. Unfortunately, there is currently no such support for the Cittàslow movement. The Regional Urban Policy of the Lublin Province does not make any references to the Cittàslow movement. The same is true of the project under the framework of the European Funds for Lublin programme, prepared for the new programming period 2021–2027. Of course, even without the support of the provincial self-government, some cities of the Lublin Province will still try to implement the idea of Cittàslow.

A survey conducted for the towns of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Province shows that membership in the Cittàslow network is treated there as a developmental perk, with towns joining the network supported by the provincial self-government. More and more towns in the region join the network because they see the benefits of belonging to it, including those related to the implementation of revitalisation programmes. In Cittàslow towns, revitalisation activities are carried out within the framework of the Supra-Regional Revitalisation Programme financed from EU funds. As noticed by Zielińska-Szczepkowska et al. [17], urban regeneration activities have led, in the vast majority of these towns, to a decrease in unemployment, an increase in entrepreneurship and reductions in poverty and crime rates. Most of the projects concerned social matters and considerably improved the quality of urban life [32]. Moreover, revitalisation resulted in significant changes in public spaces. However, the projects towns prepared were not always well thought out and implemented, which resulted in their lower quality [15]. They treated environmental and cultural aspects in a perfunctory manner. Therefore, in the future, revitalisation projects should be prepared, taking care that the objectives of revitalisation are evenly distributed across various aspects of urban life and paying attention to the quality and not the number of projects. In addition, a project should be preceded by a detailed diagnosis (including an analysis of the historical and cultural background) and adapted to the individual character of the town for which it is prepared [15,17]. It should also be mentioned that the Draft National Urban Policy 2030 pays particular attention to nurturing spatial and aesthetic order and improving the quality of the natural environment in cities and towns.

As proved by the example of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Province, membership in the Cittàslow network brings benefits to towns that have decided to choose this path of development. Revitalisation activities are planned and carried out there in a more coordinated manner, which does not mean that they are free of mistakes. The situation is similar in the analysed towns of the Lublin Province, which, as we noted, treated environmental and cultural aspects of urban life marginally. However, environmental and cultural issues are important for the implementation of Cittàslow philosophy. It turns out that slow city enclaves can even be urban allotment gardens [80].

The study did not address the relationship between urban shrinkage, suburbanisation, depopulation and revitalisation. However, it should be noted that all towns surveyed are characterised by depopulation. Other researchers have noted that the radical shrinkage of the population in the centre is causing an increase in the number of unused housing units, known as vacancies [9]. In addition, as a result of the process of urban shrinkage, there are unfavourable changes in space, including the low quality of public spaces [13]. This results in the need for revitalisation measures to prevent the perforation of urban structures.

Urban shrinkage and suburbanisation have many negative consequences, visible in the context of demographic, social, economic and spatial changes. In contrast, revitalisation is considered a positive process, counteracting suburbanisation. More than 10 years ago, it was noted that despite efforts to rehabilitate, revitalise and regenerate inner-city neighbourhoods—especially in Western European cities—suburbanisation processes are not waning at all and are still based primarily on residential development [81]. According to Jarczewski and Sroka [82], however, urban renewal revitalisation tools are not sufficient to manage shrinking cities, whose population has declined by more than 20–25%. It has also been noted that the primary determinant of successful in preventing and preventing depopulation is the complementarity of simultaneously conducted diverse activities at all levels of public authority [13].

It is crucial to develop a new concept of development which will use the process of shrinkage as an asset to improve the quality of life of residents [82]. One of them, in the case of small towns, can be the Cittàslow concept.

Linking revitalisation and the Cittàslow network can respond to the processes of suburbanisation and urban shrinkage. As Champion [83] noted, the external development of a city, its pace and scope are closely linked not only to the economic and social processes taking place in the centre, but also to the changing position of the city in regional, national and international systems.

Finally, it should be emphasised that the Lublin region is of interest to international researchers and practitioners because, like Eastern Europe (post-socialist countries), it can be described as an area of accumulation of adverse phenomena and processes [72]. Similar studies can also be conducted in other regions with similar characteristics, looking for alternative paths of development as a response to crisis phenomena associated with depopulation, among other things.

5. Conclusions

We analysed 47 towns in Lublin Province with a population of less than 50,000. In the first stage of the study, the demographics and economic conditions of these centres were determined. Thanks to Ward's agglomeration method, the towns were assigned to five types depending on the population situation and the degree of economic development, with one town being a separate type.

The research showed the unfavourable demographic situation in most towns, which manifested itself primarily in population declines. The scale of these declines varied greatly and depended on the magnitude of natural and migration losses, which were a common phenomenon in most towns. In the period under review, only two towns showed a natural increase, while three others showed a positive migration balance.

Another common negative characteristic of the towns was the high percentage of post-working age people, which, except for one centre, was higher than 20% and exceeded 30% in one. Such values clearly testify to the demographic old age of the examined cities.

The towns surveyed were highly differentiated in terms of their level of economic development and the state of the municipal economy. The situation of the towns in these respects depended on their location in the province, their rank in the settlement system as well as their economic foundations shaped over many years. In the case of towns that had an underdeveloped economy and/or municipal infrastructure, this was often the result of entrenched economic underdevelopment and a lack of action by the authorities to address and eradicate it.

The next research stage in the study was to identify the intentions of the authorities of towns in the Lublin Province to apply for membership of the Cittàslow network. On this occasion, the actual possibilities of cities to enter the network by meeting the necessary criteria for participation were examined.

The final stage of the research consisted of a thorough examination of four selected towns from among those whose authorities declared their intention to join the Cittàslow network. As part of these analyses, revitalisation projects implemented and planned in selected towns were analysed, among others.

The study proved that few towns of the Lublin Province support the idea of Cittàslow, while revitalisation enjoys much more interest. For four selected towns, despite the fact that numerous projects were proposed in the investigated towns, we did not record any town with projects having effects on each category of Cittàslow criteria, even when we discounted the partnership criterion. Nevertheless, many of the projects constituted unique measures aimed at improving the quality of life of the inhabitants, which is the objective of both revitalisation and the Cittàslow movement.

The study reported in this paper has some limitations. It was conducted at the end of the term of office of the local self-governments, which may have been why some of them did not respond to the survey, especially those that saw it as a matter of marginal importance which could not translate into a success in the coming elections. It is also impossible to ignore the impact of the armed conflict in Ukraine initiated by the invasion of Russian troops on 24 February 2022. The Lublin Province, which is located on the border with Ukraine, is particularly affected by the conflict as it has to deal with the influx of refugees and handle humanitarian aid transports. The survey was carried out in the first phase of the conflict, and some of the local self-governments may have been too busy coping with its effects to respond to our survey. It is surprising, in this context, that the authorities of the borderland town of Włodawa expressed a strong interest in membership in the Cittàslow network, which may constitute a new impulse for the development of this peripheral town and region. In addition to the limitations associated with the survey, it should also be noted that we did not have access to some data, e.g., noise level data, to make a fully comprehensive assessment of the potential of the investigated towns.

The conclusions drawn from the study can nevertheless be used in planning the development and revitalisation of small towns, especially in peripheral regions. Membership in the Cittàslow network can constitute an alternative development path for those places. Additionally, it may provide towns with more opportunities for implementing revitalisation activities. The method applied in this study is universal and can be used to analyse the relationships between membership in the Cittàslow network and revitalisation for any city or town. We plan to extend our research to other peripheral regions of Europe.

Supplementary Materials: The following are available online at <https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/su142114160/s1>, Table S1. Key revitalisation projects in the studied towns viewed against the Cittàslow criteria.

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