

Doctoral thesis

**CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTIONS OF SELECTED SMALL CITIES OF THE
WESTERN LESSER POLAND SUBREGION ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE CITTÀSLOW
(SLOW CITIES) NETWORK**

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Small cities form the largest group of cities in Poland. The socio-economic changes of the turn of the century have altered the conditions of their development. Small cities located in the Western Lesser Poland Subregion form a unique group, as they develop under the influence of two strong development poles—the Upper Silesia and Zagłębie Metropolis and Kraków. Administratively, these towns are located within the Lesser Poland Voivodeship, yet historically they lie at the border of two different regions. This is caused by a varied level of regional awareness and carries over to difficulties with establishing socio-economic integration within the subregion. Creating a Cittàslow slow cities network, whose goal is to build inter-city cooperation networks based on local identity and unique intrinsic assets, could be used to integrate this area. To become a member of the network, a city must perform a self-assessment based on membership criteria, which revolve around matters of environmental policy, care for the environment and preserving the local character of buildings and urban complexes.

The primary research goal of this dissertation was to outline possible development directions for selected small cities of the Subregion based on the Cittàslow network's postulates. It is based on their own (endogenous) assets—qualitative and quantitative studies were used to determine the distinctive landscape traits and urban character that create their unique identity.

Due to a lack of internal cohesion in the region, creating such a cooperation network could initiate integration on the cultural plane. The development of cities following the adage *festina lente* (make haste slowly) is an attempt at preserving cultural and spatial separateness in a period of globalisation and unification. The character of a given city is formed by its history, identity, customs and traditions, local products, as well as socio-economic relations.

Modelling city development following the slow style focuses on their originality and uniqueness, as well as them being resident-friendly. Exploring local identity is used as a tool for building competitiveness both locally and regionally. Cittàslow network membership criteria consist of universal elements that can be used to assess the quality of life within a given city and are recognised as conducive to sustainable development.

The study's findings can be applied to creating a joint development strategy for the small cities of the Western Lesser Poland Subregion, allowing for boosting their attractiveness and developing mutual relations based on joint action. They can also significantly contribute to the development of an alternative image of the Subregion, which is currently mostly associated with industry. The findings are universal, as they are applicable both to other Polish cities and European ones, who may want to base their development on entering cooperation networks.