

Article

Revitalization of Public Spaces in Cittaslow Towns: Recent Urban Redevelopment in Central Europe

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Abstract: Revitalization of cities varies depending on the scale of a city, type of challenges, and the socio-environmental context in each case. While revitalization projects carried out in globally known cities are well described, there is still a gap in characterizing revitalization processes that aim to improve quality of life in smaller units like medium-sized towns. This paper fills this gap by the insight from 82 revitalization projects implemented in 14 towns of Warmia and Mazury region (Poland) which are associated in the Cittaslow movement. The study combines a quantitative assessment of statistical data describing these projects with their qualitative evaluation based on interviews with local experts. The results of conducted analyses show that socio-economic development plays a major role as, despite projects which directly refer to the social domain, social elements were found also in projects initially categorized as those targeted to architectural and spatial domains. On the other hand, the authors observed that environmental and ecological as well as cultural issues are treated unevenly or marginally in projects compared to social ones. Interviews with experts show that the least importance was assigned to cultural and historical domain. The obtained results might constitute important knowledge to understand the background of current revitalization processes outside of global metropolises to improve future mechanisms supporting urban renewal.

Keywords: public spaces; revitalization; Cittaslow; quality of life; liveability



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1. Introduction

The contemporary urban development process should focus not on “developing more”, but on “developing better”. However, to complex problems related to urban development planning, it is difficult to find solutions, which are correct or false, or answers on how the idealized planning should function [1]. Experience of recent decades in urbanization processes [2] shows that ignoring the issue of quality of urban development may influence many aspects of life like poverty [3], crime [4], public health [5], socialization [6], and many others. That leads to demographic changes which are caused by migrations [7] and as a result influence the development of unsustainable urban forms like low-density urban sprawl in suburban zones [8]. Of course, the problem of urban sprawl mainly affects large cities. However, the effects of this process may affect small towns located in areas near large agglomerations [9]. On the other hand, in small towns in the provinces, one can observe the phenomenon of migration of people to large cities. In order to reverse these ineffective processes, urban renewal became a direction of development policies in many municipalities [10]. In its original meaning, renewal is a process that is intended

to improve the condition of the urban environment by introducing direct changes to the housing structure of cities and poor neighborhoods. Improvement of living conditions and better aesthetics of the surroundings are to change the way residents think about space and care for the place where they live [11,12].

Urban regeneration is a process of transforming the economic and social conditions of a place. It requires action at the level of introducing a coordinated small town development policy and cooperation between the public and private sectors, as well as involving the local community in these activities. Regeneration refers to interventions and changes to maximize the outcomes of increasing social, cultural, environmental, and economic outcomes [13].

City revitalization in this context is defined as a response to the stimuli arising from the forces of disinvestment and deterioration (i.e., decline), including interracial demographic shifts, metropolitan suburbanization, intraregional economic competition, and economic globalization [14]. The revitalization of small towns is a process aimed at “revitalizing” them, which takes into account changes in space and the environment concerning the improvement of socio-economic conditions. Revitalization affects especially poor, marginalized places and places in need of intervention [15].

In recent years there is an increasing interest in the role of communities in urban revitalization. The concept of community action and its spatial dimension is understood as the action of a collective of individuals toward a common goal of improvement of the living conditions within their residence or environments [16]. However, there is no one general approach to revitalize a city or town, as every community has got its characteristics and different factors should be taken into account, so the practices of community actions are difficult to use as replicable models [16].

Revitalization projects all around the world differ as other issues have to be solved among cities, they vary according to natural conditions, available financial sources, and kinds of human activity that should be stimulated [15,17–24]. Due to their scale, some mega-projects like Big Dig from Boston (MA, USA) [25], Green Carpet from Maastricht (Netherlands) [26], waterfront regeneration in Malmö (Sweden) [27], Huangpu river revitalization in Shanghai (China) [28] or High Line in New York (NY, USA) are well known [29]. However, not every revitalization project is so spectacular, which is in strong relationship with the investment activity of each city [30]. Smaller towns for example may implement different strategies that can be connected also with smaller public spaces in order to create an opportunity for a cozy atmosphere, friendly environment to slow down and step out from very dynamic daily routine. One of the best-known organizations gathering such towns is the Cittaslow network.

The Cittaslow movement was created in 1999 and its goal is to resist globalization and homogenization of towns by promoting cultural diversity, protecting the environment, promoting traditional local products, and striving to improve quality of life. Towns that want to become a member of the network need to have a population under 50,000 citizens (according to European standards classified as medium-sized town [31]) as well as support and implement the goals of Cittaslow [32]. Local policy assessments rely on six main criteria: environmental policies, the safeguarding of autochthonous production, infrastructure, technologies and facilities for urban quality, hospitality, and awareness of the aims, procedures, and programs of the Cittaslow initiative [33]. In order to guarantee high quality of life, public spaces in towns associated in Cittaslow are also being revitalized by local authorities, however, they require different approaches in revitalization projects to maintain their calm character [34–40].

According to information supported by the Cittaslow network, an example coordinated revitalization of Cittaslow towns was implemented in Poland in the mid-2010s [41]. As with every public investment, the revitalization of public spaces in Cittaslow towns depends on financial feasibility. The Regional Operational Programme of the Voivodeship of Warmia and Mazury 2014–2020 [42], supported by the European Union, among others, from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and European Social Fund

(ESF), creates such financial framework for local and regional authorities. The region of Warmia and Mazury plays a key role in the Polish Cittaslow network [43–47], as 23 out of 32 associated towns are located in this voivodeship. To manage public investments in that area in an integrated approach, the Supra-Local Revitalization Program of the Network of Cittaslow Cities for 2014–2020 (SLRP) was adopted in 2015 [48,49]. Currently, once the time frame is almost finished it is possible to evaluate how Cittaslow municipalities used this opportunity and what are the findings for future revitalization of public spaces in this specific group of municipalities.

The research aimed to define the role of the revitalization program in transforming public spaces in Cittaslow towns in the region of Warmia and Mazury (Poland). The assessment of the sustainable development of the analyzed towns was of great importance in the research and took into account not only the economic and social aspects but also (which is very important in the 21st century) the ecological and environmental aspects. The ratio of the number of all revitalization projects to projects related to public spaces and architecture (including spaces and architecture of historical importance) was determined. The ratio of the revitalized area was also determined in relation to the groups of revitalization projects (S-space and SA-space and architecture) adopted for the research purposes. The results of an expert interview on the purposefulness and perception of the revitalized space were analyzed (also in terms of addressing the issue of environmental protection and ecology).

The conducted analyzes were to answer the main questions:

- Did the membership in the Cittaslow town network and the inclusion of towns in the Supra-Local Revitalization Program (SLRP) increase the attractiveness of towns?
- To what extent are the projects implemented under the SLRP directly related to the main goal of Cittaslow towns, i.e., sustainable development and respect for identity?
- What was the main motivation for the revitalization of public spaces?
- What is the perception of changes in urban space after revitalization?

Additionally, the authors tried to find an answer to the supplementary question:

- Is the participation of towns in SLRP related to the increase in the number of projects based on pro-environmental, ecological, and cultural development, as well as their quality and effectiveness?

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 includes literature review; Section 3 describes methods that were applied in the research and the materials that were used to perform the analyses; Section 4 contains results of the research presented in diagrams; discussion and conclusions of the obtained results are presented in Sections 5 and 6.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Revitalization of Small Towns and the Livability Concept

Revitalization involves the process of repairing public and private spaces that are in some way neglected in terms of spatial and functional, but also aesthetic and social. Physical space where people can assemble—libraries, schools, playgrounds, parks, public spaces, as well as commercial establishments create social infrastructure and facilitate sociality [50,51]. Examples can be found in which public art intervention has attempted to generate inclusion [52]. A revitalization is an important tool for the socio-economic development of urban structures [53,54], in this case, small towns. It manifests itself in undertaking initiatives in the field of renovation of facilities or areas that require immediate intervention or immediate repair tasks. A comprehensive approach is important in this case. Often, as a result of revitalization, the function and purpose of such objects changes, which often allows for economic, social, or cultural effects, while maintaining the identity of the place to a significant extent, sometimes by signaling the original meaning, or the historical sense.

Historic centers of small towns are often objects of revitalization. In comparison to other parts of an urban area, they require transformations leading to a better adjustment of historical structure to new functional uses [55,56]. Revitalization projects in small towns

often focus also on improvements in mobility [57–59], or opportunities for cycling [60–63]. Terms livability and sustainability are used as guiding principles of revitalization processes [64,65], as they represent concepts expressing the quality of life and quality of the urban environment [66,67]. To improve the environmental quality and human well-being, policies of revitalization projects give attention to the revitalization of urban green infrastructure, and public green spaces [68,69].

Recent trends in revitalization policies take into account the need to apply nature-based solutions [70–78], as critical components of sustainability transitions [71], climate change mitigation, and adaptation strategies [79–84], important also for small municipalities [85–90]. The benefits of nature-based solutions are still not recognized enough in urban planning policies of cities [74]. There are still gaps and barriers in the impact assessments of nature-based solutions, however, it would be an essential part of promoting this concept and approach [70]. For the implementation of climate change adaptation strategies, multilevel coordination between cities and higher levels of government is required and insufficient responses erode the basis of sustainable development [80]. In the case of small municipalities, the local economic benefits are usually on top of the agenda and climate adaptation provisions become secondary [85]. Lack of priority, limited policy direction, and perceptions of climate change are barriers in implementing adaptation into local plans in small municipalities [87].

As a response to the current social and environmental issues, principles of circular economies are advocated, conceptualizing applications for cities [91–94] as in transitioning to a circular economy the role of the built, and particularly the urban environment, is crucial [93]. Core aspects include issues of energy, recycling resources, but at a local level, the key strategy promoted is waste management [95,96]. Recycling urban space and transformation of unused and dysfunctional built-up structures belong to the concepts of circularity [97,98].

Many efforts of revitalization projects addressing the development of cities from economic, social, and cultural points of view are oriented towards tourism, cultural and social activities [99–103]. Small towns need to adopt substantively different cultural strategies [102] and culture and leisure are often focal points both to local entrepreneurship and to local governments [103]. Small towns may attract tourism and experience economy, due to the beauty of their natural or constructed environment, or their history [102]. The role of citizen participation and activism in community development and revitalization and creative urban revitalization is essential [104]. Non-governmental organizations create often new stimuli for cultural development [105] and in revitalization planning and financing policies, participation becomes important [106].

2.2. *The Role of the Revitalization Process in the Renewal of Small Towns in Warmia and Mazury*

In the Revitalization Act of 9th of October 2015 [107], the issue of “revitalization” covers activities, both comprehensive and integrated, and aimed at leading cities and towns out of the state of crisis. These are also construction and technology investments on a small scale, such as minor repairs. On the other hand, from the administrative point of view, revitalization includes interventions initiated by the local government in neglected, unwanted, forgotten areas, but suitable for broadly understood renewal. With regard to small towns in the region of Warmia and Mazury, it should be noted that the renewal applies to areas with high unemployment, as well as marginalized areas, i.e., those located outside a large agglomeration. In the latter reference, one can speak of the so-called hinterland, i.e., in the spatial and social sense, located more than 50 km from large agglomerations [108]. Revitalization in small towns should also take into account the degree of diversification in the income of residents, by preparing places (e.g., flats) also for the less wealthy part of the the society. Another issue is the process of depopulation (especially the flight of young people to agglomerations) and the aging of the society. It is especially noticed in the case of towns in Warmia and Mazury, therefore all activities and treatments in the field of revitalization should take into account these demographic

conditions. In terms of space, a sufficient number of places and facilities for health and care should be created. The issues of social development in relation to revitalization in Warmia and Mazury were emphasized in the Regional Operational Program of the Voivodeship of Warmia and Mazury 2014–2020 [42], as well as in other EU documents related to the 2014–2020 financial perspective. As we read in the Supra-Local Revitalization Program 2015 (SLRP) [48], “the revitalization process contributes to the protection of cultural heritage and the increase of local and regional awareness of the inhabitants, which is particularly important in the context of European integration. Therefore, the involvement of the local community, non-governmental organizations, entrepreneurs, and other stakeholders of social dialogue in the creation and implementation of the revitalization program has a chance to positively affect the increase in civic activity, engaging residents in the social life of towns, as well as in cooperation with public administration and business”.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Assumptions of the Supralocal Revitalization Program

The SLRP for the towns of Cittaslow in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship was created to respond to economic, social, cultural, and demographic transformations and changes.

The program emphasizes more effective use of the existing possibilities related to financing individual regeneration activities. Combining investments and projects into integrated undertakings is intended to improve the situation in small towns of Warmia and Mazury selected for the projects. The complexity of activities in the selected area should lead to permanent changes in the quality and functionality of the area, which should contribute to sustainable development on various scales, from local to regional [48].

The SLRP is a long-term operational program, subordinate to the town's development strategy, adopted and coordinated by a local government unit. It is implemented according to a specific schedule and financed from available sources. The planned undertakings will be financed from various sources (ERDF, ESF, own funds). The scope of projects is also possible to be financed under the Regional Operational Program of the Voivodeship of Warmia and Mazury 2014–2020 [42,48]. Revitalization of selected small towns belonging to the Cittaslow association in the region of Warmia and Mazury is planned as activities within Integrated Investment Projects. An Integrated Investment includes at least two projects related to a selected topic, which constitute a common goal. The selection of projects, their assumptions, goals, and the manner of implementation are the tasks of the regeneration working groups established in each town of the supralocal program. The organization implementing the SLRP of Cittaslow towns is the Association of “Polish Cittaslow Cities”.

3.2. Research Assumptions

SLRP for selected towns of Cittaslow from the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship was established in 2015 and fourteen towns from the region joined it. A revitalization plan was developed for these towns, including objectives of individual projects, and then their implementation began in the following years. After 5 years, the effects of some activities can be seen, some projects have been abandoned, and others are still being implemented. In 2019, a new SLRP was developed, this time for 19 towns, including five new ones. This program has introduced changes compared to the 2015 program and has selected key priority projects. In this study, the authors included only 14 towns that participated in the first version of the revitalization program, due to the implementation of their projects. The projects in the new program and for new towns are at the planning stage.

3.3. The Study Area

Fourteen of all towns operating in the Polish Cittaslow Cities Association were selected for the study, which joined the SLRP in 2015. Fourteen towns were intentionally selected for the research, as these towns are included in the SLRP and implement regeneration projects under the program.

These are: Barczewo, Biskupiec, Bisztynek, Dobre Miasto, Gołdap, Górowo Iławeckie, Lidzbark Warmiński, Lubawa, Nidzica, Nowe Miasto Lubawskie, Olsztynek, Pasym, Reszel, Ryn. They are located in north-eastern Poland in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship (Figure 1).

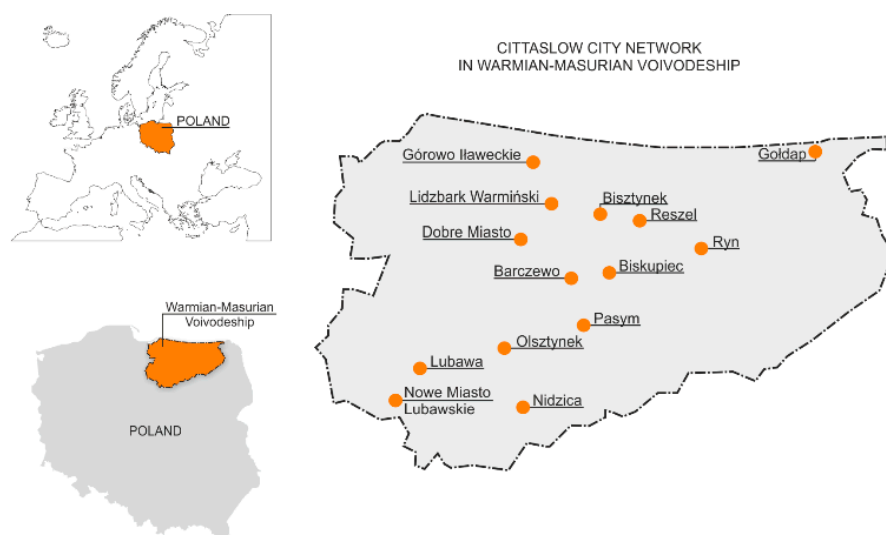


Figure 1. Location of Poland, Warmia and Mazury Voivodeship and selected Cittaslow Towns.

The smallest of the fourteen analyzed towns in terms of a number of inhabitants is Bisztynek (2437 inhabitants), while the largest is Lidzbark Warmiński (15,877), Table 1.

Table 1. The number of inhabitants in the analyzed 14 Cittaslow towns.

Town	Number of Inhabitants ¹
Barczewo	7290
Biskupiec	10,582
Bisztynek	2437
Dobre Miasto	10,741
Gołdap	13,593
Górowo Iławeckie	4021
Lidzbark Warmiński	15,877
Lubawa	10,269
Nidzica	14,166
Nowe Miasto Lubawskie	10,977
Olsztynek	7669
Pasym	2561
Reszel	4667
Ryn	2899

¹ Own elaboration based on data of the Central Statistical Office of Poland as of 2015.

3.4. Research Stages and Methods

The research was divided into five stages. In the first, the literature on the subject as well as monographic and cartographic documents, as well as strategic documents concerning the towns of Cittaslow, were studied. In the second stage, the degree of urban space development in relation to the revitalized space was analyzed. In the third stage, projects were selected according to the adopted criteria. In the fourth, the degree of development of public space was assessed concerning the projects related to space, and to architecture and space. The fifth stage concerned the evaluation of projects by a group of experts. The conducted research covers the period from the beginning of 2015 to December 2020. An environmental interview with experts was conducted in the second half of 2020.

3.4.1. Stage I. Analysis of Materials and Documents Related to Selected Towns

The analysis concerned strategic and planning materials and documents, including Strategies for the Development of Towns and Communes, Study of the Conditions and Directions of Spatial Development, Local Spatial Development Plans, current and previous (before 2015), Local Development Plans of Cities and Communes, Local Urban Revitalization Plans (before 2015) as well as Social and Economic Strategy of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship until 2015 [109], and Regional Operational Program of the Voivodeship of Warmia and Mazury 2014–2020 [42].

3.4.2. Stage II. Analysis of the Revitalized Area

At this stage, the degree of revitalization was determined in relation to the total area of towns and the revitalized area, as well as the number of town residents and the number of residents from the revitalized area. As it results from the SLRP, towns were guided by the following regulations, establishing that the area of revitalization is “all or part of a degraded area, characterized by a particular concentration of negative phenomena, . . . is an area of significant importance for local development, . . . cannot cover areas larger than 20% of the commune and may not be inhabited by more than 30% of the commune inhabitants” [48].

Due to the fact that the research covered only towns, without the entire commune area, the authors developed a revitalization unit (RU), which refers to the town area and the number of town inhabitants. It was also created to compare the degree of spatial development in the analyzed towns.

RU refers to a number that express the impact of the program on the town space, according to:

$$RU_i = \left(\frac{RA}{TA} \right)_i \times \left(\frac{IRA}{ITA} \right)_i \quad (1)$$

Then, the average of revitalization units was calculated according to the formula:

$$\overline{RU} = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \left(\frac{RA}{TA} \right)_i \times \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n \left(\frac{IRA}{ITA} \right)_i \quad (2)$$

where

RU —revitalization unit;
 RA —revitalization area;
 TA —total area;
 IRA —number of inhabitants of the revitalization area;
 ITA —number of inhabitants of the total area;
 n —number of towns;
 \overline{RU} —average revitalization unit.

3.4.3. Stage III. Selection and Analysis of Projects Taking into Account Goals and Functions

At this stage, the projects were grouped according to their goals and functions, divided into groups. The first group consisted of projects of a social nature (SOC), the second group of projects related to architecture (A), the third group of projects related to space (S), and the fourth group of combined projects related to the development of space with the renovation of architectural objects (SA). Due to the previously adopted research assumptions, projects from the last two groups were selected for further analysis.

3.4.4. Stage IV. Assessment of the Degree of Development of Public Space in Relation to Projects Related to Space (S), and Architecture and Space (SA)

As already mentioned, as a result of the selection, projects from groups S and SA were selected for further research. At this stage, the number of projects was compared by function and location, and the projects were collected into the following subgroups:

- S1—parks and green squares;

- S2—recreation and sport areas;
- S3—main squares, streets, parking spaces;
- SA1—buildings with a social and administrative (contemporary or with historical value) and surrounding areas;
- SA2—buildings with social/recreational/sports function and surrounding areas;
- SA3—buildings with cultural function (with historical values);
- SA4—buildings with transportation function and surrounded road infrastructure (railways stations and parking spaces).

Then, based on the data available in the SLRP, the area of the implementation of projects was calculated. The next step was to calculate the revitalized areas divided into individual groups (S and SA).

3.4.5. Stage V. Expert Assessment Regarding the Implementation of Projects

The expert evaluation aimed to find out the opinions of 20 experts (17 women, 3 men), who professionally represent various fields related to spatial planning and management, administration of small towns, education, and social animation. When selecting experts, the authors made use of the following criteria:

- Knowledge of the revitalization process in the small towns of the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship;
- Expert's ability to assess changes in the public space of the fourteen sites selected for analysis, and thus knowledge of the spatial and functional structure of those sites;
- Experts are not authors or directly involved in the implementation of the projects.

Experts assessed the projects in the region where they live, so they know all the analyzed 14 towns. After familiarizing themselves with all projects in the revitalization program, the experts assessed the implemented projects in towns. Experts expressed their opinion on the usefulness of regeneration projects and their impact on changing the space of the analyzed towns. The interview protocol included 10 issues grouped into two blocks: a descriptive opinion and questions regarding the assessment of changes in space in relation to the types of design and functions of space.

Issues in the interview concerned the degree of increasing the attractiveness of the town after revitalization, the main motives for participation in the program, and thus the implementation of projects, detailed assumptions of implemented projects, quality and efficiency of projects, the impact of revitalization on improving the quality of life of residents, visible changes in public space, practical recommendations for the preparation of future projects for the analyzed towns and towns outside the revitalization program.

Respondents were acquainted with the purpose of the interview and were informed about the research assumptions. Due to the pandemic, most of the interviews were conducted as online interview.

4. Results

4.1. The Results of the Analysis of Source Materials Regarding the Priority Objectives Included in the Supra-Local Revitalization Program

The analysis of source materials shows that the studied towns have an attractive geographic location and unique natural and cultural values, which creates opportunities for their sustainable development. At the same time, they have the development potential of areas intended for revitalization. Despite this, both the natural and cultural potential (including protected areas, monuments) is not used. The analyzed source materials show that the economic development of towns should be in line with environmental protection. Due to the specificity of towns and the above-mentioned natural and cultural values, a significant role is assigned to redefining the concept of recreational spaces for both residents and tourists. On the other hand, the poor condition of built-up areas, including historic architecture, technical infrastructure, and the transport network, is noticeable. There is a lack of integrated space management and ideas to stop environmental degradation. The use

of alternative energy sources is very low. Another obstacle in the proper implementation of the revitalization process of public spaces is the unregulated situation in land ownership.

Therefore, among the priority objectives contained in the urban renewal plans and other analyzed documents, taking into account the development of towns, the following can be distinguished:

- With regard to the protection of cultural heritage—protection and improvement of cultural heritage objects, restoration or giving them a new function;
- In terms of space renewal—revitalization and modernization of public space, improvement of accessibility of space for disabled or excluded people, improvement of the quality of public space for residents and tourists, revitalization of publicly accessible recreational areas;
- In terms of improvement of infrastructure and residential areas—modernization of technical and road infrastructure, improvement of the accessibility of residential buildings and the environment, thermal modernization of residential buildings;
- In the field of social, educational, and promotional activities—improvement of ecological awareness and pro-ecological attitudes of residents, shaping a positive image of the town, improving conditions for rest and leisure by supporting initiatives for children, youth, and the elderly.

4.2. Results of the Assessment of the Degree of Spatial Development in Relation to the Revitalized Area in Towns

When comparing the revitalization areas in all towns, it can be seen that the largest area was designated for revitalization in Dobre Miasto, then in Biskupiec, Bisztynek, and Lidzbark Warmiński. The smallest area is in Nidzica and Pasym. However, taking into account the ratio of the revitalized area to the total area of the town, the largest area designated for changes was in Bisztynek, then in Dobre Miasto and Biskupiec, and then in Górowo Iławeckie, Olsztynek and Lidzbark Warmiński. The smallest area was designated in Pasym and Nowe Miasto Lubawskie (Figure 2).

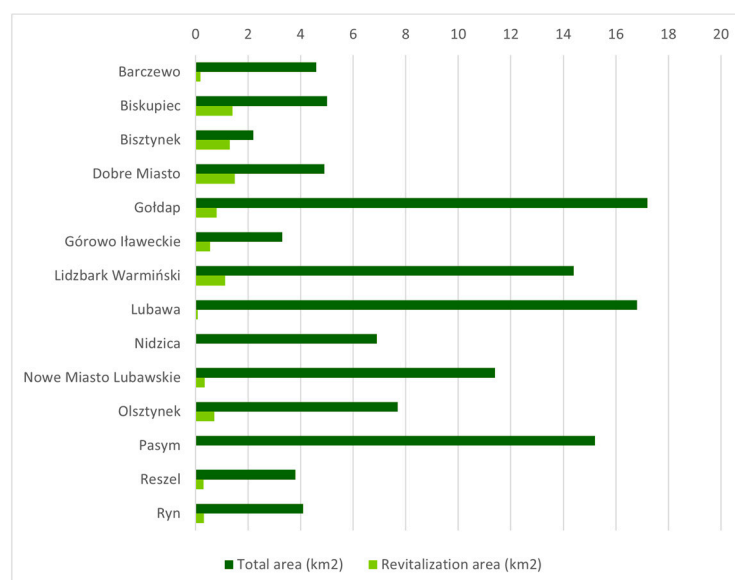


Figure 2. Comparison of towns in relation to the town area and the revitalized area in these towns.

Analyzing the number of inhabitants of the revitalized areas in all towns, the largest number of inhabitants lives in this area in Biskupiec, then in Lidzbark Warmiński, Dobre Miasto, and Gołdap, and the least in Ryn. However, when referring to the proportion to a total number of inhabitants in an individual town, the largest number of inhabitants living in the revitalized area is found in Bisztynek, then Biskupiec and Dobre Miasto, while the least in Lubawa and Nowe Miasto Lubawskie (Figure 3).

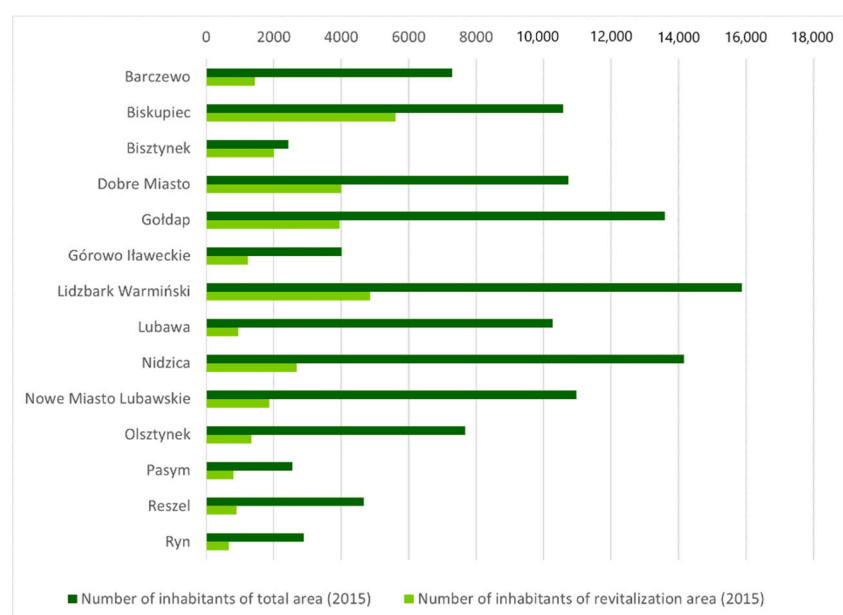


Figure 3. Comparison of towns in relation to the number of their inhabitants (in total) and the number of inhabitants of the revitalized area in 2015.

Comparing the revitalization units (RU) of towns with the average revitalization unit (\overline{RU}), it can be seen that Bisztynek stands out. The revitalization unit of Bisztynek is several times higher than the average value calculated based on data from all 14 towns, followed then Biskupiec and Dobre Miasto. In Górowo Iławeckie, the value approximate to the revitalization unit can be noticed (Figure 4).

4.3. Results of Analysis of the Projects Taking into Account Goals and Functions

In the Supra-Local Revitalization Program (SLRP), towns have designated a total of 82 projects for implementation. The largest group, 64%, are projects related to spatial development, renovation of architectural objects, and renovation of space around architectural objects (S, SA, A), while social projects (SOC) make up 36% of all activities planned in the program (Figure 5).

Social projects (SOC) most often concerned the activation of residents, especially the unemployed, socially excluded, and the poor. The main goal of these projects is broadly understood education, including improving professional qualifications and increasing the competitiveness of people in the labor market, as well as easier access to activities with a cultural, integrative, and health-promoting function. Most projects of this type have been or are being implemented in Gołdap and Olsztynek, while the least in Dobre Miasto, Nidzica, Nowe Miasto Lubawskie, Reszel, and Ryn (Table 2). In the case of Gołdap, the projects related to integrated services for families, therapeutic activities, and ways of spending free time together, as well as activities improving technical and information technology skills. Of course, social projects are important from the point of view of increasing the quality of life of residents, however, they are often not integrated with other projects, e.g., those related to the revitalization of public space.

Among urban development projects, revitalization projects of space (S) have the largest share, followed by projects aimed at renovating buildings with different functions (A), while there are slightly fewer projects identified by the authors as a combination (SA). Their goal is to renew the conditions of buildings along with the development of their surroundings (Figure 6).

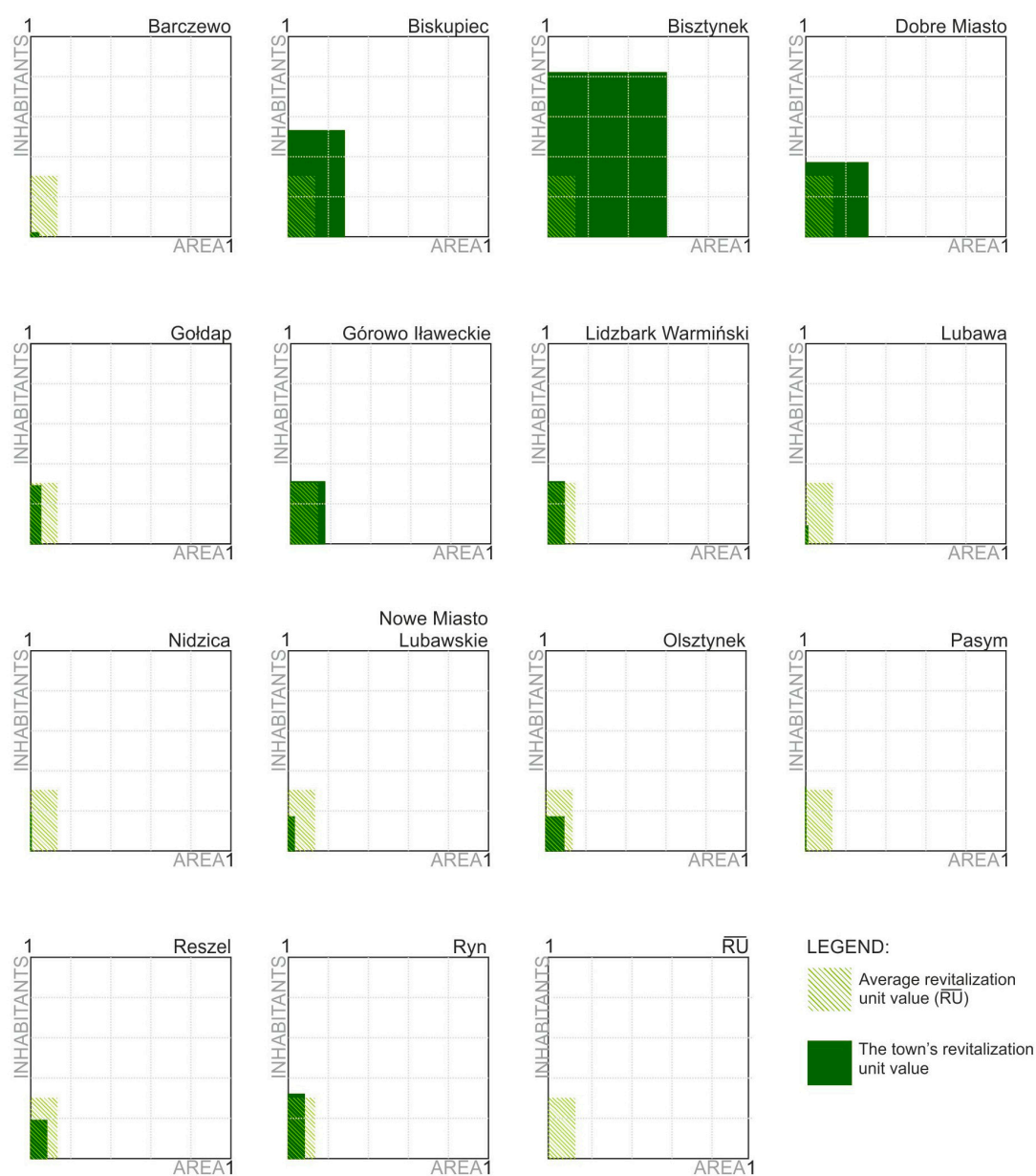


Figure 4. Comparison of the revitalization units of analyzed towns (RU) in relation to revitalization unit (\overline{RU}).

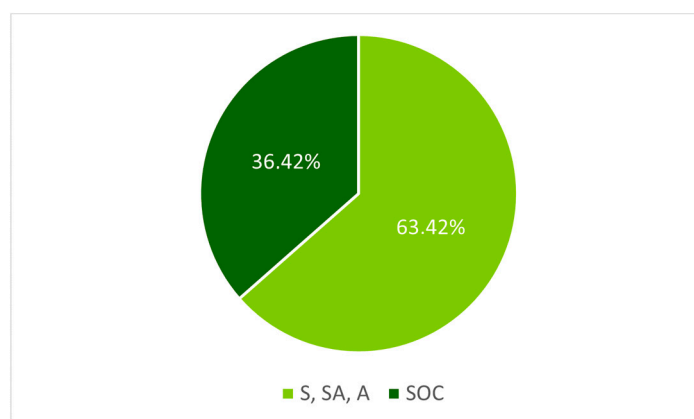
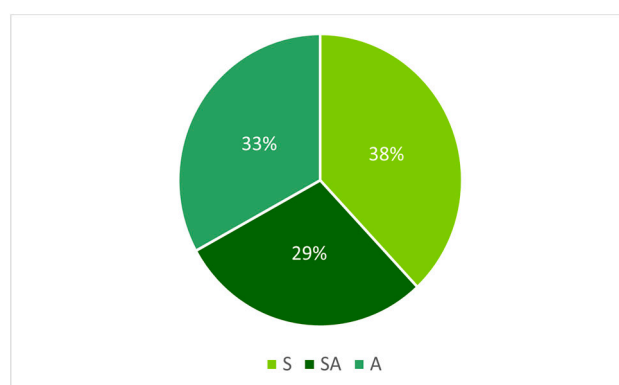


Figure 5. The number of projects (%) related to spatial development (S, SA, A) and social projects (SOC).

Table 2. The number of projects in the analyzed towns.

No.	Town	Together (with Social) *	** Without Social	Architecture (A)	Space (S)	Architecture and Space (SA)
1	Barczewo *	5	3	1	1	1
2	Biskupiec	5	3	-	1	2
3	Bisztynek	4	2	1	-	1
4	Dobre Miasto	3	2	-	1	1
5	Gołdap	13	5	4	1	-
6	Górowo Iław.	6	4	-	2	2
7	Lidzbark Warm.	10	8	2	3	3
8	Lubawa	4	2	1	1	-
9	Nidzica	6	5	1	3	1
10	Nowe Miasto Lub.	6	5	2	3	-
11	Olsztynek	6	3	1	1	1
12	Pasym	5	3	2	1	-
13	Reszel	3	2	-	1	1
14	Ryn	6	5	2	1	2
Total		82	52	17	20	15

Own source based on Supralocal Revitalization Program (2015). * Number of projects in the local revitalization program (including those of a social nature). ** Number of projects related to space and architecture (excluding those of a social nature).

**Figure 6.** The number of projects (%) by groups S, SA, A.

The analysis of the number of projects focused on the revitalization of space and the renovation of architectural objects showed that most projects were implemented or are under implementation in Lidzbark Warmiński and then in Gołdap, Nidzica, Nowe Miasto Lubawskie and Ryn and least in Bisztynek, Dobre Miasto, Lubawa and Reszel (Table 2). As far as the development of the space itself (without architecture) is concerned, most of the projects were carried out in Lidzbark Warmiński, Nidzica and Nowe Miasto Lubawskie, while in the case of the revitalization of architectural structures and their surroundings, most of them were realized in Lidzbark Warmiński, and then in Górowo Iławieckie, Biskupiec and Ryn. Only in one town, Bisztynek, no space development has been planned as part of the revitalization program, while in Gołdap, Lubawa, Nowe Miasto Lubawskie and Pasym there are no joint projects SA (Table 2).

4.4. The Results of the Analysis of Spatial Development Divided into Functions in Groups S and SA

Based on the analysis, 20 projects were assigned to the S group and 16 projects to the SA group in all towns. In group S, the largest number are S2 (10) development projects, then S1 (6), and the least are S3 projects (4). Of the recreational and sports space projects, the largest number concerns sidewalks, cycling, and walking routes, and recreational areas by the water (rivers, lakes). Such areas have been or are under construction in Barczewo, Biskupiec, Dobre Miasto, Gołdap, Górowo Iławieckie, Lidzbark Warmiński, Olsztynek,

Ryn, and the most in Lidzbark (3). Regarding the revitalization of parks, it should be noted that 2 parks are being renewed in Nowe Miasto Lubawskie and Nidzica, and 1 in Reszel and Górowo Iławeckie. On the other hand, squares, street space, and car parks are being revitalized in Lubawa, Nidzica, Nowe Miasto Lubawskie and Pasym (Figure 7). As mentioned above, most revitalization projects in group S concerned recreational space. This space, unlike designed town parks, is most often connected with areas of great natural and ecological value. The results of the revitalization carried out largely took into account the reorganization of these places for use by residents. However, the projects lacked the environmental context relating to the care and protection of these unique values.

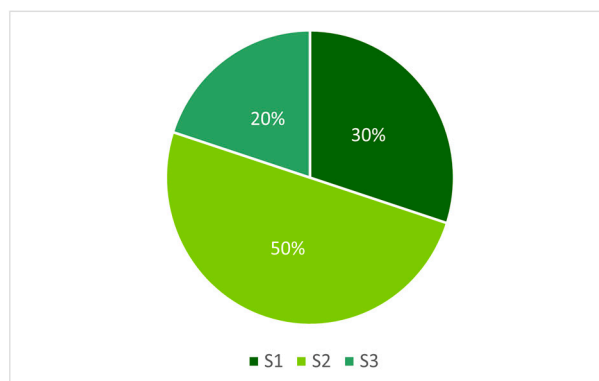


Figure 7. The number of projects (%) in group S (S1, S2, S3).

Most of the projects in the SA group are SA3 projects in 8 towns. They are implemented in Biskupiec, where the project covers up to 10 locations, as well as in Lidzbark (2 projects), Bisztynek, Dobrze Miasto, Górowo Iławeckie, Lubawa, Olsztynek and Ryn. The projects from SA3 group usually concern the development of facilities with a small area outside the building. Most often these are areas with a historic water tower (for example in Ryn and Olsztynek), areas with fragments of historic defensive walls (Lidzbark Warmiński), or areas near cultural centers (Biskupiec, Górowo Iławeckie). Fewer projects are in the subgroup SA1, five projects include Górowo Iławeckie, Lidzbark, Nidzica, Reszel and Ryn. The least represented are the projects in SA2 subgroup (1 project in Barczewo) and SA4 subgroup (one project in Biskupiec) (Figure 8). When it comes to the function and quality of the development of the space around the buildings, most of the projects show that it has been treated marginally in relation to the renovation of the buildings themselves. In most towns, projects of this type included resurfacing and infrastructure preparation, while they often lacked even a minimal amount of greenery or elements referring to the history and genius loci of the place. The focus was on the renovation of the facilities and their use by residents (social factor).

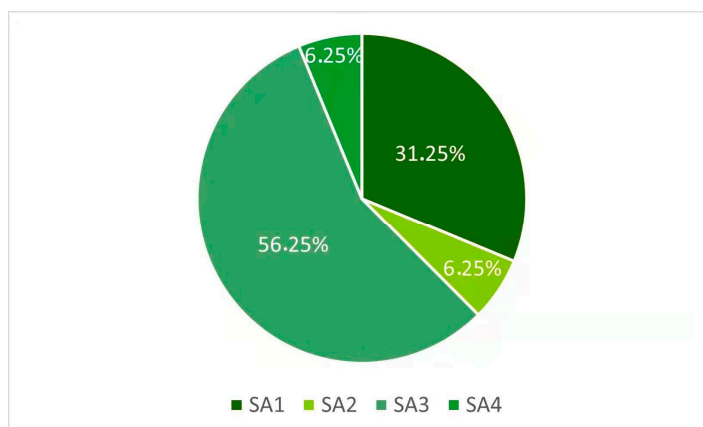


Figure 8. The number of projects in group SA (SA1, SA2, SA3, SA4).

The results of the analysis of the area included in the completed projects in group S in all towns indicate that the largest area was revitalized in the subgroup S1, then S3 and slightly less in the subgroup S2 (Figure 9). The largest area under revitalization in terms of subgroup S1 represents two parks and squares in Nidzica (11.5 ha), a slightly smaller area the park in Reszel (9.5 ha), and the smallest area is reported in Górowo Iławeckie (0.8 ha). In the subgroup S2, the largest revitalized area is a recreational space in Ryn (0.89 ha), and the smallest in Biskupiec (0.2 ha). The revitalized area of the S3 group is the largest in Lubawa (1.37 ha), and the smallest in Nowe Miasto Lubawskie (0.5 ha).

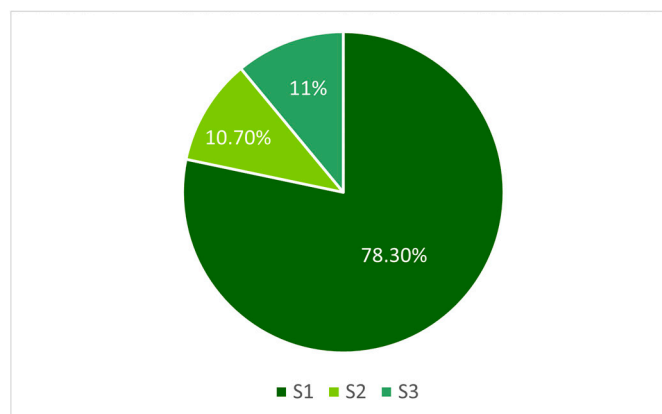


Figure 9. Revitalized area (%) in group S (S1, S2, S3).

In SA projects, the largest area was revitalized in the case of SA3, followed by SA2 areas and SA4 (Figure 10). Among the projects implemented in the SA group, the largest area in the SA1 subgroup is represented by the project in Ryn (0.5 ha), and the smallest area in Reszel (0.086 ha). In the SA2 subgroup, there is only one project in Barczewo (area 1.5 ha), while in SA3 the largest area was recorded for the area in Biskupiec (6.58 ha), it should be noted that this is the total area of revitalization sites located in different parts of the town. The smallest area of objects, together with the surrounding revitalized areas in this subgroup, is in Bisztynek (0.363 ha). The last group SA4 includes only one project in Biskupiec for the facility and adjacent areas with an area of 1.04 ha.

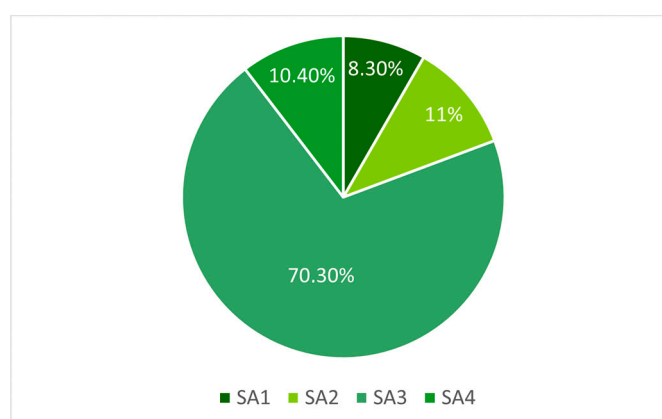


Figure 10. Revitalized area (%) in the SA group (SA1, SA2, SA3, SA4).

4.5. The Results of Interview with Experts

Experts about the relationship between towns belonging to the Cittaslow network and the implementation of the SLRP assumptions, and increasing the attractiveness of towns, indicate the following elements: making the image of towns more attractive, improving the quality of life of residents, improving aesthetics and spatial order (Figure 11, point I.):

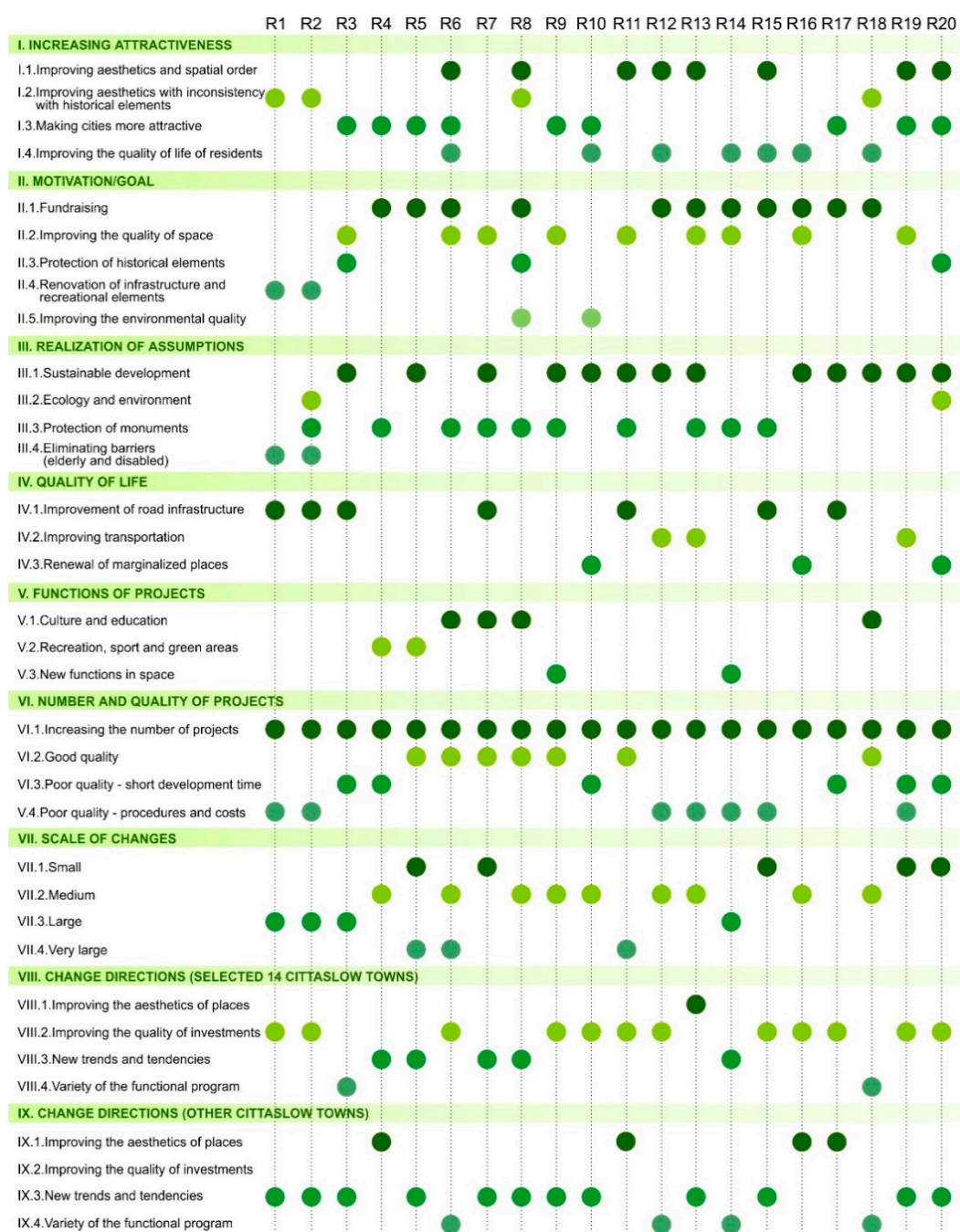


Figure 11. Matrix showing the range of experts' responses.

"... definitely belonging to the Cittaslow network and SLRP made it easier for Cittaslow towns to increase their attractiveness by implementing projects in line with the idea of words ... indicated in the program. SLRP Cittaslow allowed promoting towns that share similar issues ... "

"... the towns become more beautiful, they become a tourist attraction; ... the inhabitants live calmer and better ... "

At the same time, they point out the lack of coherence with the historical tissue in the revitalized spaces (Figure 11):

"... joining the SLRP has significantly increased the possibilities of improving the aesthetics of public spaces in towns, but there is no care for historical elements ... "

“... there is a noticeable dissonance between the revitalized areas and the existing tissue, historical buildings or the surrounding landscape; ... the point is not to introduce artificially historicizing elements, “pretending that they are from the past”, but to perform revitalization with respect for the existing elements and genius loci ... ”

With regard to the main motivations of Cittaslow towns in the implementation of revitalization projects and accession to the SLRP, the experts emphasized the possibility of financing projects, improving the quality of public space, and to a lesser extent, the protection of historic areas and buildings, renovation of transport and recreational infrastructure, or improvement of the quality of the environment (Figure 11, point II.):

“... An important motivation was the pressure of the inhabitants to replace post-communist public spaces with more modern ones; ... the motivation was to a small extent to improve the condition of the environment, take care of monuments or protect natural resources ... ”

“... the most important motivation was the possibility of obtaining funds and increasing the quality of life of the inhabitants and changing the image of the revitalized area ... ”

Regarding the detailed assumptions in the revitalization projects of the Cittaslow towns, experts believe that they should be based on sustainable development, respect for historical elements, shaping ecological attitudes among the population and the possibility of using space for all (accessibility for elderly and disabled) (Figure 11, point III.).

Regarding the selection of directions of revitalization related to the improvement of the quality of life of residents in space revitalization projects, experts point out that the projects most often concerned the renovation of road infrastructure (access roads, paths, parking) and technical infrastructure (Figure 11, point IV.1. and IV.4.):

“... definitely important for the people managing the revitalization process was the improvement of the quality of infrastructure and the renewal of space; ... the aesthetics of architectural objects was secondary, if the remaining needs of the residents were not met ... ”

“... especially in the perspective of towns with a low level of investment activity, it was important in the first place to meet the infrastructural needs and adapt the infrastructure to the needs of the resident, meeting the expectations of a town user in the 21st century ... ”

They also point to the need to focus on the following issue—the renovation of areas and facilities with a cultural, cultural and educational function, with high environmental potential, including green areas for recreational and health-promoting purposes. The changes in the functions of space are also of great importance for the respondents. At the same time, they point out that in the implemented projects, these issues were often not resolved correctly or were treated rather marginally (Figure 11, point V.).

“... the sphere of culture and the preservation of its tangible and intangible heritage are also very important issues in the perspective of space revitalization in Cittaslow towns ... ”

“... regardless of the age group, it is important to arrange places for various activities, including active (sports, recreational) or passive (walking in silence, relaxing) ... ”

Experts firmly stated that the participation of towns in the Cittaslow revitalization program increased the number of projects. Some of the respondents claim that the number of implemented projects does not refer to their quality. This is mainly due to the short time for pre-project analyses and the short time for preparing documentation. Another important issue here is the issue of tender procedures, which assume the selection of the company and contractor for the projects at the lowest price (Figure 11, point VI.).

“... often the possibility of applying for subsidies is very limited in time, hence the need to prepare project documentation in a short time ... imposing the will and vision of officials on designers in the absence of public consultations may also be a problem ... ”

“... a disadvantage in the development of the SLRP was a short time that towns had to select the projects and prepare documentation ... it could translate into the quality and effectiveness of the projects ...”

“... the main criterion for selecting contractors is the price, which is not related to quality ... often poor quality materials are used ... work is carried out quickly, inaccurately, which causes manufacturing defects and the need for repairs ...”

In terms of noticeable changes in the public space after the implementation of the projects, experts mostly believe that they are visible to a medium and low degree (Figure 11, point VII). Referring to the directions of revitalization in terms of functions of spaces and the preparation of future projects for the analyzed 14 towns, the experts pointed to the improvement of the quality of the projects and, consequently, the revitalized spaces, taking into account new trends and diversifying the utility program. One of the experts also noted the need to improve the aesthetics of the space (Figure 11, point VIII). On the other hand, when it comes to the directions of revitalization in terms of the functions of space and the preparation of future projects for the remaining Cittaslow towns in the Warmia and Mazury region, which were not taken into account in the SLRP, the interviewees proposed to refer to new trends and to the same degree to reduce attention to the aesthetics of places, as well as the diversification of the utility program adapted to all users (Figure 11, point IX).

The experts found that the most visible changes in relation to the revitalized spaces are seen in the S group, respectively in the case of S2, then S1, and finally S3. As for the SA group, they notice the greatest changes concerning the area in the case of SA1, then SA2 and SA3, and finally SA4 (Figure 12).

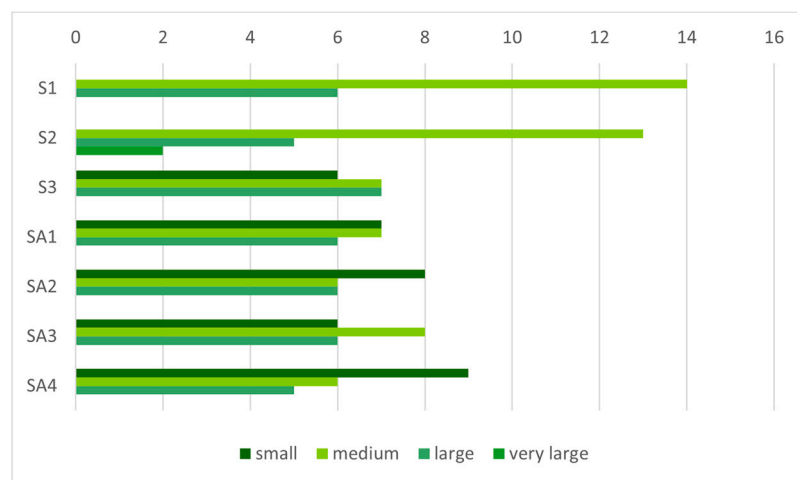


Figure 12. Assessment of the degree of changes in public space in relation to revitalization as part of the projects from groups S and SA (after 2015).

5. Discussion

As it results from the provisions of the revitalization programs of the analyzed towns and the SLRP, the main goal of revitalization is to carry out social and spatial changes in order to improve the living conditions of residents and the quality of space [48]. Improving quality, as understood by project managers, should have a direct impact on economic development.

It should also be emphasized that towns associate the effects of the revitalization process with the continued strengthening of the local economy through improved conditions for small businesses, the service industry and the socio-cultural offer. This vision assumed an increase in the attractiveness of towns as places to live, as well as the development of tourism. These issues are highlighted by [110–114]. As a result of revitalization, the image of revitalized areas is to be significantly improved, which will stimulate changes in neighboring areas.

The results of interviews with experts indicate to a large extent a positive perception of the SLRP itself, as well as the main goal and motives of the activities undertaken in the field of revitalization. Experts emphasize the improvement of the quality of life through, for example, the renovation of infrastructure and the possibility of obtaining funds for revitalization. However, when analyzing the detailed answers, it can be noticed that they also pay attention to the shortcomings of the project preparation process itself, and often their quality, as well as the quality of implementation (execution). This translates directly into changes of the space that are visible after implementation and during use. Research carried out by [115–118] also refers to problems related to the preparation process and the quality of projects.

Based on the analysis of source materials, it can be concluded that in the spatial and functional sphere, towns refer to the vision of socio-economic development, but also to improving the condition of the environment, or caring for space and objects of great cultural and historical importance. In contrast, research has shown that they have made a significant step in terms of social development and improving their image and promotion. This is indicated by the results of the analysis of the number of projects in individual groups. The SOC group accounts for 1/3 of all activities, while the projects in the S, SA and A groups also relate to social development. As can be seen from the interview, the experts also emphasized that the projects had largely social and economic significance. In other studies, the authors also pay attention to the social and economic aspects of revitalization [99,100,104,119].

On the other hand, when it comes to caring for the same features (including historical ones) and environmental protection and ecology, the situation is a bit different. Experts' statements indicate a poor reference in projects (and, consequently, in implementations) to historical or cultural characteristics. The results of the analysis of public spaces from the S group indicate that the number of marketplaces or central squares (S3) projects is the smallest. It should be emphasized that it is the center of small towns that have a historical character. Taking into account the developed area, the centers (markets) are comparable to the S2 group, but still, the area is smaller than the projects from the S1 group. However, when referring to the space around objects of cultural importance (SA3) and partially with a social function (not all) SA1, although the number of projects is quite large, according to experts, they often lack reference to the context of the place.

As it results from our analysis of the revitalization programs of individual town as well as the SLRP, special attention was paid to the pro-ecological approach to revitalization. The provisions of the SLRP deal with the need to care for the environment and broadly educate the public on ecology. While the revitalized public spaces referred to the willingness (not always the need) of pro-social changes, the issue of ecology and the use of pro-environmental solutions in these projects and later implementations is treated marginally or is neglected. Experts pay attention to this. Although according to our research, the projects of parks and lawns (S1) and recreational space (S2) are dominant in terms of numbers and areas, the pro-ecological program and environmental protection ideas were practically not taken into account in them. The evidence is often felling trees prior to land development, very little differentiation in the selection of species in the case of park greenery and squares, no reference to contemporary environmental problems (climate change, environmental pollution), no reference to contemporary pro-ecological design (NBS application). There is a need for a different approach to designing public space in towns [70–78,84,120,121].

Regarding the changes after revitalization in public spaces in relation to the area of towns, one can notice a differentiation depending on the function of space. In the perception of experts, the scale of changes generally ranges from small to medium. The results of the research show that the biggest changes refer to S1 and SA3, while experts say slightly different ideas and select groups S2 (then S1) and SA1 (then SA3). Other studies also show that the most visible space after revitalization are green squares and parks [122,123].

In view of the general need for a change in the direction of thinking about the design of public spaces in small towns, experts suggest the need to introduce new trends, pro-ecological trends and paying attention to the quality and content of projects by adapting them to the conditions and nature of towns (*genius loci*). This suggestion concerns significant future projects according to analyzed 14 towns, as well as other towns from the Cittaslow network, which were not included in the SLRP. In addition, for this other group, they propose the consideration of introducing a diversified utility program.

6. Conclusions

The objective of this study was to define the role of the revitalization program in transforming public spaces in Cittaslow towns in the region of Warmia and Mazury (Poland). The main conclusions are as follows:

- The participation of towns in SLRP undoubtedly brought the intended effects of drawing attention to the need for changes in public spaces and thus taking steps towards their revitalization. This, in turn, increased their attractiveness and influenced the perception of Cittaslow towns as standing out from the rest of the region and the country. This was confirmed, *inter alia*, by the results of the expert interview.
- The main motivation for the revitalization of public spaces was the possibility of obtaining EU funds for the implementation of projects and the preparation of common places for residents. Most of the projects concerned social function. In contrast, the participation of towns in SLRP did not increase the number of projects based on pro-environmental, ecological, and cultural development.
- Our research shows that the goal of social development and making the revitalized public spaces available to residents has been achieved. However, the implemented projects often did not take into account the objectives of improving ecological conditions or respect for identity on the same level as social objectives. This is important due to the declaration of sustainable development clearly defined in the strategic goals of Cittaslow towns, in the SLRP, and in the revitalization plans of selected towns.
- According to the research, changes in public spaces proceeded quickly, and the prepared projects were not always well thought out and implemented, which resulted in their lower quality and lower efficiency.

Therefore, in order to improve the revitalization process and the quality of revitalized public spaces in the future in the fourteen analyzed towns, other towns belonging to the Cittaslow network, as well as other towns, we recommend:

- Even distribution of the goals of revitalization, and thus paying attention not only to the economic and social aspect, but also, which is significant nowadays, to the issues of ecology and environmental protection. In future projects, attention should be paid to the specificity of the place and the reference to historical and cultural conditions.
- It is necessary to develop detailed pre-design analyzes, as well as pay attention to the need for a longer design process, allowing for the elimination of errors and the introduction of optimal solutions.
- It is important to conduct reliable interviews with experts, but also with residents in order to develop common goals regarding the use of space.

The presented research contributes to the knowledge of public space revitalization planning, through the use of a simple, multi-criteria analysis process aimed at the need for wide-ranging multi-directional activities for the sustainable development of small towns in Central and Eastern Europe regions. While many studies on the topic of the revitalization of public spaces in small towns are available globally, research from Central and Eastern Europe is still scarce, particularly that employing a multidimensional approach towards revitalization. The majority of studies focus only on the social role of revitalization while there is a lack of studies taking into account the assessment of the balance between social and economic, cultural, and environmental aspects in the implemented revitalization projects. Moreover, different geographic, spatial, and economic conditions of these regions

should be emphasized to permit comparison with other regions around the globe in the future. The presented method can be used for the analysis of small towns in other regions of Europe, or the world. However, the condition for its application is the selection of towns with a similar structure, spatial and economic, and social conditions.

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