



REVITALISED MARKET SQUARES OF SMALL TOWNS IN THE ŚWIĘTOKRZYSKIE REGION WITH FUTURE GENERATIONS IN MIND

ZREWITALIZOWANE RYNKI MAŁYCH MIAST W WOJEWÓDZTWIE ŚWIĘTOKRZYSKIM Z MYŚLĄ O PRZYSZŁYCH POKOLENIACH

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Abstract

Revitalisation encompasses efforts aimed at resolving social, economic and spatial issues, particularly in smaller towns and cities, while also playing a vital role in preserving cultural heritage. The author presents this issue through the case studies of selected towns in the Świętokrzyskie region which date back to the Middle Ages, where local authorities employ revitalisation initiatives to restore them to their former glory and improve their usability. To achieve this, projects frequently leverage the towns' most valuable surviving assets – the historic urban layout, the medieval market square with its characteristic built environment, and other elements that shape local identity. This study aims to identify the evaluation criteria for the preserved historic fabric and the significance of heritage protection that guarantee the success of revitalisation. The research employs in situ investigations, comparative analysis, and an evaluation of completed revitalisation projects in selected towns and cities within the Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship, including Kielce, Sandomierz, Chęciny, Bodzentyn and Wiślica.

Keywords: Świętokrzyskie, revitalisation, market square, historic monument, conservation, protection

Streszczenie

Rewitalizacja obejmuje działania ukierunkowane na rozwiązywanie problemów społecznych, gospodarczych i przestrzennych – zwłaszcza w mniejszych miastach – a jednocześnie odgrywa istotną rolę w ochronie dziedzictwa kulturowego. Autorka omawia to zagadnienie na przykładzie wybranych miast regionu świętokrzyskiego o średniowiecznym rodowodzie, w których władze lokalne podejmują inicjatywy rewitalizacyjne, by przywrócić im dawną świetność i poprawić ich funkcjonalność. W procesie tym często wykorzystuje się najcenniejsze zachowane zasoby: historyczny układ urbanistyczny, średniowieczny rynek z charakterystyczną zabudową oraz inne elementy kształtujące lokalną tożsamość. Celem niniejszego opracowania jest określenie kryteriów oceny zachowanej tkanki historycznej oraz znaczenia ochrony dziedzictwa dla powodzenia rewitalizacji. Badanie opiera się na wizjach lokalnych, analizie porównawczej oraz ocenie zrealizowanych projektów rewitalizacyjnych w wybranych miastach województwa świętokrzyskiego, w tym w Kielcach, Sandomierzu, Chęcinach, Bodzentynie i Wiślicy.

Słowa kluczowe: Świętokrzyskie, rewitalizacja, rynek, zabytek, konserwacja, ochrona

1. INTRODUCTION

The Świętokrzyskie region, located in south-central Poland, features numerous small cities and towns with municipal rights. Towns in the Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship that have retained municipal rights since their medieval incorporation include Kielce (1364), Sandomierz (1282) and Chęciny (c. 1325). Wiślica obtained charter status even earlier, in 1326, but lost it in 1870, eventually regaining it in 2018, when it became the smallest town in Poland with a population of 503 residents. Bodzentyn held municipal rights from 1355 to 1870, subsequently reclaiming them in 1994. Medieval incorporation under Magdeburg Law was permanently embedded in the fabric of these towns, and manifests as a regularly-shaped market square and a geometric street grid that continues to form their core to this day. By the tail end of the 20th century, and particularly from the first years of the 21st century, local heritage assets emerged as an antidote to the local problems plaguing these small towns. Revitalisation programmes began improving the difficult situation of small Polish towns, leveraging heritage to elevate the quality of both the urban space and residents' lives. Consequently, during the first decade of the 21st century, every other municipality in the Świętokrzyskie region secured EU funding for revitalisation-related projects. As of today, virtually every town in the Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship strives to develop a Local Municipal Revitalisation Programme for the town and commune, and then to subsequently implement these projects to achieve the intended goal – boosting both investment and tourism appeal. This has been, and remains, the case for cities and towns such as Sandomierz, Kielce, Chęciny, Bodzentyn and Wiślica.

2. RESEARCH AIM AND SCOPE

This paper aims to outline the criteria for assessing the preserved historic space and the significance of conservation and protection, which guarantee the successful execution of revitalisation projects. The scope of the study covers towns and cities with medieval roots whose urban space retains the imprint of Magdeburg Law incorporation, namely a market square and a geometric street grid alongside its built environment. To achieve this objective, *in situ* studies were conducted in selected cities and towns across the Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship – Kielce, Sandomierz, Chęciny, Bodzentyn and Wiślica – where market square revitalisation projects have taken place. The evaluation of these projects relies on a comparative method, drawing conclusions that establish the

significance of cultural heritage as a key criterion in such undertakings.

The cities and towns were selected for study based on several criteria: first, the period of origin – medieval incorporation and the status of municipal rights; second, the state of preservation and function of the market square, its buildings, and other structures defining the site's identity; the decisive criterion, however, was whether revitalisation works had been carried out within the market square area.

2.1. The medieval market square and revitalisation

Revitalising a historic public space – a market square with medieval roots – presents unique challenges, varying according to the current state of preservation of the architectural and urban layout and its function prior to revitalisation. The state of preservation and function constitute the two primary criteria for evaluating the urban layout and historic fabric before drafting a revitalisation programme with public participation, and subsequently formulating the resulting action plans. Urban layouts of historical value are typically entered into the register of historic monuments¹, which inherently aims to safeguard the most valuable elements of the original town planning and the spatial composition of the complex, which comprises the built environment with its subsequent alterations and extensions. As a result, alongside the general layout, conservation protection extends to the division of plots, the size and volume of buildings, the spatial relationships between elements of the development, the appearance of façades², and their architectural decoration. This imposes conservation constraints that both heritage protection authorities and municipal governments must address within their planning frameworks. The success of revitalisation projects stems from reconciling the interests of both authorities; their shared goal, however, is – or at least ought to be –

¹ Kielce – urban and landscape layout of the city of Kielce, reg. no.: A.321; Bodzentyn – spatial layout (layout and internal/external landscape), reg. no.: A.214; Chęciny – urban and landscape layout of a historic town with the layout of squares, streets and buildings, reg. no.: A.228 of 9.01.1947 and 264 of 15.02.1967; Sandomierz – Urban-architectural and landscape complex with an extended conservation zone of a historic town, encompassing the entirety of its existing historical built environment, as well as the areas surrounding and linked to the town, reg. no.: A.719; Wiślica – town-settlement as a historic town, reg. no.: A.84 (register entry no. 113 of 22.12.1986).

² Judgement of the Voivodeship Administrative Court in Warsaw of 23 May 2014, case ref. VII SA/Wa 188/14. Cf.: Entry in the register of historic monuments, 29 December 2021 [1].

the preservation of tangible and intangible heritage for contemporary users and future generations.

Considering these criteria, the resulting actions, and the degree of necessary intervention, the author picked a number of examples illustrating approaches to the revitalisation of market squares with varying degrees of preservation regarding their historic urban layout, architectural fabric and existing function, yet characterised by comparable sizes (Tab. 1).

Table 1. Comparative table of market square sizes (author's own work, 2026)

No.	Town/City	Area [hectares]	Plots
1.	Sandomierz	1.03 ha	district 0003, no. 1135/1
2.	Kielce	0.56 ha	district 0016, no. 216/1
3.	Chęciny	0.65 ha	district 0002, no. 2203
4.	Bodzentyn	0.63 ha	district 0001, no. 2987
5.	Wiślica	0.66 ha	district 0001, no. 431

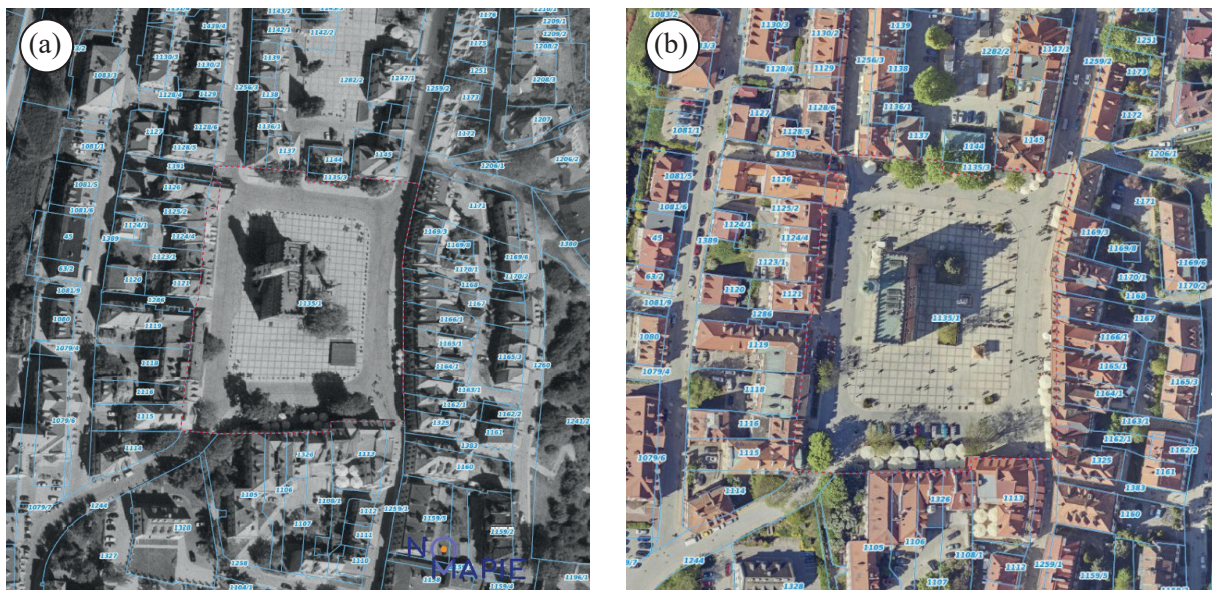


Fig. 1. Sandomierz – Market Square: (a) Aerial photograph taken in 2003 [Archival aerial photograph report, retrieved: 06.05.2026]; (b) Aerial photograph taken on 27.04.2025 [Archival aerial photograph report, retrieved: 06.05.2026]



Fig. 2. Kielce – Market Square: (a) Condition before 2010. Aerial photograph taken in 2009 [Archival aerial photograph report]; (b) Kielce – Market Square. Current condition since 2024. Aerial photograph taken on 27.04.2025 [Archival aerial photograph report, retrieved: 06.05.2026]



Fig. 3. Chęciny – Market Square: (a) Condition before 2013. Aerial photograph taken in 2009 [Archival aerial photograph report, retrieved: 07.05.2026]; (b) Current condition since 2014. Aerial photograph taken in April 2025 [Archival aerial photograph report, retrieved: 07.05.2026]

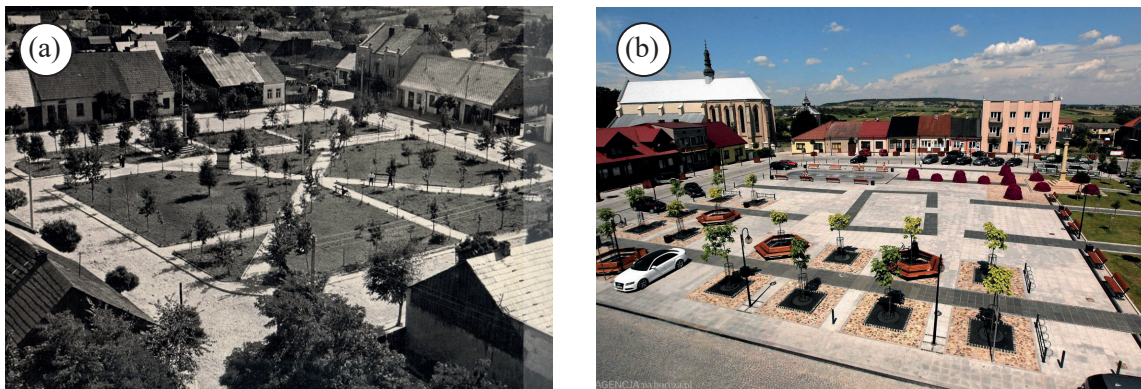


Fig. 4. Bodzentyn – Market Square: (a) Bodzentyn. View of the Upper Square in Bodzentyn (1961-1963) [2]; (b) The intended effect of applying conservation guidelines involving greenery [3]



Fig. 5. Wiślica – Market Square: (a) Condition in 1967 [Source: [4]]; (b) Current condition. Aerial photograph taken on 27.05.2024 [Archival aerial photograph report, retrieved: 07.05.2026]

The market square in Sandomierz was chosen as the best-preserved urban development concept of its kind in its original setting, which did not undergo any major changes over the centuries (Fig. 1). The remaining examples comprise market squares which have lost their commercial function in favour of transport infrastructure and green spaces established in their central sections, which was the case in Kielce, Chęciny and Bodzentyn, and which subsequently regained their prestigious status as public spaces through revitalisation (Fig. 2, 3, 4). Wiślica, by contrast, serves as an example of a situation where the market square retained the form into which it had evolved—an urban green area (Fig. 5).

2.2. Revitalisation of preserved market squares

Sandomierz is a city on the Vistula River, located 94 kilometres south-east of Kielce, situated in south-central Poland in the Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship and Sandomierz District. Initially, in the 10th century, it existed as a settlement, then turned into a stronghold with suburbs in the 11th century. The fortifications fell in the mid-13th century. In the second half of the 13th century, the centre of Sandomierz was relocated from Old Town Hill to Town Hill. This *translatio civitatis* was formally sealed by the incorporation charter of 1286, and the new location was anchored by the market square, which remains the heart of the town and its Old Town district to this day [5, p. 121] (Fig. 1). The rectangular square was laid out on the highest elevation within historic Sandomierz, featuring a characteristic geometric network of streets radiating from its corners and quarters divided into plots where townhouses were erected to form continuous frontages (Fig. 2). The two-storey townhouses feature relatively high ridged gable roofs with dormers. Back in the Middle Ages, a town hall was built in the northern part of the market square, and subsequently remodelled and extended during the Renaissance. This well-preserved building remains functional today, housing a branch of the District Museum and the Register Office, while its cellars host the *Lapidarium* club.

The historic centre of Sandomierz avoided major wartime destruction; however, considerable time has passed since the war, and much could have changed, yet this did not happen. In reality, Sandomierz can be seen as an open-air historical and architectural museum. Visitors can experience all the subsequent eras thanks to more than 120 preserved historic buildings representing all architectural styles. This was fostered by a policy of care for the historic space implemented from the

very outset, as evidenced by early archive records [6], alongside superb cooperation between the authorities and the conservation officer from the beginning of his tenure. From the start, even before the war, the conservation officer Andrzej Oleś campaigned for the proper protection and maintenance of the town's historic character [7]. This remains the case today, thanks to the Sandomierz branch office of the Voivodeship Heritage Conservator in Kielce. As a result, the entire urban layout of historic Sandomierz is perfectly preserved to this day. The value of the town's historical heritage was further recognised and highlighted in 2021, when Sandomierz – the historic architectural and landscape complex – was designated a Historic Monument.

Safeguarding historical values and maintaining this state of preservation requires continuous care, protection and conservation, alongside revitalisation – which in Sandomierz's case focuses primarily on aesthetic matters, repairing the surface of the square, pavements and roadways, and occasionally spatial projects concerning new elements. The market square in Sandomierz is a *complete space* – compact, well-maintained and undisturbed. The introduced and variable elements comprise street furniture designed to blend into the historic space. These include lanterns, which ought to be uniform, litter bins and benches, as well as cohesive decorative elements on façades that go hand in hand with the historic character of the buildings. This is particularly true for advertising, which has been replaced by signposts for the shops and other businesses operating in the townhouses.

Between 2001 and 2012, road works and utility overhauls were carried out across the entire town of Sandomierz, and the infrastructure within the Old Town boundaries was completely rebuilt. In the subsequent years (2014–2020), the town carried out tasks within the framework of the EU project *Revitalisation of Sandomierz – a City of Cultural Heritage and Development* [8]. The primary objective of the project, for which the town secured EU funding from the Regional Operational Programme, was the socio-economic revival and the physical and spatial renewal of Sandomierz's revitalisation area; this also included the renovation and adaptive reuse of degraded buildings to restore or assign them new social, economic, educational and cultural functions. Thanks to the initiatives driven primarily by the municipality, all the townhouses are regaining their former glory, and the Old Town is growing more beautiful. Furthermore, the wooden benches in the Market Square were replaced with new ones made of steel-framed Pilkington multi-

layer laminated glass. Additionally, glass display panels were installed. This so-called *glass walk* is designed to help visitors explore Sandomierz and learn the history of its monuments (Figs. 6, 7). A plaque installed in the corner of the Sandomierz market square displays the town hall alongside a monument to the Tsar that stood there until 1928³. To reproduce the 1870s engraving onto the glass, ceramic printing technology was employed, and the printed elements were placed between two laminated panes of glass. The primary aim of these measures is to improve the quality of life for the local community and, among other things, to enhance the town's tourism potential. The revitalisation has enhanced both the usability and aesthetics of the space without disrupting the preserved fabric; the added elements integrate seamlessly, providing added value to the contemporary residents.



Fig. 6. Sandomierz, eastern frontage of the market square (M. Doroz-Turek, 2021)



Fig. 7. Sandomierz, Town Hall – view from the south-west corner of the market square (M. Doroz-Turek, 2021)

³ A monument of gratitude for the enfranchisement of peasants, erected in 1865 at a prominent point in Sandomierz.

2.2.1. Revitalisation of lost market squares in Kielce, Chęciny and Bodzentyn

In Poland, most market squares of medieval origin lost their significance during the second half of the 20th century. The commercial function of the market squares, which hosted fairs where peasants and artisans sold their produce and wares, persisted for quite a long time – until the interwar period, and in many cases even until the mid-20th century [9, pp. 78-83] [10]. During the interwar period, the authorities began introducing trees into the empty squares along the frontages. Even earlier, in the 19th century, tram lines and associated stops were introduced to market squares in cities such as Warsaw (1866), Wrocław (1877), Poznań (1880) and Kraków (1882); in 1952, the last trams ran through the market squares of Kraków and Poznań, with the decision to dismantle the tram lines justified by the need to protect the historic Old Town, while in Wrocław they continued to run until the late 1970s⁴. Motor vehicle traffic also emerged after World War II. This state of affairs continued until at least the 2nd half of the 20th century. It was only at the end of the 20th century, and especially at the beginning of the 21st century, that the need to create public spaces arose, especially in the Old Towns and city centres. The market square, standing as a testament to the past, proved to be the perfect example; through revitalisation, local authorities turn them into prestigious and universally accessible spaces, designed with people and society in mind.

Kielce, the capital of the Świętokrzyskie region, exemplifies a Polish city with medieval roots. The history of the oldest trading settlement can be traced back to the turn of the 10th and 11th centuries. The incorporation of Kielce may have occurred even before 1227, when Bishop Iwo Odrowąż obtained the right from Prince Leszek the White to settle German immigrants through mediation [11, p. 208]. The culmination of Kielce's urbanisation, despite its low population and its commercial and agricultural character, came with its incorporation under Magdeburg Law in 1364 [12, pp. 53-54] [13, p. 23]. At that time, a marketplace – a market square in the shape of an irregular rectangle – was laid out adjacent to the trading settlement; its form was dictated by an existing road (today's Bodzentynska Street, which then turns into Duża Street), which was left unaltered. As

⁴ On 27 June 1952, the last tram rolled into Kraków's Market Square. In Wrocław, trams continued to run to the market square until the late 1970s.

a departure from the regular layout of perpendicularly radiating streets, the street in the north-eastern corner runs diagonally, akin to Grodzka Street in Kraków.

A brick town hall was erected in the market square in the first half of the 16th century, testifying to the status of Kielce as a city. The building burned down at the beginning of the 19th century during a city fire [14] [15, pp. 27, 52, note 3], after which it was demolished and never rebuilt [16, p. 315] [17, p. 36]. The underground remains of this freestanding historic town hall were first encountered in 1943, during the construction of a firewater reservoir by the Germans (Fig. 8) [18, p. 130] [15, p. 27] [19, pp. 198-199].



Fig. 8. Kielce. The Market Square with fountain in the middle, before 2008 [36]

In addition to the town hall, by the end of the 18th century continuous frontages enclosed the market square, including six brick townhouses and ten partially brick ones. The remaining buildings were wooden, but following their destruction in fires, they were replaced by brick structures [18, p. 30]. All houses within the blocks facing the square were fronted by arcades [18, pp. 130-133], or simply featured brick façades, which Adamczyk marked on his plan [15, p. 30, Fig. 19]. This distinctive character of the built environment surrounding the square is evidenced by two arcaded townhouses – at Rynek 18 (the townhouse known as the Sołtyk House) and Rynek 4 (currently housing the Museum of Dialogue and Cultures). Between 1945 and 1948, a vision for the post-war redevelopment of the inner city and the expansion of Kielce was formulated by the Warsaw-based architect Bohdan Pniewski [20, p. 66], for whom Kielce became a second centre of professional activity outside Warsaw during the occupation [13, pp. 181-195] [21]. Accounts indicate that, *owing to his connections with prominent clergy, he designed the inner city of Kielce with medieval characteristics – priests' residences on one side, and guild*

artisans (goldsmiths, makers of devotional items and clerical vestments) on the other [22]. While references in written records confirm that the architect worked on this plan alongside a team in Kielce, which included Jerzy Król, no iconographic sources are known to exist. The contract to draft an outline development plan for the Kielce urban complex within the context of the wider Kielce region was signed with Bohdan Pniewski on 24 April 1945. This is confirmed by a document certifying the acceptance of works executed by the architect [21] and by earlier sources [23, 24].

Józef Kłodawski also conceived visions for the future of Kielce. In a study penned during the occupation titled *The Future Kielce* [26], the author formulated a vision for the city's future, outlining its regional role and developmental prospects against a backdrop of cultural and economic life, alongside the city's physical appearance [27]. He sketched out a multifaceted portrait of the city, focusing specifically on the *Kielce Acropolis* – an architectural gem – and its premier civic space, namely the Old Market Square. Kłodawski notes that various architectural proposals for the market square buildings existed at the time, including arcaded houses and designs focused on the Renaissance style. Like Pniewski's aforementioned project, these plans were never executed.

In the 1960s, the firewater reservoir was converted into a fountain, which remained there until 2008 (Fig. 8) [20, pp. 198-199]. During this period, the square functioned as a traffic junction – a roundabout with the aforementioned fountain at its centre, a few trees, a lawn and benches – bearing no resemblance to a historic market square, save for the surrounding townhouses enclosing the space.

The modern revitalisation of Kielce theoretically commenced in the 1990s, when a vision for 21st-century city first emerged. Jacek Nowakowski worked on the development plans for the city centre⁵. Their main aim was to free the city centre from car traffic. The plan approved by the councillors envisaged that: *The roundabout and fountain will disappear from Kielce Market Square, leaving only a few trees – the entire square is to become a level and open space in order to uncover and enforce its historic character*⁶. The architects' plan to get rid of traffic from the centre

⁵ Jacek Nowakowski was born in 1953 in Kielce. He studied architecture in Kraków. After completing his degree, he worked as an architect and painted [28].

⁶ Krzysztof Krogulec wrote about the planned changes in 1994 in a Kielce daily newspaper [29].

of Kielce was intended to facilitate pedestrian traffic and reflected a desire to reveal its history. Design competitions for the development of Sienkiewicza Street and the Market Square, then known as Partyzantów Square, were held in 1993. However, works did not commence until the new century under the project *Revitalisation of the Historic Inner City of Kielce – Redevelopment of the Market Square and Surrounding Streets*⁷. The project's main goal was to boost the socio-economic and spatial activity of Kielce. The revitalisation carried out in 2010–2011 enhanced the aesthetics of the area and improved the residents' quality of life. As initially intended, efforts focused on restoring the original form and function of the square by restricting car traffic, transforming the site into a venue for meetings and strolls for residents and visitors alike. Whether this succeeded could be evaluated more than two decades later. In the residents' view, Kielce undoubtedly reclaimed its Market Square, the heart of the city which had been completely lost [30]. During the revitalisation, the surviving remnants of the town hall walls were uncovered once again and subsequently left underground; however, their outline was marked in the market square paving and there are sections of the wall raised above the surface, which bring the image of the ruins to mind. As a result, the lost architectural heritage was commemorated within the public space and its memory was restored through a trace in the new paving [19]. In modern times, this historic area and its historic buildings have been used by the authorities to develop and promote the city – the capital of the Świętokrzyskie region. The so-called *Urban Salon* was also arranged in the market square – a unique initiative encompassing 180 square metres of the area. The idea of the initiators from Kielce Institute of Design was to create a space resembling a living room, where one can relax or receive guests (Fig. 9) [31]. Consequently, planters with greenery and furniture, such as seats and deckchairs, were installed in the market square. The residents of Kielce were actively involved in this public project, and the concept was consulted with them. The project received high acclaim, and the architects of the Kielce Institute

of Design won an award for the Urban Salon in the prestigious competition hosted by the Institute of Industrial Design – 2013 Good Design.



Fig. 9. Kielce, The Market Square – Urban Salon
(M. Doroz-Turek, 2015)

Thanks to thorough revitalisation, the Kielce market square has regained its original significance as a public square, becoming a space used by residents as a venue for meetings and local events, as well as a point of interest highly appreciated by visitors (Fig. 10).



Fig. 10. Kielce. The Market Square before 2023
(M. Doroz-Turek, 2021)

Despite the significant success of the project and the revival of the square, there were voices of those dissatisfied with its outcomes. The project was chiefly criticised – as in the case of many other towns where similar revitalisation projects had been carried out [32] – for covering the city centre in concrete and the removal of greenery.

A decade later, the local authorities initiated projects aimed at adding greenery and unsealing parts of the

⁷ It encompasses the reconstruction and expansion of the Market Square and St Tekla's Square, as well as the surrounding Mała and Duża streets, the redevelopment and construction of technical infrastructure and street furniture elements, alongside the removal of the existing underground toilet. All structural elements of the roads and pavements will be replaced, along with the reconstruction of storm water drainage, street lighting and conflicting technical infrastructure.

market square surface. The *Green Revitalisation of the Historic Inner City of Kielce* project [33, 34] represents works for which the city of Kielce secured funding from the Strategic Investment Programme. The works commenced in 2023 and will conclude in the spring of 2024. The market square now features trees planted directly in the soil (Fig. 11).



Fig. 11. Kielce. The Market Square after 2024
(M. Doroz-Turek, 2026)

As part of the recent revitalisation of the market square in Kielce, the square was partially unpaved to plant trees and low-growing greenery. Spurred by the calls and protests of Kielce residents, the original design – which also envisaged removing pavement and new plants in the central section of the square – was scaled back; some feared that the market square could have lost its function of a public space, turning into yet another park. Preserving a venue capable of hosting various events organised by the city, including a space for building a large stage, was seen as vital [35]. The new trees were planted directly into the soil and are watered with an underground irrigation system. New street furniture elements were also introduced, including benches, bins, information boards and bicycle racks [34]; the aforementioned *Urban Salon* was relocated to Literatów Square.

Chęciny is a small town located to the west of Kielce. The history of Chęciny dates back to the mid-12th century, and the settlement was originally located elsewhere, at a site now known as the village of Starochęciny. Chęciny gained significance with the construction of a fortified medieval Royal Castle on the rocky ridge of Castle Hill, (360 metres above sea level). A new settlement was established at the foot of the hill at the turn of the 14th century which, thanks

to the prominence it achieved under King Władysław I the Elbow-High, was incorporated under Magdeburg Law after 1306 (c. 1325)⁸; as of then, the ducal castle in Chęciny was already there. Concurrently with these rights, a regular market square and an orthogonal street grid were laid out. The entire urban layout was oriented visually towards the fortress towering over the surrounding area. The town hall was erected in the market square, which exists to this day as 2 Czerwca Square. The building survived until the mid-17th century. Today, the market square is surrounded by townhouses, some displaying architectural features dating back as far as the 15th century. Unfortunately, many of the buildings no longer exist, such as the Kozubowicz Townhouse, of which only the cellars survive beneath the current building, featuring the oldest stone portal dating back to the 15th century.

The main tourist attraction in Chęciny is the castle, preserved as a ruin which retains a clear form reminiscent of the magnificent original structure. The numerous tourists visiting the area focus on the castle. Until recently, very poor technical infrastructure discouraged exploration of Chęciny's centre, while the lack of tourist services deterred visitors from extending their stay and fully utilising the space. In order to remedy this situation, as well as attract and retain both residents and visitors in the centre, in 2013–2014 a comprehensive revitalisation of Chęciny's market squares along with adjacent streets was carried out, aimed at rebuilding and promoting the unique historical and cultural features of the area [37].

The design guidelines for the revitalisation of the Market Square – 2 Czerwca Square, were preceded by historical and urban analyses conducted by Dariusz Piotrowicz [38, pp. 121–142]. The completed analysis did not, however, offer a ready-made solution for this vital urban area and public space, but *revealed its hidden historical and spatial values, which serve as a foundation for further revitalisation efforts*. The main premise of the revitalisation was to clean up and open up the public space, as well as to highlight the urban compositional elements and landscape vistas of the architectural landmarks, including the castle. Elements of the former layout were also recreated, including arcades, a well and market stalls, which are set up occasionally (Fig. 12). Motor traffic on the square was restricted, while street

⁸ The incorporation charter has not survived. The incorporation of the town can be traced back to the reign of King Władysław I the Elbow-High, 1306–1325.

furniture and greenery were introduced along the eastern and western frontages. Alongside preserving and bringing out the square's values, the project focused on improving the quality of space in this small town, impacting its economic and commercial development: namely tourist services, small-scale catering, accommodation, etc. [39, p. 15].



Fig. 12. Chęciny. The Market Square following its revitalisation [43]

In 2013, despite the immense interest in the ruins of Chęciny Castle, this site was also subjected to revitalisation and adaptive reuse for tourism purposes. The project works, which focused on meeting contemporary technical conditions and standards, were carried out with respect for the historic heritage of the site. Excavation works revealed new and previously unknown architectural artefacts of the castle, which dates back to the turn of the 13th and 14th centuries. After securing the discoveries, the revitalisation of the castle ruins commenced in the spring of 2013, based on a design concept developed back in 2005. During this time, a comprehensive renovation and landscaping works were carried out with the aim of making the monument more attractive to tourists. Following the completion of the revitalisation, interest in the castle increased by 60% compared to the period prior to these interventions.

Bodzentyn is yet another small town with municipal rights in the Świętokrzyskie region boasting a rich history that stretches back to the Middle Ages. The town is surrounded by a beautiful landscape – it borders the Świętokrzyskie National Park and the Łysogóry range in the the south-west and is located roughly 30 kilometres north-east of Kielce. Many hiking trails intersect in Bodzentyn, due to the rich landscape values and the saturation of preserved

cultural heritage in the area⁹. In this town, visitors are drawn primarily to the preserved ruins of the former Krakow Bishops' Palace¹⁰, the 15th-century Gothic church and the market square.

Bodzentyn was founded and incorporated around 1355 by Bodzęta, the Bishop of Kraków [40, p. 25]. In the second half of the 14th century, a subsequent bishop erected a medieval castle. The site for the episcopal residence was selected as the layout of the town was decided at the time of its incorporation. Bodzentyn held great significance during the medieval and Renaissance periods; during this time, the residence was rebuilt following a fire in 1413 and subsequently expanded by successive bishops over the following centuries, with the first expansion of the castle carried out by Bishop Zbigniew Oleśnicki (1423-1455), and at the end of the 15th century by Bishop Fryderyk Jagiellończyk (1488-1503). Bishop Franciszek Krasiński (1552-1577) was the main originator of the overhaul of the Gothic castle and the erection of a magnificent bishop's residence in Renaissance style. The works were completed by Bishop Piotr Myszkowski (1577-1591). Significant changes to the castle took place from the beginning of the 17th century on the initiative of Bishop Piotr Tylicki (1608-1616). The building was eventually rebuilt on a horseshoe plan and consisted of the southern and northern wings, which were connected to the east by the Grand House. Thanks to the funding provided by Bishop Piotr Gembicki (1642-1657), the entire structure was linked by a single communication system with stairs, an arcade loggia and an overlooking gallery [41].

In the early 17th century, the palace in Bodzentyn experienced its heyday as a summer residence of the bishops of Kraków, bustling with cultural life – and the town reaped the benefits. It soon lost its importance in favour of the new palace built in Kielce between 1637 and 1642¹¹ (1644¹²) at the initiative of Jakub Zadzik, the Bishop of Kraków – a residence ranked at the time among the most beautiful buildings in Poland [13, p. 218]. The brilliance of the Kielce palace eclipsed not only the residence in Bodzentyn, but also the castles in Iłża, Lipowiec and Siewierz.

⁹ The Wooden Architecture Trail, the Defensive Architecture Trail, the Archeo-Geological Trail, the Literary Trail.

¹⁰ Register of Monuments no.: ruins of the castle with courtyard, reg. no: A.217/1-4 of 15.02.1967 and 17.02.1957.

¹¹ Works commenced in the years 1636–1637. Cf.: [42, p. 155, note 14].

¹² The year the interior works were completed [43].

From the mid-17th century, the town of Bodzentyn unfortunately also began to decline. The decline worsened following the seizure and nationalisation of episcopal estates in 1789. In the hands of the Austrian occupying authorities, the palace served as a granary and a military hospital, which led to its destruction. After 1815, it became the property of the government of the Congress Kingdom of Poland and was subsequently abandoned. As a result, it began to fall into disrepair. During the 1830s, the defensive walls and the Opatowska Gate were demolished, and the market square was transformed into a green space surrounded by roads (Fig. 4a). Shortly thereafter, in 1870, Bodzentyn lost its municipal rights, eventually regaining them in 1994. Upon recovering its town charter, the municipality sought to restore its former status and significance within the Świętokrzyskie region, as the quality of public space had also deteriorated. The authorities saw an opportunity to achieve this goal by undertaking urban revitalisation initiatives that leveraged the preserved cultural assets. Within the framework of the Local Revitalisation Programme for Bodzentyn, a public space development concept was drafted between 2012 and 2013. Based on its premises, a redevelopment scheme for the Main Market Square and the surrounding streets was drafted. In this case, the functional revitalisation of the market square consisted of restoring the original function and creating a town centre that was friendly to residents and visitors alike [39, p. 15] [35, p. 7]. During the revitalisation works in Bodzentyn market square, the foundation walls of the 17th-century town hall, which had been demolished in 1832, were unearthed. Following this discovery, changes had to be introduced to the design of the paving, which now delineates the outline of this historic structure (Fig. 4b, 13).



Fig. 13. Bodzentyn. The Market Square following its revitalisation. A bird's eye view [44]

The project enhanced the aesthetics of the public space by organising the square, replacing the paving and introducing street furniture, while mature trees were replaced with low-growing greenery. At the same time, plans were made to revitalise the ruins of the former episcopal palace. Despite the development of a concept for the site, no restoration or adaptive reuse works were undertaken at that time. It was not until 2024 that a controversial project was approved and implementation work commenced at the ruins of the Bodzentyn palace.

2.2.2. Revitalisation of the lost market square in Wiślica

Wiślica, a medieval gem of the Ponidzie region situated on the Nida River, was until recently the smallest town not only in the Świętokrzyskie region, but in Poland as a whole. The town lost the municipal rights it had obtained in 1326 in 1870, eventually regaining them in 2018. The fact that Wiślica was a prominent hub in historic Lesser Poland¹³, alongside Kraków and Sandomierz [45], is evidenced by numerous monuments dating back to before its incorporation. These include the remains of a fortified settlement: two rotundas, two palatia, and two Romanesque churches, along with a crypt associated with one of them that features a rich plaster floor known as the Orants' Slab (the Wiślica Slab), dating back to the third quarter of the 12th century. Wiślica was presumably incorporated under Magdeburg Law in the first half of the 14th century, and in the mid-14th century, under Casimir the Great, the town was enclosed by defensive walls. The incorporation is evidenced by the orthogonal 9-field urban layout of the centre, featuring a small market square built on an irregular square plan measuring approximately 2 x 2 cords¹⁴, enclosed by compact development comprising predominantly single-storey buildings with attics under ridged gable roofs. Originally, the buildings were mainly timber-framed; sources indicate that by the end of the 18th century, only one brick building stood in the market square, described as an inn (known as the Rosary Townhouse at Rynek 34). The town hall erected in the square was also wooden [46] [47, p. 184]. Furthermore, the houses currently surrounding the market square date back to the 19th and 20th centuries – some of them were

¹³The territory of historical Lesser Poland currently encompasses the south-eastern part of the country, roughly corresponding to today's Lesser Poland, Świętokrzyskie and Podkarpackie voivodeships.

¹⁴1 large cord = 10 rods = 75 cubits = 150 feet = 44.665 metres; a non-mathematical unit of length historically used in Poland.

erected over older vaulted cellars. In 2018, Wiślica – the collegiate church ensemble of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary with the remnants of the church of St Nicholas and the hillfort site – was designated a Historic Monument.

For the years 2007-2013, in connection with the town's millennium, a project entitled *The Millennium of Wiślica – Traces of Former Splendour* was launched in the Wiślica Municipality, encompassing the revitalisation of the archaeological pavilion and the basilica's underground vaults, alongside the redevelopment of the market square. The overall aim of the project was to improve tourist facilities and make use of historic buildings for this purpose; hence the programme included the restoration of the Market Square and its adjacent streets. Restoration work began at the end of 2012 and was completed in 2014 (Fig. 5b, 14). In connection with this project, remedial works were carried out, including the resurfacing of park pathways, the installation of new benches and lanterns, and a new bus shelter; in the middle of the park, a 5-metre circle featuring the coat of arms of Wiślica was crafted from paving blocks (Fig. 14).



Fig. 14. Wiślica. The Market Square after its revitalisation [48]

Beyond the former market square, the surfaces of the adjacent streets extending perpendicularly (Targowa, Okopowa) and Solny Square were also replaced. During the recent revitalisation, the current function of the market square was retained, and the green municipal square was refreshed. The result is a friendly, well-kept space with alleys and benches for residents and visitors alike. It was a primarily aesthetic revitalisation, mostly concerned with tidying the space and removing replaced street furniture elements. However, the designation of the former market square was not altered, which during the 20th century had assumed the character of a municipal green area; the commercial function was taken over by

Solny Square, which gained more importance than the original market square.

In each case, revitalisation works are conducted with respect for history, based on meticulously executed research and thorough analyses identifying the condition of historic monuments and other buildings, which lead to the formulation of design assumptions. The state of preservation of cultural heritage is of paramount importance, as the degree of intervention during revitalisation depends entirely upon it. In Sandomierz, the market square required only a minor aesthetic overhaul and adaptation to the needs of contemporary users. In the cases of Kielce, Chęciny and Bodzentyn, the revitalisation of market squares restored their prestigious character due to restriction of vehicular traffic, thereby creating a safe space for pedestrians alongside a venue for gatherings and hosting events. In Wiślica, the revitalisation comprised solely works aimed at refreshing the space. The designers preserved the green area given the current importance of the town. One could argue that Wiślica had lost its true market square; however, following the trend of market square revitalisations widely criticised for paving over the areas, the revitalisation in Wiślica aligns with the new green revitalisation trend.

3. CONCLUSIONS

In addition to passive protection and conservation of historic monuments, the 21st century demands significantly more from interventions carried out in historical urban spaces. An informed yet demanding society expects better living spaces. Cultural heritage has become the key factor in improving the environment, which is why it is leveraged as part of the revitalisation processes. Local revitalisation projects and schemes lead to improvements in the quality of life, particularly in small towns and cities. The revitalisation of Polish towns has also become a way of preserving cultural heritage, which is particularly important given the pressing need for its protection and sustainable use. The aforementioned examples of towns and cities in the Świętokrzyskie region demonstrate how their historical tangible heritage in the form of preserved market squares and built environments, serves this end. The types and scales of interventions carried out as part of revitalisation projects are influenced by the state of preservation of public spaces, as well as their current function. The success of an implementation depends on exploiting the potential of the historic spaces, but also on the towns'

contemporary significance. However, one has to agree that revitalisation projects are extremely important in modern times. Cultural heritage holds immense potential and constitutes a factor in local development, while spatial changes leveraging historical assets drive the economic and social advancement of small towns. It is evident that as society evolves, the town evolves

alongside it; therefore, one must be ready for changes – a phenomenon which is best exemplified by Kielce. In this city, a decade after the initial revitalisation of the market square, another project was carried out in response to global climate change, with future generations in mind.

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