



TRANSFORMATION OF THE ADVERTISING LANDSCAPE AND LANDSCAPE GOVERNANCE IN A HISTORIC CITY CENTRE: THE CASE OF KIELCE (POLAND)

PRZEKSZTAŁCENIA KRAJOBRAZU REKLAMOWEGO I ZARZĄDZANIA KRAJOBRAZEM W HISTORYCZNYM CENTRUM MIASTA: PRZYPADEK KIELC (POLSKA)

Jagoda Juruś*, Julia Lech
Kielce University of Technology, Poland

Abstract

The rapid expansion of outdoor advertising in post-socialist cities has transformed the visual structure of historic urban landscapes, contributing to visual pollution. This study investigates the transformation of the advertising landscape in the historic city centre of Kielce (Poland) and evaluates the effectiveness of landscape governance in improving visual quality and spatial order. The research combines a literature review, historical analysis, planning document analysis, field observations, and a semi-quantitative comparative visual assessment of selected building facades. The results indicate that historical forms of advertising were generally better integrated with architectural composition, whereas post-1989 advertising contributed to visual fragmentation. The implementation of the 2022 landscape resolution reduced advertising density, improved architectural visibility, enhanced visual coherence, and increased the transparency of ground-floor facades. The findings demonstrate that local landscape governance can effectively reduce visual pollution and support the sustainable management of historic urban environments.

Keywords: visual pollution; landscape governance; advertising landscape; historic urban landscape; urban sustainability; spatial order; outdoor advertising; cultural heritage

Streszczenie

Gwałtowny rozwój reklamy zewnętrznej w miastach postsocjalistycznych przekształcił wizualną strukturę historycznych krajobrazów miejskich, przyczyniając się do powstania zanieczyszczenia wizualnego. Niniejsze badanie analizuje przemiany krajobrazu reklamowego w historycznym centrum Kielc (Polska) oraz ocenia skuteczność działań w zakresie zarządzania krajobrazem pod kątem poprawy jakości wizualnej i ład przestrzenny. Metodologia badań obejmuje przegląd literatury, analizę historyczną, analizę dokumentów planistycznych, obserwacje terenowe oraz półilościową, porównawczą ocenę wizualną wybranych elewacji budynków. Wyniki wskazują, że historyczne formy reklamy były zazwyczaj lepiej wkomponowane w kompozycję architektoniczną, podczas gdy reklamy powstałe po 1989 roku przyczyniły się do fragmentacji wizualnej przestrzeni. Wdrożenie uchwały krajobrazowej z 2022 roku doprowadziło do zmniejszenia zagęszczenia reklam, poprawy widoczności architektury, zwiększenia spójności wizualnej oraz poprawy przejrzystości elewacji na poziomie parteru. Uzyskane wyniki dowodzą, że lokalne zarządzanie krajobrazem może skutecznie ograniczać zanieczyszczenie wizualne i wspierać zrównoważone gospodarowanie historycznymi przestrzeniami miejskimi.

Słowa kluczowe: zanieczyszczenie wizualne; zarządzanie krajobrazem; krajobraz reklamowy; historyczny krajobraz miejski; zrównoważony rozwój miast; ład przestrzenny; reklama zewnętrzna; dziedzictwo kulturowe

1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary cities are characterised by an intensive presence of various forms of visual communication, which constitute an integral component of the urban landscape. Outdoor advertising plays an important informational and economic role, enabling businesses to communicate with potential customers and supporting local economic development. At the same time, its excessive expansion may lead to significant aesthetic and functional problems in public space. In urban studies, this phenomenon is commonly referred to as visual pollution [1].

Visual pollution is defined as an excess of visual elements that disrupt spatial perception, hinder orientation within the city, and reduce the overall quality of the urban environment [2]. The most frequently identified sources of this phenomenon include large-format advertisements, chaotically arranged shop signs, banners, and other forms of commercial visual communication. This issue is particularly evident in historic city centres, where intensive commercial and service activities result in a high concentration of advertising elements within spaces of significant cultural and architectural value.

Previous studies conducted in various countries indicate that an excessive number of advertisements may lead to the degradation of cultural landscapes and a reduction in the legibility of urban composition [1]. Nevertheless, advertising remains an essential component of urban space and cannot be entirely eliminated. Therefore, increasing attention is being paid to finding a balance between market-driven economic needs and the protection of public space quality.

The problem of advertising-related visual disorder became particularly pronounced in Central and Eastern European cities following the political and economic transformation after 1989. The liberalisation of the economy and the rapid development of the private sector led to a significant increase in outdoor advertising. In many cases, this process occurred in the absence of adequate legal regulations governing the placement and form of advertising media, resulting in a noticeable deterioration in the visual quality of urban environments [3].

In response to the growing problem of visual clutter, Poland introduced the so-called “Landscape Act” in 2015, which enabled local governments to adopt landscape resolutions regulating the location, size, and aesthetic standards of advertising in public space. In recent years, an increasing number of Polish cities have implemented such regulations as part of

broader urban landscape governance strategies aimed at improving spatial quality and protecting cultural landscapes.

One example is the city of Kielce, where a landscape resolution was adopted in 2022, regulating the placement of advertisements, shop signs, fences, and elements of street furniture. The regulation introduced a division of the city into landscape zones and defined detailed requirements regarding the form and location of advertising media. These provisions are particularly important in the historic city centre, where the concentration of commercial activities generates strong advertising pressure on building facades.

Despite the growing academic interest in visual pollution and the impact of advertising on urban landscapes, empirical evidence focusing on medium-sized cities in Central and Eastern Europe remains limited. Existing research has predominantly concentrated on large metropolitan areas or on theoretical approaches to visual pollution and its assessment methods. Nevertheless, there is a clear lack of in-depth analyses evaluating the actual spatial effects of local landscape regulations, particularly in historic urban environments.

Moreover, the transformation of advertising landscapes in post-socialist cities – from historically integrated forms of visual identification, such as traditional shop signs and neon signage, to contemporary large-scale advertising and fragmented visual communication systems – remains insufficiently explored. Understanding these processes is crucial not only from the perspective of urban aesthetics but also in terms of cultural heritage protection, spatial order, and the construction of urban visual identity.

From a sustainability perspective, visual quality and landscape coherence are increasingly recognised as important components of sustainable urban development. Addressing visual pollution and improving the legibility of urban space contribute to enhancing the liveability and cultural value of cities. In this context, local regulatory instruments can play a key role in shaping more sustainable and visually coherent urban environments.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to analyse the transformation of the advertising landscape in the historic city centre of Kielce and to assess the role of the landscape resolution as an instrument of urban landscape governance and visual order improvement. The research focuses on identifying historical and contemporary transformations of the advertising landscape and evaluating changes in the visual

structure of selected building facades following the implementation of landscape regulations.

The novelty of this study lies in combining a long-term historical perspective on advertising forms with a comparative visual assessment of facade transformations resulting from the implementation of landscape governance tools in a medium-sized post-socialist city. Unlike previous studies focused primarily on large metropolitan areas or theoretical approaches to visual pollution, this research provides empirical evidence on how local regulatory frameworks influence architectural visibility, visual coherence, and spatial order in historic urban environments. The study also contributes to broader discussions on the role of landscape governance in sustainable urban landscape management.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: ADVERTISING IN THE STRUCTURE OF THE URBAN LANDSCAPE

2.1. Advertising within the Cultural Landscape

Advertising constitutes a persistent and multifaceted component of the contemporary urban landscape. Its impact extends beyond its informational function, influencing spatial perception, place identity, visual order, and the overall quality of the cultural environment. In the scientific literature, advertising is analysed both within the framework of the cultural landscape and more broadly as a factor contributing to so-called visual pollution. This section presents a synthetic theoretical overview based on established models of spatial analysis and studies examining the impact of commercial visual interventions on urban structures.

The urban landscape is a multi-layered structure resulting from the interaction of physical form, functional processes, and cultural meanings. According to the literature, urban space consists of overlapping layers: the physical (urban form), the functional (urban activity), and the symbolic (meaning layer) [4, 5]. Advertising – as a visual communication medium – operates within this symbolic layer, acting as a cultural inscription that both interprets and transforms place.

Within the concept of the cultural landscape, as developed by Sauer and later expanded by Cosgrove, advertising can be understood as a form of semantic inscription embedded in space. It contributes to the legibility of the environment by emphasising commercial and service-related functions [4]. At the same time, it may obscure the visual structure of urban space by competing with architectural elements of historical value.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) emphasises that in historic areas – particularly those protected under the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach – visual interventions should be carefully controlled to avoid compromising heritage values. Due to its dynamic and often temporary character, advertising is considered one of the most significant threats to the integrity of historic urban landscapes [1, 6].

2.2. Advertising as a Perceptual Stimulus – An Environmental Psychology Perspective

In theoretical models of environmental perception [7, 8], it is emphasised that an excessive number of visual stimuli reduces spatial orientation and increases cognitive load. Advertising – by definition designed to attract attention – competes with architectural space for the viewer's visual focus. These mechanisms are particularly relevant in historic urban environments, where excessive advertising may interfere with the perception of architectural composition and reduce the legibility of cultural landscapes.

Empirical studies have demonstrated that:

- an excess of advertising reduces the perceived quality of the landscape [9],
- compositionally dominant advertisements alter the visual structure and disrupt the perception of architectural detail [10],
- dynamic LED screens change the rhythm of nighttime urban space and may lead to sensory overload [11].

The presence of advertising along commercial streets has a particularly strong impact on the perception of linear urban sequences. This has been investigated using eye-tracking methods, which show that users' visual attention is primarily drawn to dynamic and high-contrast stimuli [12].

2.3. Advertising and Visual Pollution

The concept of visual pollution has been widely analysed in interdisciplinary research. According to the systematic review by Gao et al. [1], visual pollution has been described in the literature as elements that disrupt the landscape through excess, low aesthetic quality, inappropriate scale, or lack of contextual coherence.

Commercial advertising is one of the primary contributors to visual disorder in urban environments, leading to:

- fragmentation of visual composition,
- dominance of ephemeral elements over enduring historical values,

- reduced legibility of public space,
- difficulties in perceiving protected architectural heritage.

These effects are particularly pronounced in historic areas, where the protection of visual corridors, skylines, and architectural detail is essential.

2.4. Economic and Functional Roles of Advertising

From an economic perspective, advertising is embedded within the logic of consumption and capitalist models of urban development [13]. In commercial and service-oriented areas, it plays an important informational role, enhancing business visibility and indicating location.

However, the literature also highlights that increasing commercial pressure leads to conflicts between private economic interests and the public interest, particularly in maintaining spatial order and protecting historical values [14]. These conflicts are especially evident in heritage areas, where advertising must be subject to stricter regulations.

From the perspective of sustainable urban development, these conflicts reflect the broader challenge of balancing economic activity with the preservation of environmental quality and cultural heritage within urban landscapes.

2.5. The Positive Role of Advertising in Urban Landscapes

The literature also acknowledges that advertising can have positive effects. It may contribute to the visual identity of commercial streets [15], create distinctive aesthetic atmospheres – particularly in nighttime environments (so-called media architecture) [16] – and, in some cases, become part of cultural heritage. Examples include historic neon signage in cities such as Warsaw, Berlin, and Prague [17].

The concept of the heritage of modernity suggests that certain forms of advertising – especially mid-20th-century neon signs – can be recognised as valuable cultural artefacts [18].

In this context, advertising should not be perceived solely as a source of visual degradation but also as a potential component of sustainable urban identity, provided that it is appropriately integrated into the architectural and cultural context.

The theoretical concepts discussed above – particularly visual coherence, architectural visibility, spatial perception, and visual dominance – provide the conceptual basis for the comparative visual assessment applied in this study. These categories were used to evaluate transformations in the advertising

landscape following the implementation of landscape governance regulations in Kielce. The theoretical framework presented above also provides the basis for analysing the role of landscape governance tools in shaping visual order and improving the quality of historic urban environments.

3. METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study was to assess the transformation of the advertising landscape in the historic city centre of Kielce and to evaluate the impact of landscape regulations on visual order and spatial quality. The research was based on a qualitative and comparative approach combining literature review, historical analysis, field observations, photographic documentation, and comparative visual assessment.

3.1. Study Area

The research focused on the historic city centre of Kielce, with particular emphasis on Henryk Sienkiewicz Street – the city's main pedestrian street and one of its most important commercial axes. This street constitutes a representative public space characterised by a high concentration of commercial, retail, and gastronomic functions, resulting in intensive advertising pressure and a large number of visual communication elements.

The study area included selected fragments of the historic city centre characterised by high historical and urban value and a strong concentration of commercial activities. The selection of this location was based on its representativeness for the visual structure of the city centre and the significant intensity of advertising observed on building facades.

The location of the study area and the analysed case studies within the historic city centre of Kielce are presented in Figure 1.



Fig. 1. Location of the study area and analysed case studies within the historic city centre of Kielce, Poland

3.2. Literature and Planning Document Analysis

The first stage of the research involved a review of the literature concerning the impact of advertising on urban landscapes and the phenomenon of visual pollution. The literature review included publications in urban studies, landscape architecture, environmental psychology, and cultural landscape research, as well as scientific articles analysing the influence of outdoor advertising on spatial perception and visual quality.

At the same time, planning documents and legal acts regulating the placement of advertisements in Poland and in Kielce were analysed, in particular:

- the Spatial Planning and Development Act,
- the Landscape Act (2015),
- the landscape resolution of the city of Kielce adopted on 21 April 2022.

The analysis made it possible to define the legal framework governing the location and form of advertising media and to identify instruments used in urban landscape governance and visual order management.

3.3. Historical Analysis

The next stage of the research involved an analysis of the historical development of signage and advertising in the urban space of Kielce. The study was based on archival photographs, iconographic materials, historical documentation, and studies related to the spatial and commercial development of the city.

The analysis enabled the identification of changes in forms of outdoor advertising across different historical periods, with particular emphasis on:

- craft and commercial signage from the late 19th and early 20th centuries,
- advertising and graphic design from the interwar period,
- neon signage characteristic of the socialist period,
- contemporary forms of outdoor advertising following the political and economic transformation after 1989.

This approach allowed for the presentation of long-term transformations in the advertising landscape and changes in the relationship between advertising and architectural composition.

3.4. Spatial Analysis of the Advertising Landscape

A spatial analysis was conducted for selected areas of the city centre, with particular focus on

Sienkiewicz Street and adjacent public spaces. The analysis included the identification of advertising types, their spatial distribution, placement, scale, and visual characteristics.

The study employed field observation and photographic documentation of changes in the urban landscape. This method is commonly applied in urban landscape and visual assessment studies as a tool for evaluating the visual quality of public space.

The analysis focused on the spatial structure and visual impact of advertising elements, including their number, scale, placement, visual dominance, and relationship with architectural composition. Particular attention was given to facade legibility, visual coherence, and the transparency of ground-floor zones.

3.5. Comparative Visual Assessment

A semi-quantitative comparative visual assessment was carried out to evaluate changes in the advertising landscape following the implementation of the landscape resolution. The assessment focused on selected building facades located along Sienkiewicza Street and was based on a comparison of archival and contemporary photographic documentation collected during field observations.

Five representative case studies were selected according to the following criteria:

1. Location along the main commercial axis of the historic city centre (Sienkiewicza Street);
2. High visibility within the public space;
3. Representativeness of different types of advertising landscape transformation, including the elimination, reduction, and standardisation of advertising elements;
4. Availability of comparable archival and contemporary photographic documentation illustrating the conditions before and after the implementation of the landscape regulations.

The assessment was conducted using a semi-quantitative evaluation framework commonly applied in landscape studies and visual quality assessment. Five evaluation criteria were adopted:

- advertising density,
- architectural visibility,
- visual coherence,
- ground-floor transparency,
- visual dominance.

Each criterion was evaluated using a five-point ordinal scale, in which higher scores represented

more favourable visual conditions. For advertising density, higher scores indicated a lower concentration of advertising elements, whereas for the remaining criteria higher scores reflected improved architectural visibility, greater visual coherence, increased ground-floor transparency, and the predominance of architecture over advertising.

The visual assessment was carried out independently by both authors using the predefined evaluation criteria presented in Table 1. Any differences in interpretation were subsequently discussed until a consensus was reached, ensuring consistency in the final assessment.

The adopted methodology combined descriptive interpretation with a semi-quantitative visual assessment, enabling the identification of changes in advertising density, architectural visibility, visual coherence, ground-floor transparency, and visual dominance before and after the implementation of the landscape resolution. The analysis focused on changes in facade composition, the relationship between advertising and architecture, and the overall visual structure of the streetscape.

The assessment criteria and interpretation scale applied in the comparative visual analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Assessment criteria applied in the comparative visual analysis

Criterion	1	3	5
Advertising Density	Very high density	Moderate density	Minimal advertising
Architectural Visibility	Architecture obscured	Partially visible	Fully visible
Visual Coherence	Chaotic composition	Moderate coherence	Highly coherent
Window Transparency	Covered windows	Partial transparency	Fully transparent
Visual Dominance	Advertising dominant	Balanced	Architecture dominant

Note: Intermediate values (2 and 4) represent transitional conditions between the anchor points defined in the assessment scale.

The overall research workflow applied in this study is presented in Figure 2.

THE PROBLEM: The Impact of Outdoor Advertising on the Landscape of the Historic City Center.

RESEARCH PURPOSE: Assessment of the impact of advertising and the effectiveness of landscape regulations

RESEARCH METHODS	Literature review
	Analysis of planning documents and legal acts
	Historical analysis
	Case studies
	Field observation
	Photographic documentation
	Spatial analysis
	Comparative visual assessment
DATA COLLECTION	Historical sources
	Archival photographs
	Field observation
	Photographic documentation
	Legal acts and planning documents
DATA ANALYSIS	Assessment of advertising density
	Assessment of architectural visibility
	Analysis of changes over time
	Analysis of the impact of legal regulations
	Comparative visual assessment
RESULTS	Transformation of the advertising landscape
	Changes in the advertising landscape
	Impact of the landscape resolution

CONCLUSIONS:

Impact on the historic urban landscape Effectiveness of landscape regulations Research limitations and future research

Fig. 2. Research workflow

4. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SIGNAGE AND ADVERTISING – FROM GENERAL CONTEXT TO THE LOCAL CASE OF KIELCE

4.1. Historical and Theoretical Development of Signage and Advertising

Advertising, understood as visual commercial communication, has been an integral component of the urban landscape since the intensification of urbanisation processes in the 19th century. The development of retail trade, craft services, and industrial production created the need for clear identification of business locations, which led to the widespread use of signs and advertising boards in European cities. Studies on urban landscape formation indicate that advertising elements functioned not only as commercial messages but also as important components of the visual identity of streets and districts [19].

In Poland, the interwar period brought a dynamic development of graphic design reflected in signage, posters, and advertisements painted directly on building facades. These designs were often created by professional artists and were characterised by a high

level of compositional and typographic awareness [20]. Neon signs also played a significant role as symbols of modernity, appearing in major Polish cities as early as the 1930s.

After World War II, during the socialist period, illuminated advertising was centralised under the state enterprise “Reklama”, which from the late 1950s was responsible for the design, production, and installation of neon signs across the country [21, pp. 7–10]. Neon signage fulfilled a dual function: informational and commercial on the one hand, and representational on the other, contributing to the visual attractiveness of urban space, especially at night [21, pp. 7–10].

Since the 1990s, traditional neon signage has gradually disappeared due to both political-economic transformation and the introduction of cheaper advertising technologies, such as vinyl banners and plastic light boxes. Literature in architecture and urban studies indicates that this process resulted in the loss of an important cultural and aesthetic layer of the urban landscape [23, pp. 34–40]. In many post-socialist cities, context-sensitive and architecturally integrated forms of visual communication were replaced by fragmented and commercially dominant advertising systems.

In recent years, however, renewed interest in neon signage has emerged, with such elements increasingly recognised as part of urban cultural heritage and carriers of place identity. From the perspective of urban sustainability, this shift highlights the tension between economically driven visual transformation and the preservation of culturally embedded landscape elements.

The historical evolution of advertising demonstrates a broader transformation of urban visual culture – from architecturally integrated forms of communication towards increasingly commercialised and spatially dominant advertising systems. This process reflects wider socio-economic transformations affecting post-socialist cities and highlights the growing tension between commercial visibility and the preservation of cultural landscape values.

4.2. Historical Development of Signage and Advertising in Kielce

The economic development of Kielce accelerated following the opening of the railway line in the 1880s and the rapid expansion of the quarrying and lime industry associated with the exploitation of Devonian limestone deposits at Kadzielnia and Wietrznia. The growth of industrial, commercial, and service activities contributed to the increasing importance of the city

[24, pp. 11–18]. As commercial activity expanded, signs and other forms of visual identification became increasingly common in urban space. Painted signs on wooden boards and directly on building facades were commonly used, reflecting practices observed in many Polish cities of that period.

During the interwar period, Kielce followed broader national trends observed in cities such as Warsaw, Łódź, and Kraków, where signage design evolved in line with modern graphic design principles. Signs frequently included the owner’s name, reflecting contemporary commercial culture. Archival photographs from the historic centre also show bilingual signage (Russian and Polish), illustrating the socio-political context of the period (Figs. 3–6). Local workshops produced enamel plates and typographic signage consistent with interwar design trends.



Fig. 3. Shopfront of Karol Soczek’s Optical and Mechanical Workshop in Kielce – example of late 19th-century commercial signage integrated with the architectural composition of the facade [25]



Fig. 4. Bilingual sign of the Mutual Life Insurance Company “New York”, Kielce, Konstantego Street – example of multilingual commercial communication in the pre-independence urban landscape [26]



Fig. 5. Archival photograph of J. Kotowski's wine store – Kielce, Sienkiewicza Street. Advertisement painted directly on the gable wall of the building, illustrating early forms of large-scale facade advertising integrated into the streetscape [26]



Fig. 6. Signage of J. Kotowski's delicatessen after Poland regained independence (Kielce, Sienkiewicza/Duża Street), demonstrating the transformation of visual communication in the interwar commercial landscape [26]

In the 1960s and 1970s, Kielce participated in the nationwide process of urban “neonisation”. Approximately 200 neon signs were in operation in Kielce during the 1970s [27]. Many of the most prominent installations were located along Sienkiewicza Street, the city’s main commercial and representative thoroughfare. These installations served both informational and aesthetic functions, enhancing the attractiveness of urban space after dark and contributing to the city’s visual identity [21, pp. 7-10].

The character of Kielce’s neon signage (Figs. 7-8) corresponded to the broader typology of socialist-era neon design. Many of them were based on standardised designs produced by the “Reklama” enterprise, while others were locally designed, often combining functional clarity with expressive graphic forms. Studies on neon signage in Poland suggest that such realisations formed an important part of the visual culture of the period, characterised by simplified yet visually distinctive compositions [23, pp. 34-37; 27].

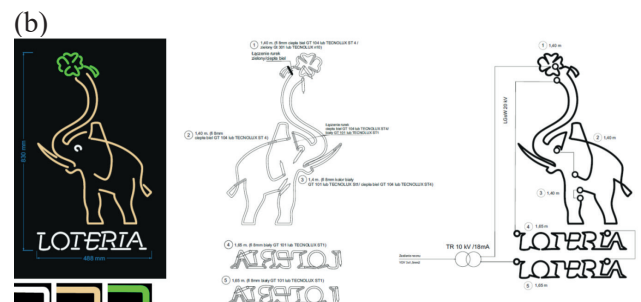


Fig. 7. Example of architecturally integrated neon signage characteristic of the socialist-period visual identity of Kielce – “Loteria” neon sign located on Sienkiewicza Street (a) and its design documentation (b) [26, 28]

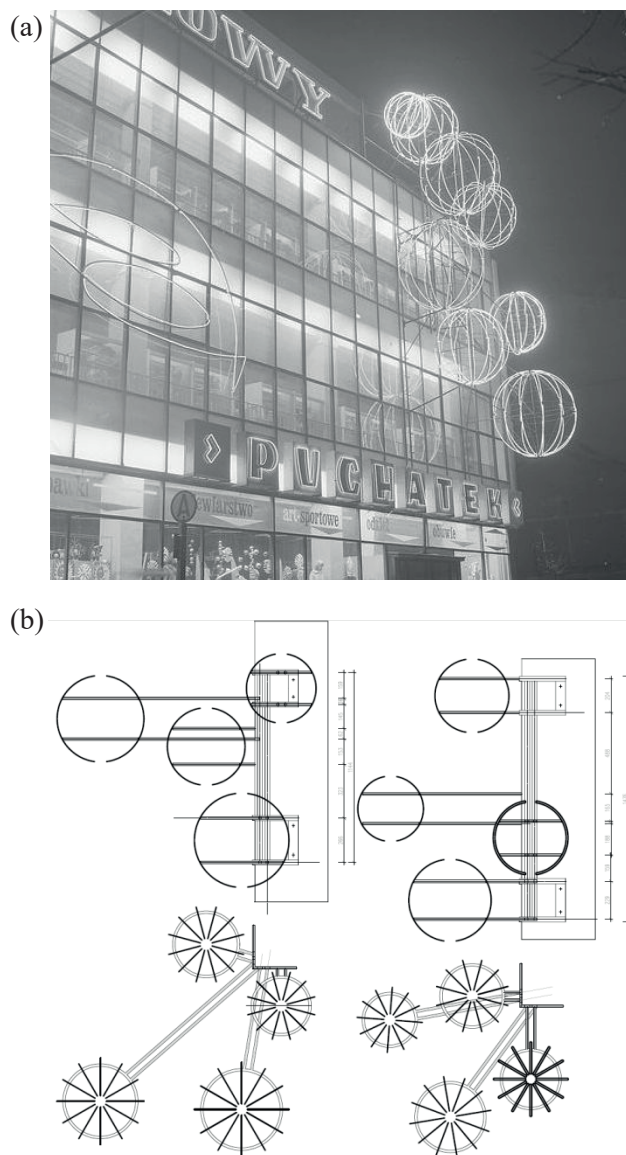


Fig. 8. “Puchatek” Department Store on Sienkiewicza Street – example of modernist commercial architecture integrated with spatial neon signage (a) and neon design documentation (b) [26, 28]

The economic transformation of the 1990s led to the dominance of low-cost advertising forms, such as vinyl banners, adhesive films, and plastic light boxes. During this period, many neon signs in Kielce – similarly to other Polish cities – were dismantled, deactivated, or fell into disrepair. These new advertising forms contributed to the fragmentation and visual degradation of the urban landscape, widely described in the literature as visual pollution [1].

The uncontrolled expansion of low-cost advertising media contributed to the progressive fragmentation of facade composition and the deterioration of visual coherence within the historic city centre.

These processes became one of the key premises for introducing landscape governance instruments aimed at restoring spatial order and protecting the visual identity of the city.

In the last decade, renewed interest in neon signage has emerged, with increasing recognition of its value as cultural heritage and an element of local identity. Recent studies indicate that historic neon signs are increasingly perceived not only as elements of twentieth-century design heritage but also as objects of collective memory and cultural tourism [18, pp. 46–49; 22]. In Kielce, such initiatives have been undertaken by local organisations, including the Society of Friends of Kielce, which has been involved in identifying, preserving, and promoting knowledge about historic neon signage.

This process reflects a broader shift towards integrating heritage preservation with sustainable urban landscape management. At the same time, preserving historic neon signs may contribute to reinforcing local identity and strengthening residents’ sense of place [5, pp. 45–66].

The combination of general and local perspectives demonstrates that the development of advertising in Kielce followed broader European and Polish trends while also exhibiting local specificity, particularly in the scale of neonisation, the character of signage, and its subsequent degradation.

The historical analysis indicates that earlier forms of advertising were generally more integrated with architectural composition and urban identity, whereas contemporary advertising systems increasingly contributed to visual fragmentation and spatial disorder. These observations provide the historical context for the comparative visual assessment presented in the following sections and justify the introduction of landscape governance instruments aimed at improving visual coherence and spatial order in the historic city centre.

5. LEGAL REGULATIONS ON ADVERTISING IN URBAN SPACE – THE CASE OF KIELCE

5.1. Landscape Regulations in Poland – The Landscape Resolution as a Tool for Urban Landscape Governance

The problem of excessive advertising in public space became particularly evident in Poland after the political transformation of the 1990s, when the rapid development of a market economy led to a significant increase in the number of advertising media in cities. The lack of coherent regulations regarding their

location, size, and form contributed to the emergence of what is described in the literature as advertising chaos or visual pollution [1]. This phenomenon resulted in the deterioration of public space aesthetics, reduced legibility of architecture, and degradation of the cultural landscape in many cities.

In response to the growing problem of visual disorder, the Polish legislator introduced the so-called Landscape Act (2015), amending the Spatial Planning and Development Act. This legislation enabled municipalities to adopt local regulations governing the placement of street furniture, fences, advertising boards, and advertising devices [29]. The new provisions made it possible to implement so-called landscape resolutions, which define rules and conditions for the placement of advertisements in public space, including permissible dimensions, forms of advertising media, quality standards for signage, and location restrictions.

The primary objective of landscape resolutions is to improve landscape quality, protect cultural and aesthetic values, and organise the visual structure of urban space. Such resolutions function as instruments of urban landscape governance, enabling municipalities to regulate visual quality, protect cultural landscapes, and restore spatial coherence within public space. These regulations allow for adapting advertising rules to the specific character of different urban areas by introducing landscape zones with differentiated requirements for historic, residential, commercial, or natural areas. This differentiated approach reflects the growing importance of context-sensitive landscape management in sustainable urban policy.

Studies on urban landscape management indicate that such regulatory frameworks can effectively reduce the negative effects of visual pollution and contribute to improving the aesthetics and legibility of urban space [10]. In urban studies literature, advertising is recognised as a key factor influencing spatial perception, and its excessive presence leads to landscape degradation and a decline in the quality of public space [19]. Therefore, advertising regulations are increasingly becoming a standard tool of urban policy in many European cities.

From the perspective of sustainable urban development, landscape resolutions can be understood as governance instruments that balance economic activity with the protection of cultural and visual environmental quality.

One example of such an approach is the city of Kielce, where a landscape resolution regulating the placement of advertisements has been implemented. The resolution introduces a division of the city into landscape zones with differentiated rules, representing a practical application of landscape governance at the local level.

5.2. The Landscape Resolution in Kielce

In Kielce, a landscape resolution was adopted to regulate the placement of advertising boards, advertising devices, signage, and elements of street furniture within the city.

The document introduces, among others:

- a division of the city into landscape zones,
- specific restrictions for advertising in areas of high cultural value,
- guidelines for signage design in historic areas,
- limitations on the size and form of advertising media.

Particular protection has been assigned to areas of high historical and urban value, including the city centre and representative public spaces. In these zones, stricter regulations regarding the size and form of signage were introduced in order to minimise the negative impact of advertising on the cultural landscape.

The introduction of advertising regulations in public space constitutes an important element of cultural landscape protection policy. Research indicates that limiting the number and scale of advertising media can significantly improve spatial legibility and enhance the perception of architectural values [30].

In the context of Kielce, the landscape resolution serves as a tool for organising the visual structure of the city, particularly in areas of high historical value, such as Sienkiewicz Street and the historic city centre.

The landscape resolution operationalises visual governance through the division of the city into four landscape zones (A–D) (Fig. 9), each characterised by different levels of advertising control depending on historical, functional, and landscape value [31]. These differences result from the varying cultural, spatial, and environmental characteristics of particular urban areas. The key regulatory principles for each zone are summarised in Table 2.

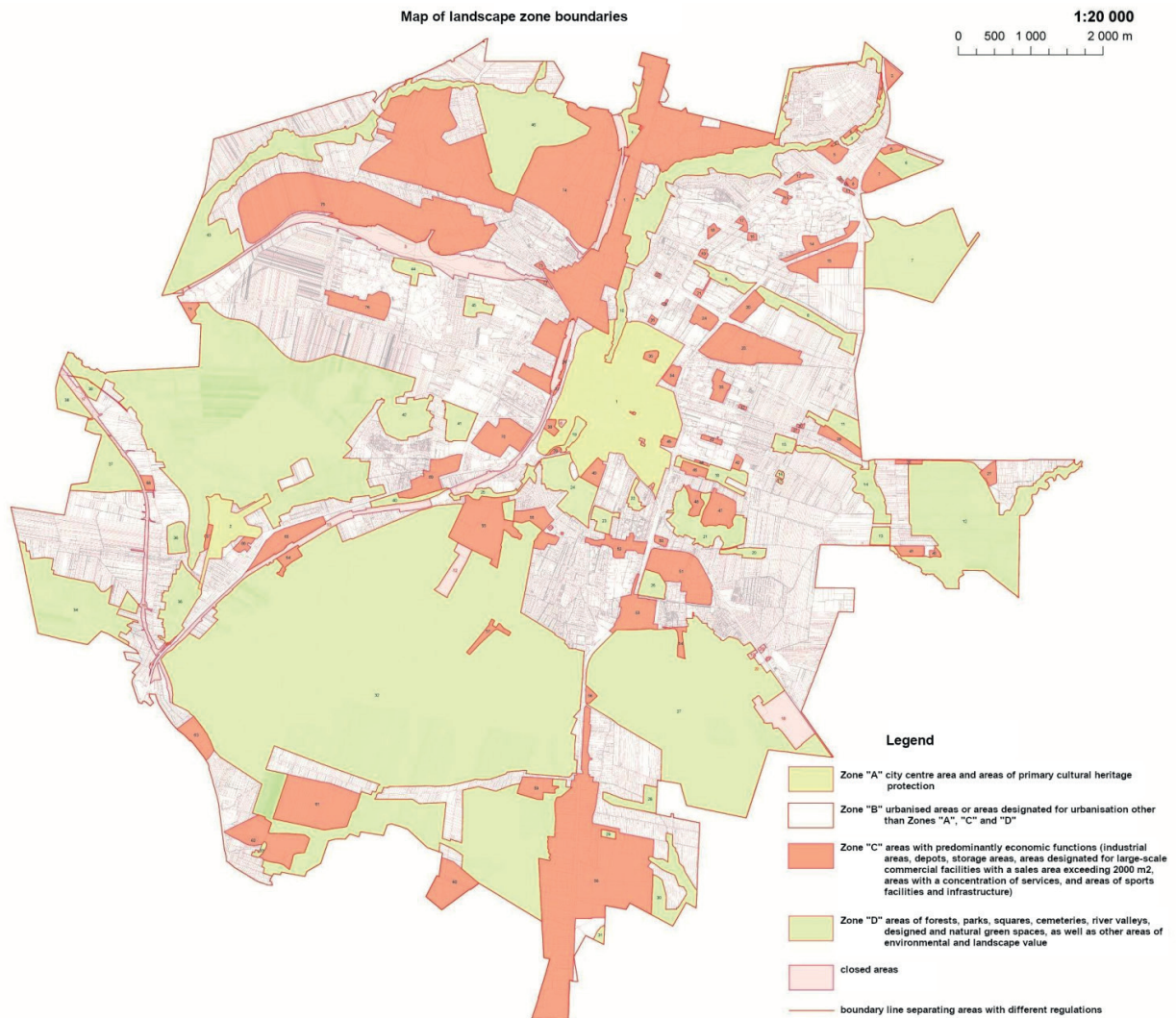


Fig. 9. Landscape zones (A–D) defined in the landscape resolution of Kielce, Poland [31]

Table 2. Landscape zones and advertising regulations in Kielce

Zone	Description	Key Regulations
Zone A – City Centre Area	Includes the historic city centre and areas of the highest cultural and architectural value. Subject to the most restrictive regulations to protect the historic urban fabric.	One sign per each commenced 30 m of facade; prohibition of covering architectural details (e.g., cornices, pilasters, window frames); strict control of form, size, and placement of signage.
Zone B – Areas of High Landscape Value	Includes areas with significant landscape value, such as urban green spaces and selected residential zones.	Maximum of two signs per each commenced 30 m of facade; regulations aim to balance economic activity with landscape protection.
Zone C – Remaining Urban Areas	Includes areas dominated by commercial, service, industrial, and sports functions.	Less restrictive regulations; greater flexibility in advertising placement; larger advertising media allowed, especially for commercial facilities (>2000 m ²).
Zone D – Environmentally Valuable Areas	Includes natural and landscape-sensitive areas such as forests, parks, river valleys, and cemeteries.	One sign per each commenced 30 m of facade; strict limitations to prevent visual dominance of advertising in natural landscapes.
General Regulations (All Zones)	Applies to all zones regardless of classification.	Prohibition of signage above ground floor level (except public buildings); restrictions on window coverings and adhesive graphics; requirement to maintain transparency of ground floors; regulation of fences and street furniture.

The zoning system reflects a hierarchical approach to visual landscape protection, with the strictest regulations applied to historically and visually sensitive urban areas. The differentiation of regulations across landscape zones directly influences the visual structure of urban space, which is reflected in observable changes in the advertising landscape.

5.3. Impact of the Landscape Resolution on the Urban Advertising Landscape

The introduction of the landscape resolution in Kielce represents a significant step towards organising the visual structure of the city and reducing advertising chaos. The regulations primarily aim to improve public space aesthetics, protect the cultural landscape, and enhance architectural legibility by limiting the number and size of advertising media.

One of the most notable effects has been the gradual removal of large-format advertising banners from building facades, particularly in the city centre. Before the implementation of regulations, banners often covered substantial parts of facades, obscuring architectural details such as cornices, window frames, and decorative elements. The new regulations contributed to revealing historic facades and improving architectural readability.

Another observable change is the gradual adaptation of signage to new requirements regarding size, location, and aesthetics. In many cases, large-scale signage has been replaced with smaller, more organised forms of visual identification. This has reduced visual clutter and improved spatial order along commercial streets. These transformations are particularly visible in facade composition, architectural readability, and the reduction of advertising dominance, as confirmed by the comparative visual assessment presented in the Results section.

Restrictions on window advertising have also contributed to increased transparency of ground floors and improved visual interaction between indoor commercial spaces and public space. This has important implications for urban quality, as transparent ground floors enhance pedestrian experience and perceived safety.

These changes can also be interpreted within the framework of sustainable urban design, where visual quality and human-scale perception are key components of livable public spaces.

It should be noted, however, that the implementation of the landscape resolution is a long-term process

requiring both administrative action and adaptation by property owners and businesses. In many cases, replacing existing signage involves additional costs, which is why transition periods are typically included in such regulations.

The landscape resolution can therefore be interpreted as an element of spatial policy aimed at improving urban landscape quality and reducing visual pollution. In the long term, such regulations may contribute to increased attractiveness of public spaces, improved aesthetics of the city centre, and strengthening of urban visual identity.

At the same time, the effectiveness of such regulations depends largely on consistent enforcement and cooperation between local authorities, business owners, and residents. Without proper supervision and educational efforts, legal regulations may not achieve the intended improvements in urban landscape quality.

The case of Kielce demonstrates how legal instruments can be used in urban landscape management to reduce advertising chaos. The differentiation of rules across landscape zones allows for context-sensitive regulation, contributing to improved spatial quality, visual coherence, and architectural legibility within the historic city centre.

The observed transformations demonstrate that landscape governance instruments can significantly influence the visual structure of historic urban environments. The spatial effects of these regulations are further examined through comparative facade analysis presented in the following section.

6. RESULTS

6.1. Spatial Structure of Advertising in the City Centre

The historic centre of Kielce is characterised by a high concentration of commercial and service functions, which translates into a high density of advertising media, including signage, advertising boards, banners, and other forms of visual communication. The greatest concentration of advertisements occurs along Henryk Sienkiewicz Street – the main pedestrian and commercial axis of the city.

Before the introduction of landscape regulations, this space exhibited a high diversity of advertising forms, including facade-mounted signage, vinyl banners, large-format advertisements, illuminated advertisements, and neon signs. The lack of unified design standards and the accumulation of visually competing elements contributed to the emergence of

visual chaos, reducing the legibility of architectural composition and negatively affecting the perception of public space [1].

The spatial structure of advertising was characterised by fragmented visual communication systems, inconsistent colour schemes, excessive window advertising, and the frequent use of large-format banners. In many cases, advertising elements dominated over architectural composition, particularly within ground-floor zones of commercial buildings.

6.2. Large-Format and Temporary Advertising

An important component of the advertising landscape consisted of large-format advertisements mounted on scaffolding during building renovations. These forms of advertising became widespread in Poland after the 1990s alongside the development of the advertising market and often utilised protective mesh as a medium for commercial communication.

This phenomenon is widely observed in many European cities and is often economically justified, as advertising revenues may support renovation works. However, the literature emphasises that large-scale advertisements placed on historic buildings can significantly reduce architectural readability and disrupt the perception of urban space [3].

In Kielce, large-format banners frequently covered substantial parts of facades, obscuring architectural details and visually transforming buildings into

temporary advertising surfaces. Such practices contributed to increased visual intensity and reduced the coherence of the historic streetscape.

6.3. Examples of Spatial Problems

One of the most recognisable examples of excessive advertising concentration in Kielce was the building located at 76 Sienkiewicza Street (Fig. 10), which in 2014 was ranked among the ugliest buildings in Poland in an online poll. The negative perception of this building was largely associated with the excessive number and scale of advertising boards and banners placed on the facade.

This example illustrates the mechanism of advertising chaos, in which individual commercial entities install separate advertising media without reference to architectural composition or urban context. As a result, the facade loses spatial coherence and architectural readability, while visual attention becomes dominated by commercial communication.

6.4. Comparative Visual Assessment of Facade Transformations

To assess the impact of the landscape resolution on the advertising landscape of the city centre, a comparative visual assessment was conducted for selected building facades located along Sienkiewicz Street. Five case studies were analysed based on archival and contemporary photographic documentation. Pre-regulation images were obtained



Fig. 10. Example illustrating the mechanism of advertising chaos – Kielce, 76 Sienkiewicza Street; upper floors fully covered by a large-format banner (a) [32], excessive concentration of advertisements at ground level (b) [33]

from the authors' archives and publicly available sources, while post-regulation conditions were documented by the authors.

The comparison of visual materials revealed significant changes in the number, scale, form, and location of advertising media. Before the implementation of regulations, building facades were characterised by a high density of signage and the presence of large-scale advertisements, often installed without regard for architectural composition. In many cases, advertising elements obscured architectural details and disrupted facade legibility.

Following the implementation of the landscape resolution, a substantial reduction in advertising intensity and improved integration of signage with architectural structure were observed. Advertising media became largely limited to ground-floor zones, while architectural divisions and decorative elements regained visual prominence.

The results of the comparative visual assessment are presented in Table 3. The analysis demonstrates changes in advertising density, architectural visibility, visual coherence, window transparency, and visual dominance before and after the implementation of the landscape resolution.

The comparative visual assessment demonstrates a consistent reduction in advertising density and a simultaneous increase in architectural visibility, visual

coherence, and facade readability across all analysed case studies. The most significant transformations were observed in buildings previously characterised by large-format advertising and fragmented visual communication systems (Cases 2 and 3). The results indicate a gradual shift from advertising-dominated facades towards compositions in which architecture regains visual dominance within the streetscape.

The observed changes also demonstrate a gradual reduction of visual clutter and an improvement in spatial order. At the same time, the degree of adaptation varies between buildings, reflecting the ongoing and uneven implementation of the landscape resolution.

6.5. Case Studies

Case 1 – Sienkiewicza 19

The facade was completely cleared of advertising elements (Fig. 11). Before the implementation of the landscape resolution, the ground floor was dominated by a continuous lightbox sign and window advertisements that obscured architectural details and disrupted the facade composition. Following the removal of these elements, the architectural divisions and decorative details became fully visible, restoring the architectural dominance of the building within the streetscape.

Table 3. Comparative visual assessment of facade transformations before and after implementation of the landscape resolution

Case Study	Advertising Density	Architectural Visibility	Visual Coherence	Ground-Floor Transparency	Visual Dominance
Case 1 – Before	2	2	2	2	1
Case 1 – After	5	5	5	5	5
Case 2 – Before	1	2	1	1	1
Case 2 – After	5	4	4	4	4
Case 3 – Before	1	1	1	2	1
Case 3 – After	4	4	4	4	4
Case 4 – Before	1	3	2	3	2
Case 4 – After	5	5	5	5	5
Case 5 – Before	2	2	1	2	1
Case 5 – After	4	5	5	5	5

Note: Assessment based on the five-point ordinal scale presented in Table 1. For all criteria, higher scores represent more favourable visual conditions. For Advertising Density, higher values indicate a lower concentration of advertising elements, whereas for the remaining criteria higher values indicate greater architectural visibility, visual coherence, window transparency, and the predominance of architecture over advertising.



Fig. 11. Comparison of the facade at 19 Sienkiewicza Street before (a) [Source: J. Juruś] and after (b) the implementation of the landscape resolution [Source: J. Lech]

Case 2 – Sienkiewicza 36

The most significant change involved a substantial reduction and standardisation of advertising elements (Fig. 12). Prior to regulation, the facade was characterised by numerous signs, extensive window advertising, and inconsistent colour schemes, resulting in visual fragmentation. Following the implementation of the landscape resolution, advertising was reduced and visually unified, improving the transparency of the ground-floor zone and the readability of the facade.

Case 3 – Sienkiewicza 33

This case represents one of the most substantial transformations among the analysed buildings (Fig. 13). Before regulation, the facade was visually dominated by large-format vertical and horizontal advertisements that almost completely obscured the architectural composition. Following the implementation of the landscape resolution, large-format banners were removed, leaving only ground-floor signage. As a result, the building regained architectural readability and an appropriate visual hierarchy within the streetscape.

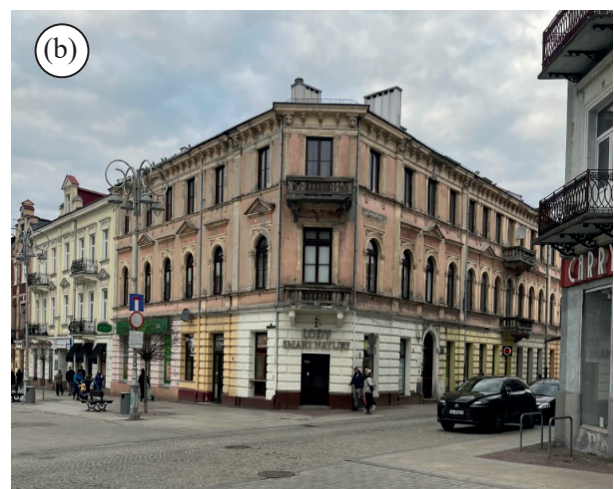


Fig. 12. Comparison of the facade at 36 Sienkiewicza Street before (a) [Source: J. Juruś] and after (b) the implementation of the landscape resolution [Source: J. Lech]



Fig. 13. Comparison of the facade at 33 Sienkiewicza Street before (a) [34] and after (b) the implementation of the landscape resolution [Source: J. Lech]

Case 4 – Sienkiewicza 11

This case illustrates the relationship between advertising reduction and facade revitalisation (Fig. 14). In addition to the removal of advertising elements, the building underwent renovation, including improvements to its colour scheme and architectural detailing. These interventions enhanced visual coherence and restored the representative character of the facade.

Case 5 – Sienkiewicza 17

This example illustrates the transition from visually aggressive commercial advertising to forms of visual communication more closely integrated with the architectural composition (Fig. 15). Before regulation, the facade contained banners, signage, and numerous window stickers arranged without compositional coherence. Following the removal of temporary advertising elements and the reorganisation of the remaining signage, both facade transparency and architectural visibility were substantially improved.



Fig. 14. Comparison of the facade at 11 Sienkiewicza Street before (a) [35] and after (b) the implementation of the landscape resolution [Source: J. Lech]



Fig. 15. Comparison of the facade at 17 Sienkiewicza Street before (a) [36] and after (b) the implementation of the landscape resolution [Source: J. Lech]

The presented case studies demonstrate that all analysed buildings experienced an improvement in the visual quality of their facades, although the magnitude of change varied. The greatest transformations were observed in buildings previously dominated by large-format advertisements and highly concentrated signage systems. Buildings with lower initial advertising intensity underwent more moderate changes; nevertheless, these also resulted in improved architectural readability and greater visual coherence.

6.6. Summary of Results

The comparative analysis demonstrates that the implementation of the landscape resolution in Kielce resulted in a clear improvement in the visual quality of the historic city centre. All analysed case studies showed a reduction in advertising intensity and an improvement in architectural readability, although the extent of change depended on the initial level of advertising saturation.

The greatest improvements were observed in buildings previously dominated by large-format advertisements and highly concentrated signage systems. In these cases, the removal of advertising restored the architectural composition, increased visual coherence, and improved the transparency of the ground-floor zone. Buildings with lower initial advertising intensity exhibited more moderate changes, yet they also showed a noticeable improvement in overall visual quality.

The findings indicate that the implementation of landscape regulations contributed to a redefinition of the visual hierarchy of the streetscape, shifting visual attention from commercial communication towards architectural composition. In several cases, compliance with the new regulations also acted as

a catalyst for broader renovation works and aesthetic improvements to building facades.

At the same time, the implementation process remains gradual and uneven, reflecting different levels of adaptation among property owners and commercial entities.

Overall, the findings confirm that landscape governance instruments can serve as effective tools for reducing visual pollution and improving urban landscape quality at both the street scale and the level of individual architectural objects.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Outdoor advertising constitutes an important component of the contemporary urban landscape, fulfilling informational, economic, and identity-related functions within public space. At the same time, the findings of this study demonstrate that excessive advertising intensity significantly affects the visual structure and perceptual quality of historic urban environments. The case of Kielce confirms that the rapid expansion of outdoor advertising following the post-socialist transformation, combined with the absence of effective regulatory instruments, resulted in substantial visual disorder, reduced architectural readability, and fragmentation of facade composition within the historic city centre.

The historical analysis further indicates that earlier forms of visual communication, particularly traditional signage and neon signs, were generally more closely integrated with architectural composition and urban identity than contemporary advertising systems. Their gradual replacement by low-cost, large-format, and visually dominant advertising media contributed to the deterioration of the historic streetscape and the weakening of the visual role of architecture.

The comparative visual assessment demonstrated that the implementation of the landscape resolution in Kielce in 2022 contributed to a noticeable reduction in advertising density, improved facade transparency, enhanced architectural visibility, and increased visual coherence within public space. The results indicate that landscape governance instruments can effectively restore the visual hierarchy of historic streets by shifting perceptual emphasis from commercial communication towards architectural composition.

These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that excessive outdoor advertising is one of the major contributors to visual pollution in urban environments and significantly reduces architectural legibility and spatial coherence [1, 10]. Similar conclusions have been reported in studies emphasising that limiting the scale and visual dominance of advertising improves the quality and readability of historic urban landscapes.

The results also support previous research highlighting the importance of landscape governance and regulatory planning instruments in protecting cultural heritage and improving the quality of public space [6, 14, 30]. While many existing studies focus primarily on large metropolitan areas, the present research demonstrates that comparable improvements can also be achieved in medium-sized post-socialist cities through locally adapted landscape regulations. This confirms that effective landscape governance is not limited to metropolitan contexts but can successfully contribute to the sustainable management of historic urban environments regardless of city size.

The present study extends previous research by combining a long-term historical perspective with a comparative visual assessment of facade transformations following the implementation of local landscape regulations. This integrated methodological approach provides empirical evidence of the relationship between landscape governance, architectural visibility, and visual quality, thereby contributing to the growing body of research on sustainable urban landscape management.

The study also demonstrates that effective landscape governance is not limited to large metropolitan areas. The case of Kielce shows that medium-sized cities can successfully implement regulatory instruments capable of producing measurable improvements in the visual quality of historic urban environments. These findings support the growing recognition of visual quality, architectural legibility, and spatial coherence as important components of sustainable urban development and human-centred public space design.

At the same time, the effectiveness of landscape governance depends not only on the adoption of legal regulations but also on their consistent enforcement, long-term spatial policy, and cooperation between local authorities, property owners, business operators, designers, and residents. The findings also confirm that advertising does not necessarily degrade urban space. When appropriately designed and integrated with its architectural and historical context, signage may contribute positively to place identity and the visual character of commercial streets.

This study contributes to the literature on urban landscape governance by integrating historical analysis, comparative visual assessment, and spatial interpretation of facade transformations within a medium-sized post-socialist city. The findings provide empirical evidence that local regulatory frameworks can significantly improve visual coherence and architectural visibility in historic urban environments.

The research is limited by its focus on a single case study and the use of qualitative and semi-quantitative visual assessment methods, which may involve a degree of interpretative subjectivity. Future research should therefore combine qualitative visual assessment with quantitative methods, including GIS-based visibility analysis, image segmentation techniques, eye-tracking studies, and comparative analyses involving multiple cities, to provide a broader understanding of the effectiveness of landscape governance instruments in reducing visual pollution and improving the quality of historic urban environments.

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