

## **MARKET SQUARES OF SMALL TOWNS AS PUBLIC SPACE OF OPOLE SILESIA ON SELECTED EXAMPLES (LEGAL STATUS AFTER 2015)**

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### Abstract

This paper presents the results of research on the diagnosis of the state of public space in the context of the evolution of its structure, on the example of market squares of small cities. The background to the research is the implementation of the Act on Ensuring Accessibility for Persons with Special Needs (The Accessibility Act, 2019) and the Revitalisation Act (2015), as documents with significant impact on the shape of public spaces in Polish cities. The multicultural and cross-border region of Opole Silesia was chosen as the research area. Six small towns in the region, whose market squares have undergone a revitalization in recent years, were selected for analysis: Biała, Dobrodzień, Korfantów, Otmuchów, Paczków, Ujazd. This article aims to diagnose the condition of public space, on the example of the market squares of small towns, based on the solutions adopted in the revitalization projects. The criteria adopted for the analyses are the identity of the place and continuity of development, accessibility, and adaptation to climate change. The research uses the method of comparative analysis of the morphological structure, the method of analyzing the physical parameters of space, and the analysis of historical iconography and cartography. Conducted analyses will make it possible to formulate an answer to the question of to what extent the introduction of the regulations as mentioned above has changed the approach to the revitalization process as a continuation of the historically formed way of building the urban fabric, and to what extent it has forced the introduction of solutions that violate the continuity of historical development. The result of the research will be a diagnosis of the problems in the revitalization processes of small towns in the multicultural area of the Opole region, in the context of current legal conditions, and sustainable development.

Keywords: revitalization, Opolskie Voivodeship, market squares, Revitalisation Act, accessibility

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Small towns make up the overwhelming majority of cities in Poland. Opolskie Voivodeship is no exception in this matter. According to the state as of 31.12.2016 [1, p.17], out of 919 cities in Poland,

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700 of them are small (76%), of which 48% are towns with less than 5,000 inhabitants. In the case of Opolskie Voivodeship, small towns account for more than 82% of the total city number. It is here, therefore, that the most typical forms of public spaces characterizing the image of the regional towns creating local place identity should be searched for.

Kevin Lynch defines place identity as a set of characteristics that allow a place to be distinguished from other things and recognized as a separable entity not in the sense of being equated with something else but with the meaning of individuality [2, p.8]. Several features set as successful place parameters have shown a relationship to how public spaces have been transformed in light of their historic values [3, p. 100]. Therefore, the search for the characteristics of typical public spaces in the Opole region should begin among the places most typical of the area [3, p. 99-100], where the greatest changes associated with the social transformations of a place can be observed [4, p. 99].

In Poland, the issue of the role of market squares in small and medium-sized towns has been described several times in the last two decades. Nevertheless, these analyses have been conducted mainly for the areas of southern Poland (Outer Subcarpathia, Upper and Lower Silesia) although there are also examples of analyses conducted for other locations, like Warmia or Greater Poland. Selected examples included an analysis of changes in the building structure, transformations, and revitalization activities undertaken recently in towns such as Starachowice, Mszana Dolna, Gorlice, Jaśliska, Brzostek, Kołaczyce, Sieniawa, Pruchnik, Głogów Małopolski, Iwonicz Zdrój, Kórnik or Kłobuck, Koniecpol, Koziegłowy, Krzepice, Siewierz, Toszek or Żarki. These are therefore selected examples from the very large set available. These studies have highlighted the multi-functionality of the small towns' market squares, both historically and contemporarily, with the possible specialization of the space along with the specialization of the town itself [5, p. 68-69] and the ongoing process of assigning them a recreational and leisure function, with a significant amount of ornamental greenery [5, p. 70-71].

The available literature mainly focuses on the aspect of problems of market spaces of small towns resulting from earlier transformations and planning decisions made mainly after 1945 [5], [6], [7], since they were written mostly before the entry into force of the Revitalization Act [8], which normalized the actions taken, although there were also later attempts at a similar diagnosis [9]. More often in these cases, specific revitalization activities and their physical effect in space were analyzed [10], less so the social aspect of such activities [11], [12]. Significantly, the number of revitalization activities in Poland, measured by the amount of funding allocated for this purpose, reached its highest level just before the law came into force, i.e. in the years 2007-2013 ([13, p. 32].

It is only in recent literature that the aspect of the revitalization of small-town markets has received attention as a phenomenon aimed not only at preserving the unique cultural heritage of urban structures and architectural features but also at improving local standards of living and accessibility [14].

So far, the issue of researching the market squares of small towns in Opole Silesia as public space has been conducted mainly in terms of the analysis of their urban morphology, identity, and historical transformation by Monika Adamska [15], [16]. In the paper the terms: Opole Silesia and Opole region are used interchangeably with Opolskie Voivodeship throughout the article.

At the same time, there are very few examples in the world literature of attempts to analyze the market squares of small towns in terms of their significance as contemporary public spaces. The topic seems to have attracted a specifically high level of interest in the Polish area, which can be linked to the initiation of a more conscious transition through changes in legislation and the enactment of two regulations: the Revitalisation Act [8] and the Accessibility Act [17].

A definition of a small town was adopted for the study according to the statistical size of the number of its inhabitants. Small towns in Poland are considered to be those with a population below 20,000 [1], [18, p. 32], although some authors apply even the limitation to 5,000 inhabitants [19, p.61].

Opole Silesia region was selected as the multicultural and cross-border research area. There are 37 towns in the Opolskie Voivodeship, 29 of which are small towns and 11 with a population below 5,000 [20]. This makes small towns the most important research area when it comes to analyzing the urban structure of the Opole region. Therefore, the search for the characteristics of typical public spaces in the Opole region should begin among the places most typical of the area [3, p.99-100], where the greatest changes associated with the social transformations of a place can be observed [4, p.99].

Therefore the article aims to diagnose the condition of public space, on the example of the market squares of small towns, based on the solutions adopted in the revitalization projects applying the criteria such as the identity of the place and continuity of development, accessibility, and adaptation to climate change.

### **1.1. Market square and public space – definitions**

It has not been known for a while that defining a space as the public is a complex and ambiguous issue [21], hence the question of the publicness of public space in its different categories - from accessibility, control, to ownership - is becoming increasingly considered [22, p.51-52]. This has even led to the establishment of the claim of the end of public space [23]. The classifications presented in the literature refer to both the function, form, user perception, and valorization of space [22], [24] and relate to the framing of public space as a reflection of the state of social clout of the period [25]. They can be 'positive', 'negative', or ambiguous spaces, even private ones with public-oriented functions [24, p.169-170]. At the same time, concerning European sites, „historical trends and norms that go back to the ancient world" are cited as the main reason for the separation of public spaces [24, p.164-165].

In Poland, towns founded in the medieval period constitute a significant majority. Their characteristic structure, whose main, most often central element was the public space of the town square, is best preserved in small towns, where since the founding of the town not too many other, equally important for the functioning of the structure, public spaces have developed. The Opole region is a typical example in this case, presenting examples of market squares with a mature functional and spatial program, bringing together all the most important elements of public life. In many small centers, which have hardly developed a proper urban structure (not only defined by their administrative boundaries) beyond the medieval town, the market square is still the main and only urban square in the urban layout of the city [26, p.11-12]. Therefore in the article we refer to the physical concept of space, defining a morphological element such as the town square, as the primary form of public space in European cities [27], [28].

At the same time as contemporary urban squares are being given new functions, the way they are classified and valued has also changed. Matthew Carmona defines 'public open space' as "managed open space, typically green and available and open to all, even if temporally controlled" [24, p.169], with examples of parks, gardens, common, urban forests, and cemeteries. Therefore for this publication, a definition of 'public space' has been narrowed down referring to its traditional form, with full openness and accessibility and use of an outdoor, publicly owned, historically shaped space and fulfilling four basic social roles [29]. As stated by Carmona, "formal public spaces have long had an important role as the perceived centers of settlements of all types and as the focus for public life, activities and events." [30].

### **1.2. Description of the legal acts**

The Revitalisation Act, which was introduced in 2015 [8], set out the basic framework for the revitalization process as a comprehensive action carried out within the framework of municipal revitalization programs by stakeholders defined by the Act. It introduced tools for a coherent policy of

municipalities on revitalization activities and indirectly defined what phenomena will be eligible to be called revitalization.

At the same time, the 2019 Accessibility Act [17] was introduced, which defined, in terms of architectural accessibility, the framework that every public space must meet. This has led to the need for evaluating the action already undertaken in public spaces, including revitalization, to assess compliance with the requirements and adapt places assessed as inaccessible. At the same time, in terms of the sustainability policy increasingly being implemented in Europe, the interventions that have been undertaken will require more integration than before.

### 1.3. Description of towns

The settlement network of Opolskie Voivodeship is currently made up of 37 towns. Assuming 20,000 inhabitants as an upper limit for the population of small towns, as many as 31 towns in the region created this group in 2022. The towns whose market squares are analyzed also belong to the group of small towns. Ujazd and Korfantów have fewer than 2000 inhabitants, Biała has a population of 2303 and Dobrodzień has 3486. Otmuchów and Paczków are the largest in this group, with populations in each town exceeding 6,000 (GUS 2023, 94). All 6 towns, like most urban centers in the Opole region, are medieval foundations. Biała, Paczków, and Ujazd were founded in the 13th century, Dobrodzień, Korfantów and Otmuchów in the 14th century [31, p. 18–19, 28–29, 40–41, 58–59, 80–81].

All towns are currently seats of urban-rural communes in the Opolskie Voivodeship, respectively in four counties/poviats: nyski (Korfantów, Otmuchów, Paczków), oleski (Dobrodzień), prudnicki (Biała), and strzelecki (Ujazd).

Five of the old town layouts included in the analysis are entered in the Register of Monuments of the Opolskie Voivodeship [32]. The earliest entered, in 1949, were the old town layouts of Otmuchów and Paczków. In the 1950s the old town layouts of Biała (1957), Dobrodzień (1953) and Ujazd (1957) were placed under statutory protection by being entered in the Register of Monuments. Only the old town of Korfantów is not on the Register. In addition, the chartered layout of Paczków, unique on a national scale, was declared a Monument of History by the President of the Republic of Poland as "Paczków - an old town complex with a medieval fortification system" in 2012 [33].

Biała, situated on the river of the same name, was in its history an important trading center in the region, among others due to its border location and the presence of a large Jewish community. The layout of the old town has a regular oval shape with a chequered grid and a rectangular market square with an area of approx. 1 ha. In the space of the square is located the mid-market block, which accounts for 20% of the market square [6, p.269–271].

In the economic history of Dobrodzień, the carpentry craft occupies an important place, which is currently the driving force of the economy of this small town. The old town layout is small, partly with features of a chequered grid. The shape of the irregular, quadrilateral market square with an area of approx. 1 ha is the result of not rebuilding the block after the 19th c. fire and locating a free-standing church in this place [6, p.79–281].

Korfantów is located in the valley of the Ścinawa Niemodlińska River. The town lost and regained city rights twice in its history. Nowadays, the town's economy is mainly based on the health care function. The old town layout is irregular and combines the features of a checkerboard and axial arrangements. The small, quadrangular market square has an area of 0,5 ha (Adamska 2019, 304–306). Otmuchów and Paczków are both situated in the Sudeten Foreland. Otmuchów until the beginning of the 19th century was owned by the Bishops of Wrocław. During the period of industrialization, it was the center of the sugar industry. The nearly rectangular old town layout is located at the foot of the castle hill, on a sloping area. A rectangular market square of an area of 0,8 ha has a 6% slope towards the east.

There is a mid-market block in the space of the square consisting of the Renaissance town hall and tenement houses, which occupies approximately 20% of the area of the square [6, p.335–337]. Paczków is a town founded on "cruda radice". It is one of the most regular layouts in Silesia with an oval, elongated outline, a symmetrical, functional layout ordered by the rules of geometry, and based on a chessboard pattern of streets. The centrally located market square is rectangular in shape and has an area of approx. 1,4 ha. The mid-market block is made up of the town hall and tenement houses and occupies approximately 15 % of the market square [6, p.338–340].

Ujazd was founded by the Bishops of Wrocław and has functioned over the centuries as a small agricultural and craft center. The town is picturesquely situated on the slope of the Chelm Ridge descending towards the Klodnica River. It has a regular, oval-shaped layout with a rectangular market square with an area of approx. 0,7 ha located on the site with 4,5 % slope [6, p.350–352].

Table 1. Basic demographic and spatial parameters of the analyzed towns. Source [34] as of June 30, 2023, and author's elaboration based on [35], [36], [37], [38], [39], [40]

	<b>Population</b>	<b>Area [ha]</b>	<b>Area - historical [ha]</b>
<b>Biała</b>	2 261	1 472	4,9
<b>Dobrodzień</b>	3 473	1 954	11,2
<b>Korfantów</b>	1 689	1 023	41,0
<b>Otmuchów</b>	6 207	4 955	8,1
<b>Paczków</b>	6 699	660	11,4
<b>Ujazd</b>	1 798	1 475	9,3
<i>average</i>	<i>3687,83</i>	<i>1923,17</i>	<i>14,32</i>

Towns with an average population of no more than 3,688 were surveyed, 4 of which have fewer than 3,500 inhabitants and 2 of which have more than 6,000 inhabitants. The contemporary size of the analyzed towns is approximately 1923 ha, the largest of which is Otmuchów, which has the entire area of Lake Otmuchów within its borders. The smallest of the towns is Paczków with an area of only 660 ha. Towns in the historic contours show greater variation in the area due to the presence or absence of urban fortifications.

#### 1.4. Revitalization of selected market squares

Town	Description of the revitalization process
Biała	<p><b>Implementation period:</b> August 2018-May 2019</p> <p><b>Designer:</b> Arteria s.c. Nysa</p> <p><b>Pre-revitalization state:</b> space with a low level of aesthetics, mostly dedicated to vehicular traffic and parking space, additionally the rectangle square was intersected by a road.</p> <p><b>Scope of activity:</b></p> <p>Project: the objective is to improve the quality and attractiveness of the degraded infrastructure for the area of the main public space; to restore social functions, to re-prioritize market functions, and to diversify them to increase organizational, integrative, and representative possibilities, good access to utility functions (car parks, bus stop, commercial facilities)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>surface:</b> granite slabs, granite paving stones, cobblestones, concrete tiles;</li> <li>➤ <b>street furniture:</b> wood and metal benches, litter bins, bicycle racks, information boards, lamps in historical forms, concrete planters and posts;</li> <li>➤ <b>greenery and water:</b> flowerbeds in the form of rectangular strips at floor level (grasses, boxwood), a few trees in spherical forms in the recreation zone and part of the frontage;</li> <li>➤ <b>accessibility:</b> 2 parking spaces for people with disabilities, 1,8 m wide pavements, adequate marking of pedestrian crossings;</li> <li>➤ <b>eco-friendly/climate change solutions:</b> keeping the truck transit ban, maintaining bus stops as part of public transport, elements favoring bicycle tourism, introducing blue-green infrastructure (fountain in place of former well and low and high planting);</li> <li>➤ <b>identity:</b> baroque figures of religious content, fountain in the location of the former well, restoration of the rectangular market square (previously cut by a road), mid-market block</li> </ul> <p><b>Results:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ a successful functional recomposition of the main city square space;</li> <li>➤ separating the zone excluded from vehicle traffic and applying architectural solutions ensuring the possibility of active presence and use, including relaxation and integration;</li> <li>➤ possibility of organizing cultural events (e.g. Days of Biała, Christmas market, happenings);</li> <li>➤ improving the aesthetics of the market square and obtaining a proper representative character;</li> <li>➤ improving the town's tourism function.</li> </ul> <p><b>Source:</b></p> <p>Materials of the Competition for the Best Public Space of the Opolskie Voivodeship organized by the Marshal of the Opolskie Voivodeship, edition 2023.</p> <p>Site visits (Biała 27.09.2022; 19.09.2023; 15.03.2024);</p>

<p><b>Dobrodzień</b> seat of the municipality</p>	<p><b>Implementation period:</b> May 2016-December 2019</p> <p><b>Designer:</b> Pracownia Projektowa „ab studio” Opole</p> <p><b>Pre-revitalization state:</b> space with a low level of aesthetics, in part dedicated to vehicular traffic</p> <p><b>Scope of activity:</b></p> <p>Project: redevelopment of the necessary infrastructure (sanitary sewage system, rainwater drainage system with road drainage, replacement of road surface, pavements, and parking spaces; replacement of the pavement of the market square; illumination of the pavement, roadway, and pavements; introduction of low and high greenery, street furniture; the possibility of installing a stage and organizing cultural events, concerts, the permanent presence of the Dobrodzień summer cultural zone.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>surface:</b> granite slabs, cut, flamed in grey, light grey flaked granite blocks, paving made of pebbles (cobblestones) excavated and collected during the construction works (jointed with cement-resin joints), pavements: flamed, cut granite slabs and granite paving blocks, roadway and parking spaces: cut and flaked granite blocks, concrete slabs;</li> <li>➤ <b>street furniture:</b> wood and metal benches, litter bins, bicycle racks, information boards, lamps in historical forms, concrete planters and posts, a form with Dobrodzień's logo;</li> <li>➤ <b>greenery and water:</b> flowerbeds with perennials and small shrubs at floor level in a square form with a tree each, greenery (lawn, shrubs, small trees, and old trees) in the church area, floor fountain in the central part of the market square;</li> <li>➤ <b>accessibility:</b> introducing a residential zone in the square, lowering kerbs to eliminate architectural barriers for the disabled;</li> <li>➤ <b>eco-friendly/climate change solutions:</b> as part of the task, street lighting was replaced with energy-efficient LED luminaries. Replacement of the street lighting reduced energy consumption and carbon dioxide emissions, which has a positive effect on environmental protection;</li> <li>➤ <b>identity:</b> a priority of the revitalization was to emphasize the character of Dobrodzień as a town of carpenters. To this end, appropriate materials (natural wood) were used. A logotype promoting the town and municipality was also placed in the central part of the square, together with the inscription „DOBRODZIEŃ - MIASTO STOLARZY” („TIMBER TOWN”). The wooden elements of the so-called 'street furniture' were made in the local carpenter's workshop, one of the oldest continuously operating carpentry workshops in Dobrodzień; religious figures baroque figures and religious content, fountain in the location of the former well, restoration of the rectangular market square (previously cut by a road); historical elements and structures: 3 figures of religious content, a free-standing 19<sup>th</sup> c. church; cobblestone surface.</li> </ul> <p>The project made minimal use of natural resources, in the amount necessary for the task (water). In addition, the town fountain constructed on the square has a closed water circulation system, which improves the microclimate of the surrounding area, but also reduces the use of water to a minimum. As a result of the project, the resilience of the public space to climate change has been strengthened.</p> <p><b>Results:</b></p> <p>the implementation of the project has had a positive impact on the development of entrepreneurship in the revitalized area, has contributed significantly to the activation and</p>
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	<p>integration of residents through social and cultural activities initiated in the square after revitalization, the levelling of architectural differences and the application of solutions affecting public safety; the project has also improved the quality of life in the public space.</p> <p><b>Source:</b> Materials of the Competition for the Best Public Space of the Opolskie Voivodeship organized by the Marshal of the Opolskie Voivodeship, edition 2021. Site visits (03.05.2021; 22.03.2024)</p>
<p><b>Korfantów</b> seat of the municipality</p>	<p><b>Implementation period:</b> June 2020-December 2022</p> <p><b>Designer:</b> Biuro Projektów Budowlanych PLANBUD Nysa</p> <p><b>Pre-revitalization state:</b> space with 1970s development standards, green square, and car park</p> <p><b>Scope of activity:</b> Project: separation of recreational, pedestrian, and traffic zones; construction of road surface, and parking places, installation of elements of street furniture (benches, street fountain), construction of a fountain in a classic arrangement with a pool, planting of raised and separated granite flowerbeds (hydrangeas, rose beds), planting of trees (column platanus and oaks), adaptation of the square for the organization of local cultural events, events, markets, fairs, and promotion of local artists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>surface:</b> granite slabs and paving stones;</li> <li>➤ <b>street furniture:</b> wood and metal benches, litter bins, bicycle racks, information boards, lamps in historical forms, concrete planters and posts, flagpoles;</li> <li>➤ <b>greenery and water:</b> a fountain with classic pool form, trees with spherical forms on the frontage, trees: plane trees and oaks with the columnar form on flower beds; raised flower beds bordered with granite;</li> <li>➤ <b>accessibility:</b> elimination of basic architectural barriers;</li> <li>➤ <b>eco-friendly/climate change solutions:</b> introduction of blue-green infrastructure with reduced planting in the market square area;</li> <li>➤ <b>identity:</b> none</li> </ul> <p><b>Results:</b> clearly zoned space (recreation and communication), the dominance of stone (granite) in the market space.</p>
	<p><b>Source:</b> Materials of the Competition for the Best Public Space of the Opolskie Voivodeship organized by the Marshal of the Opolskie Voivodeship, edition 2023. Site visits (Korfantów 15.03.2024)</p>



<p><b>Otmuchów</b> seat of the municipality</p>	<p><b>Implementation period:</b> March 2018-May 2019</p> <p><b>Designer:</b> Espeja Biuro Projektowe Kalisz</p> <p><b>Pre-revitalization state:</b> space with a low level of aesthetics, in part dedicated to vehicular traffic.</p> <p><b>Scope of activity:</b> replacement of underground technical infrastructure, new paving</p> <p>Project: renovation of the market square area, which included modernization of road surfaces, replacement of street lighting, and modernization of technical infrastructure. The project was focused mainly on road solutions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>surface:</b> a high percentage of fieldstone, granite slabs, and granite paving blocks, asphalt concrete (roadways);</li> <li>➤ <b>street furniture:</b> minimal range;</li> <li>➤ <b>greenery and water:</b> 2 fountains on the site of former wells; 6 fragments of plantings shown on the project;</li> <li>➤ <b>accessibility:</b> according to information from the competition materials, the revitalized pavements are friendly to people with mobility impairments and people in wheelchairs by adapting the infrastructure to their mobility constraints;</li> <li>➤ <b>eco-friendly/climate change solutions:</b> 4 electric vehicle charging stations planned;</li> <li>➤ <b>identity:</b> resulting from the preservation of the urban tissue: mid-market block with Renaissance town hall, baroque monumental Marian column, 2 fountains placed in a location of historic wells, cobblestone surface.</li> </ul> <p><b>Results:</b> road surfaces and pavements were renovated, technical underground infrastructure modernized, lighting renewed and replaced, and some elements of street furniture and greenery were introduced to a very limited extent.</p> <hr/> <p><b>Source:</b></p> <p>Materials of the Competition for the Best Public Space of the Opole Voivodeship organized by the Marshal of the Opolskie Voivodeship, edition 2019.</p> <p>Site visits (03.09.2019; 25.03.2024)</p>
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<p><b>Paczków</b> seat of the municipality</p>	<p><b>Implementation period:</b> November 2017-July 2019</p> <p><b>Designer:</b> Przedsiębiorstwo Produkcyjno Usługowo Handlowe "Steinbudex - J.M (tender for the execution)</p> <p><b>Pre-revitalization state:</b> a large range of parking places on the periphery of the square, paving, and street furniture of low aesthetic and technical value, including tri-tile and 1970s pots;</p> <p><b>Scope of activity:</b> replacement of underground technical infrastructure, reduction of the number of parking spaces, unification of the surface of the market square, incorporation of elements of street furniture, introduction of new planting, obtaining a representative urban space.</p> <p>Project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>surface:</b> granite slabs, granite paving stones, cobblestones (pebbles);</li> <li>➤ <b>street furniture:</b> oden and metal benches, concrete seats, lampposts with historic forms, concrete flower pots, metal posts/limiters, granite posts with a tourist route "Get to know the history of Paczków", bicycle stands; stone composition/post with a metal cast of the old town (Historical Monument); exposed relic of a former well;</li> <li>➤ <b>greenery and water:</b> high greenery in the town hall area with circular flowerbeds, trees in a sparse row on the north-west and north-east frontage of the square, high greenery partially retained, approx. 25 in total, flowerbed at ground level in the eastern part of the square, fountain of classic form with a pool;</li> <li>➤ <b>accessibility:</b> partly limited due to the terrain: terrain steps due to the location on the slope of the market square, fountain with access via steps;</li> <li>➤ <b>eco-friendly/climate change solutions:</b> bicycle repair station, underground refuse and recycling bin/underground collection chamber, fountain;</li> <li>➤ <b>identity:</b> resulting from the preservation of the urban tissue: mid-market block with the town hall, fountain placed in a location of the historic well, a relic of historic well, cobblestone surface; individually designed surface of the square, new element: bronze 3D model of the old town.</li> </ul> <p><b>Results:</b> sorted out surface, 45 parking lots, attempt to zone the space</p> <p><b>Source:</b> Site visits (18.04.2021; 25.03.2024)</p>
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<p><b>Ujazd</b> seat of the municipality</p>	<p><b>Implementation period:</b> January 2020-May 2022</p> <p><b>Designer:</b> Projekt Plus Architekci Sp. Z o.o. Zabrze</p> <p><b>Pre-revitalization state:</b> asphalt surface, square subordinated to vehicular traffic, main function: parking; location of petrol station, no greenery.</p> <p>The 0.5 ha market is the largest public square in the entire municipality.</p> <p><b>Scope of activity:</b></p> <p>first market square in the country with hundred trees planted; restoration of the size and shape of the square close to the historical one; separation of the parking zone for cars between the rows of trees; elimination of the petrol station with asphalt pavement; introduction of noble materials for the new pavement, elements of street furniture; introduction of individual elements connected with the commune (composition of slabs with the letter U, slabs with a photograph of the names of the villages of the municipality of Ujazd).</p> <p>Zoning: traffic zone; information zone with exhibition, recreation zone with fountain/event area; recreation zone in tree rows;</p> <p>Project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>surface:</b> linear/striped layout inspired by the arrangement of the farmland around Ujazd in the direction of the slope; materials: granite blocks: cut and fractured of varying sizes and textures, granite slabs (Strzegom granite), concrete slabs with the names of the villages forming the municipality, the composition of the letter U as Ujazd;</li> <li>➤ <b>street furniture:</b> architectural concrete benches and tables, display boards, concrete cubicles, flower pots, lanterns;</li> <li>➤ <b>greenery and water:</b> double rows of trees ( formed elm trees) along the periphery of the square with small retention areas and an automatic watering system during the dry season, flowerbeds with red ground-cover roses, boxwood hedges, periwinkle trees, an individually designed fountain with a complex form referring to the former well located in the square;</li> <li>➤ <b>accessibility:</b> provision in the competition materials for accessibility and disability-friendliness;</li> <li>➤ <b>eco-friendly/climate change solutions:</b> 100 trees, flower beds, slowing down rainwater run-off on the slope by using textured materials;</li> <li>➤ <b>identity:</b> individually designed surface of the square with a complex form of fountain referring to historic well, preserved elements of WWI memorial, 100 formed elm trees planted.</li> <li>➤ <b>Result:</b> attractive public space with a multifunctional character and a representative appearance, fostering integration and socio-economic activation, planned events (Maiden Fair and Community Harvest Festival, Entrepreneurship Days, other seasonal events)</li> </ul> <p><b>Source:</b></p> <p>Materials of the Competition for the Best Public Space of the Opolskie Voivodeship organized by the Marshal of the Opolskie Voivodeship, edition 2022.</p> <p>Site visits (27.09.2022; 22.03.2024)</p>
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## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study covered 6 market squares of small towns in the Opolskie Voivodeship. Three towns in the region whose market squares were revitalized after the introduction of the Accessibility Act (Biała, Korfantów, Ujazd) and three towns whose market squares were revitalized before the Act was announced in the years 2016-2019 (Dobrodzień, Otmuchów, Paczków) were selected for analysis.

The research used a mixed method approach - a multiple case study, and qualitative and partly historical-interpretative research. The adopted research method was subdivided into several stages. Firstly a semi-structured literature review was performed. A protocol for this study was developed based on the preferred reporting items for the systematic review and meta-analysis (PRISMA) protocol guidelines [41]. The analysis was limited to studies published after 2000, the full text of which is available, written in English and published in peer-reviewed academic journals or as a monograph or chapter.

The next stage of the research involved conducting a simplified historical and interpretative study to determine selected characteristics and spatial parameters of selected market squares in the context of an analysis of the criterion of the identity of the place and the continuity of its development. To this end, cartographic and other source materials available in national repositories and obtained during previous archive query at the Herder Institute for Historical Research on East Central Europe in Marburg, as well as statistical data published by the Statistics Poland [1], [34] were used.

The main part of the research on the accessibility and adaptation to climate change was a multiple case study analysis including a comparative analysis of morphological structures based on site visits. The material for the analysis was obtained through site visits carried out in each of the 6 market squares in March 2024. Earlier polling visits were conducted between 2019 and 2022. The methodology adopted is customary in architectural, urban, and historical research.

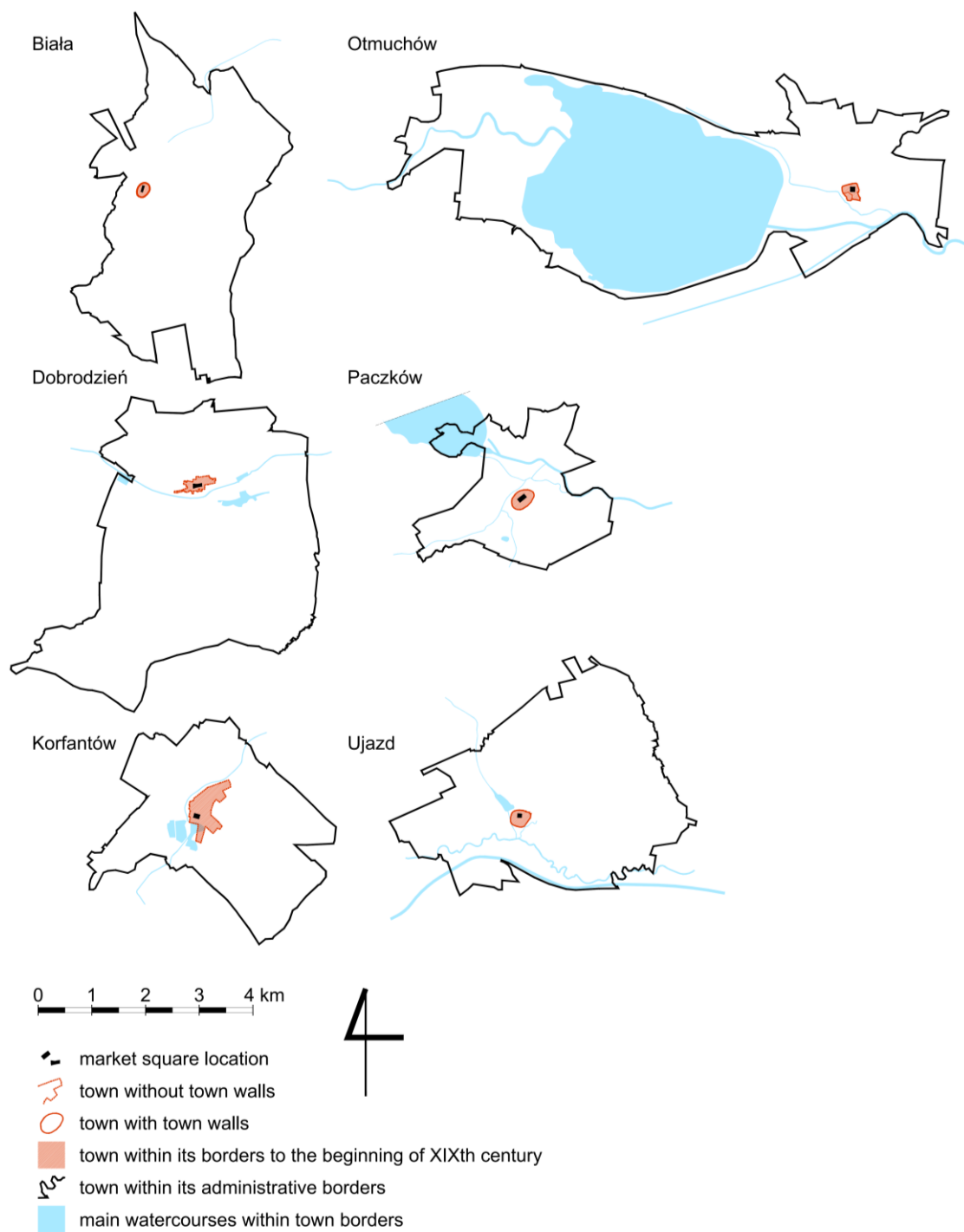


Fig. 1. Location of research areas (market squares) in the context of towns in their historical and present spatial extent. Authors own elaboration based on [35], [36], [37], [38], [39], [40], [40]

### 3. RESULTS

The conducted research has allowed the identification of three basic criteria for evaluating a successful public space in terms of its modern identity. These are elements related to building the identity of a place and the continuity of its development, accessibility, and adaptation to climate change as a favorable living environment. They were divided into three main groups of issues related to the history of local development and urban structure, form and infill, and components of structure and sustainability. This is, of course, a simplification that has to be made to assess the complex phenomenon that makes up the small town's successful public space. In terms of history, the analysed criteria concerned the state of preservation and continuity of the existing historic urban tissue in the area under study as elements of the public realm and its spatial framework. In the case of sustainable development, the analysis concerned the elements of green and blue infrastructure, and its quality and variation, as well as its proportion of impervious surfaces. Form and infill in this case determine the quality and scale of the accessibility of public space for the aging small-town society.

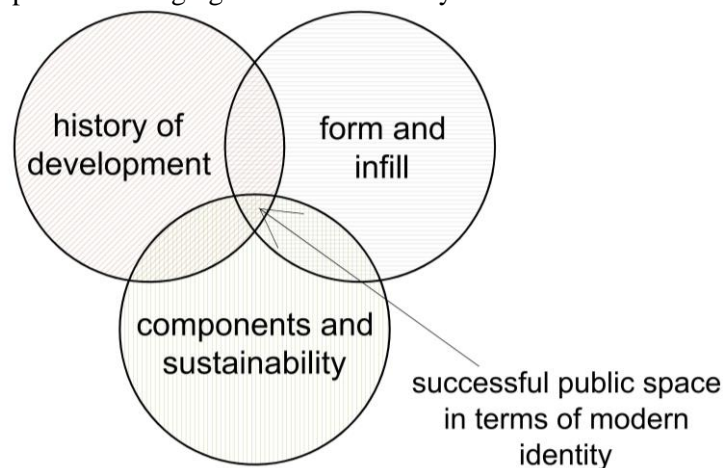


Fig. 2. A scheme of successful public space in terms of building the modern identity of a place. Author's elaboration

As the above analysis shows, with market squares of similar size and the average size of the open area of a square (without taking into account the mid-market block of buildings) being less than 0,8 ha, the amount of greenery introduced in this area ranges from about 3m<sup>2</sup> in the case of the market square in Otmuchów to less than 1,100m<sup>2</sup> in the case of Dobrodzień, with the largest amount of greenery about the total area of the square being located in Korfantów and Dobrodzień and exceeding 10% of the total area of the square. Taking into account the type of greenery introduced (in most cases it is low, ornamental greenery, the trees on the market squares are also small) its environmental value is not very high and it can be treated as a primarily decorative element.

Table 2. Market squares of the analyzed towns - market square, greenery, and water. Authors' elaboration based on data from municipal cadastral databases for each of the towns analysed.

Town (name of the market square)	Market square area [ha]		Green area [m <sup>2</sup> ]		Water facilities [m <sup>2</sup> ]	
	including mid- square development	without mid-square development				
<b>Biała</b> (Rynek)	1,0137	0,8484	144,32	1,42%	10,00	0,10%
<b>Dobrodzień</b> (Plac Wolności)	1,0872	1,0102	1106,91	10,18%	68,24	0,63%
<b>Korfantów</b> (Rynek)	0,4649	0,4649	618,94	13,31%	0,84	0,02%
<b>Otmuchów</b> (Rynek)	0,8227	0,6715	3,15	0,04%	39,67	0,48%
<b>Paczków</b> (Rynek)	1,3397	1,1247	324,42	2,42%	42,54	0,32%
<b>Ujazd</b> (Plac 1 Maja)	0,6605	0,6605	450,85	6,83%	152,84	2,31%
average	0,8981	0,7967	441,43	5,70%	51,43	0,63%



Fig. 3. Location of research areas (market squares) and the access to green and blue infrastructure. Authors' elaboration based on data from municipal cadastral databases for each of the towns analysed

Site visits revealed the presence of water in the form of fountains in the space of the 6 analyzed market squares. Among them, three solutions can be distinguished. A typical floor fountain was used in Dobrodzień. The fountain in Ujazd, modern in form, is an individually designed composition combining a floor type with a rectangular basin recessed into the floor. In Biała, Korfantów, Otmuchów and Paczków, fountains with a classical layout with a frame and an internal shaft from which water gushes out have been introduced. As a result, the largest water surface area was obtained in Ujazd ( $153\text{m}^2/2,3\%$ ), second in order in Dobrodzień ( $68\text{m}^2/0,6\%$ ). Classical fountains yield a much smaller share of water in terms of surface area. At the same time, it should be remembered that these are seasonal solutions in the moderate climate that prevails in Poland.



Table 3. Market squares of the analyzed towns - a type of development and street furniture. Authors' elaboration

Town (name of the market square)	Mid-square development (existence/% of total area)	Type of development	Street furniture: historic (non-existing)	Street furniture: historic (existing)	Street furniture: Contemporary
<b>Biała</b> (Rynek)	+20%	tenement houses	ornamental lanterns	2 religious sculptures with metal fencing	fountain in historic style; wooden benches; lanterns; litter bins; information boards; stone cubes; bike racks; flower pots; season decoration
<b>Dobroźń</b> (Plac Wolności)	+7%	Church (19th c.)	ornamental lanterns; well	3 religious sculptures (church area)	dry plaza type of water fountain; wooden benches; lanterns; litter bins; information boards; signs; stone cubes; low fence; bike racks; flower pots; 2 elements with town name
<b>Korfantów</b> (Rynek)	-	-	monument to the fallen in WWI; well; cobblestone paving	-	modern fountain; historic style well; wooden benches; lanterns; litter bins; information boards; flag masts; signs; stone cubes; metal posts; bike racks; flower pots; elevated flower beds;
<b>Otmuchów</b> (Rynek)	+20%	tenement houses; town hall (16th c.)	ornamental lanterns; 2 fountains with metal fences	religious sculpture (Marian column)	2 modern fountain (historic location & elements); lanterns; signs; metal posts; bike racks; season decoration
<b>Paczków</b> (Rynek)	+14%	tenement houses; town hall (16th +19th)	ornamental lanterns; monument with metal fence; advertising column	-	modern fountain; stone drinking fountain; stone composition with the model of the old town with a metal fence; wooden benches; lanterns; litter bins; information boards; signs; stone posts (tourists route); metal posts; bike racks; steps with balustrade; flower pots; elevated flower beds; season decoration; bicycle repair station; exposed relic of historic well
<b>Ujazd</b> (Plac 1 Maja)	-	-	monument to the fallen in WWI; ornamental lanterns; well; advertising column	-	memorial monument (historic location); modern fountain; concrete benches & tables; lanterns; litter bins; information boards; signs; exhibition walls; stone cubes; poles; bike racks; flower pots; flower beds; season decoration

Three of the analyzed squares do not have preserved elements of historical development within the market square (Ujazd, Paczków, and Korfantów). The element replacing it is often the location of fountains or wells as an element of street furniture, in original (historical) locations but adopting a contemporary form. Despite their relatively small size, most of the markets have been equipped with a block of mid-market buildings, of which in the case of Dobrodzień it is atypically a church, changing the rank of the market to a pre-church square. In the revitalization work, new elements commemorating events from the town's recent history were included or created. There are no obvious differences in this respect over time.

Table 4. Market squares of the analyzed towns - geometry characteristics. Authors' elaboration

Town (name of the market square)	Shape	Dimensions [m]	Area [ha]	Landform	Longitudinal axis orientation in hours [h]	Number of street inlets
<b>Biała</b> (Rynek)	rectangle	127–129 x 80	1,0	flat	12–1	7
<b>Dobrodzień</b> (Plac Wolności)	quadrangle	162 x 57–85	1,0	flat	9	6
<b>Korfantów</b> (Rynek)	quadrangle	84–88 x 53–58	0,5	flat	9–10	4
<b>Otmuchów</b> (Rynek)	rectangle	95 x 86	0,8	sloping (6%)	12	7
<b>Paczków</b> (Rynek)	rectangle	164 x 83	1,4	flat	2	10
<b>Ujazd</b> (Plac 1 Maja)	rectangle	88 x 77	0,7	sloping (4,5%)	~12	7

Four of the six analyzed market squares are regular rectangles, two are quadrangles with varying degrees of regularity. The area of the market squares ranges from approx. 0,5 to 1,4 ha, the smallest of the analyzed squares is the market square in Korfantów and the largest in Paczków. The average area of the analyzed squares is 0,9 ha. 4 of the analyzed market squares are located on flat ground, two on a slope (Otmuchów and Ujazd). In terms of orientation in relation to the world directions, 3 market squares have a longitudinal axis along a north-south direction or in a similar direction (30° deviation to the west and east), and the remaining 3 along an east-west direction or in a similar direction (30° deviation to the south and north).



Biała



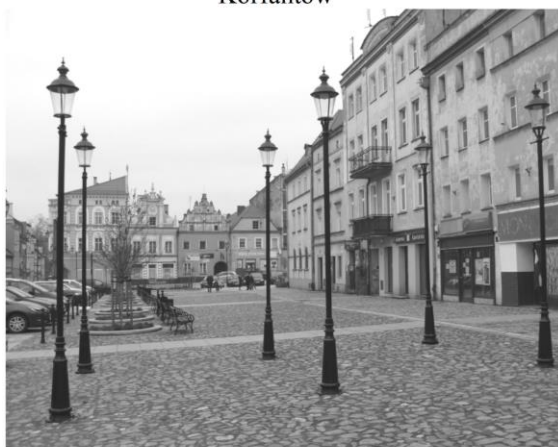
Dobrodzień



Korfantów



Otmuchów



Paczków



Ujazd

Fig. 4. Market squares of the analyzed towns view of the revitalized area and its characteristic elements. Authors' elaboration

## 4. DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Place identity

In the case of the analyzed market squares, the identity of these spaces, according to Kevin Lynch's definition of space identity [2, p.8], is built up by both historical and contemporary development elements. Among the historical elements that have been preserved in the space of the squares, sculptural compositions with religious themes, such as Marian columns and figures of saints, deserve special mention. They were introduced into the space of the market squares during the Baroque period, in connection with the Bohemian influence in Silesia [16, p.199].

One magnificent Marian column is located in the market square of Otmuchów, while statues of St. John Nepomucen and Mary are preserved in the market squares of Biała and Dobrodzień (in the church area). The individual character of the market squares' space is also formed by the fountains. In the late Renaissance and Baroque period a frequent practice was to transform wells into stately fountains to create a representational dimension of the main town square's space [43, p.1]. Two such fountains, with partly contemporary arrangements, enrich the space of the market square in Otmuchów. There are contemporary compositions of fountains: with a classical basin layout in Biała, Korfantów, and Otmuchów), of a modern form in Ujazd, and a dry plaza-type water fountain in Dobrodzień in the space of a further 5 squares included in the analysis. The presence of fountains in urban public space not only continues tradition and enhances the aesthetics of the square, but is also very important in the context of climate change and the urban heat island effect.

An important compositional element of the space of Silesian market squares was, unfortunately now mostly non-existent, monuments dedicated to those killed in WWI. A now-transformed monument of this nature is located in the market square of Ujazd. Unfortunately, the monument in Korfantów, which featured prominently in the space of this market square, no longer exists.

Among the elements of contemporary development of the analyzed squares, apart from the above-mentioned fountains, which appeared as an effect of the revitalization activities and built a new identity referring to the cultural heritage or economic traditions of the analyzed squares, there are also unique fixtures representing the local history. A spatial composition with a metal model of the unique old town layout of Paczków accompanied by the exposed relic of an old well, a wooden spatial element with the name of the town referring to the carpentry traditions of Dobrodzień, a composition in the surface based on the repeated shape of the letter U referring to the name of the town of Ujazd. The use of fragments of cobblestone paving in the market squares of Biała, Otmuchów, and Paczków is also a reference to the historical and traditional paving of the square slab.

A worrying phenomenon observed in the context of the effects of market squares' revitalization leading to the weakening of their identity is the unification of some of the arrangement's solutions of the squares, including the use of typical elements of street furniture or common introduction of dry plaza type water fountain [26, p.15].

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

### 5.1 Revitalization

The revitalization activities of the analyzed market squares were carried out between 2019 and 2022 (Biała and Paczków: 2019; Dobrodzień and Otmuchów: 2019; Korfantów and Ujazd: 2022). The scope of the main activities was primarily the modernization of the underground technical infrastructure, the zoning of the square (zones: leisure/recreation, pedestrian and vehicular traffic, cultural and sporting events), the ordering and limitation of parking in the market square area, the introduction of new paving

of the slab, the roadway with parking lots and pavements, the incorporation of elements of street furniture and the introduction of plantings. The priority objective of the revitalization of the market squares of the Opole region included in the study was to create an attractive public space with a multi-functional character and a representative appearance, conducive to integration and socio-economic activation and the organization of cultural and sporting events. It should be remembered that the market squares of small towns are usually the only squares in their structure, often also the largest public squares of the municipalities in which they are located.

One of the main problem areas in the space of the market squares before the revitalization measures was over-permitted parking along the roadway and in the area of the square. The analysis included in the study showed an arrangement and restriction of parking in the market square area. In most of the squares, parking is allowed within the designated area around the slab, only in Korfantów a part of the slab has been designated for parking.

As far as the solutions for the new paving of the market squares included in this study are concerned, the site visits carried out show the predominant use of noble stone materials of high aesthetics and durability. The predominant solutions are granite slabs (including Strzegom's granite) and cut and flaked granite blocks of various sizes; concrete slabs and blocks are in the minority. A solution referring to the historical development of market squares is the use of cobblestone paving in 4 market squares (except for Korfantów and Ujazd). In Biała "cobblestones" are located in the zone of recreation and historical monuments, in Dobrodzień in the zone of St. Mary Magdalene Church, in Otmuchów and Paczków their share in the total paving is significant. Market square pavement compositions use a division into squares (Dobrodzień, Otmuchów, Paczków) or the stripped arrangement (Biała, Ujazd). The pavement of the Ujazd market square is noteworthy for its linear layout and the high variety of materials used, inspired by the strip pattern of farmland around the town.

The analysis of the elements of street furniture introduced within the space of the researched market squares shows the frequent use of typical, catalog solutions of benches (wooden and metal), litter bins, street lamps of historic forms as well as pots and cubes made of architectural concrete. Only in Ujazd have benches and tables made of architectural concrete been introduced, composed of pots and cubicles made of the same material. Among the individually designed elements, the wooden form/logotype promotes the town and municipality and refers to the tradition of Dobrodzień's carpentry traditions or the composition of panels with the letter U and panels with a photo-engraving of the names of the villages of the Ujazd municipality deserve special attention.

In the context of the blue-green infrastructure in the square space, the presence of water introduced into the market squares in the form of fountains should be positively evaluated. Often fountains are located in the place of or near former wells (Biała, Otmuchów, Paczków) or refer to their presence in the market space (Ujazd). In Dobrodzień a typical floor fountain was installed, and in Korfantów a fountain with a classic pool arrangement. The fountains enhance the aesthetic value of the space in which they are located and build its attractiveness. The movement of water improves the well-being of people in their surroundings, has a positive effect on their psyche, and can also contribute to lowering the air temperature in hot weather and improving acoustic comfort.

Given the market squares' function in the past, the presence of greenery in their space was usually limited to rows of small trees along the frontage and composed greenery accompanying monuments or tall greenery in the good zone. Nowadays, market squares are transforming into a multifunctional space containing also a recreational function. The presence of greenery given these transformations and needs as well as in the context of climate change and the urban heat island phenomenon is important. The site visits carried out showed the forms of greenery introduced in the revitalization activities. These include flowerbeds at ground level (Biała, Dobrodzień, Paczków, Ujazd) or elevated with a stone border (Korfantów). Flower beds present in most of the market squares have become popular. As far as high

greenery is concerned, the market square in Ujazd stands out, where 100 trees (double rows of trees/formed elm trees) have been planted along the edges of the market plate. Also worthy of mention are the old trees in the church area of the market square in Dobrodzień and new plantings in the area of the slab margins. In Korfantów, a small number of columnar plane trees and oak trees have appeared in the new market square arrangement, and small trees with spherical forms have appeared along the frontage. More than 20 trees are incorporated into the space of the market square in Paczków. The least amount of tall greenery is found in the market square in Biała. A visit to the market square in Otmuchów revealed a virtually complete lack of greenery in this square.

Among the environmentally friendly solutions used are:

- ✓ Biała: keeping the truck transit ban; maintaining bus stops as an element of public transport; introducing elements favoring bicycle tourism; introducing blue-green infrastructure (fountain and low and high planting);
- ✓ Dobrodzień: replacement of street lighting with energy-efficient LED luminaires. Replacement of lighting reduced energy consumption and carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere, which has a positive effect on environmental protection; the municipal fountain operates in a closed water cycle system, which improves the microclimate of the environment and reduces water use; introduction of blue-green infrastructure (fountain and low and high planting);
- ✓ Korfantów: small-scale introduction of blue-green infrastructure;
- ✓ Paczków: bicycle repair station; underground waste bin for municipal and segregated waste/underground collection chamber; introduction of blue-green infrastructure to a small extent;
- ✓ Ujazd: slowing down rainwater runoff on the slope by using textured materials; planting of 100 trees.

## 5.2. Accessibility

The site visits carried out allowed a preliminary assessment of the accessibility of the revitalized market squares. In general, the changes in the arrangement of road traffic in the market areas should be assessed positively. As a result of the revitalization, parking spaces have been located along the square slab edges (except Korfantów and Otmuchów), consistently organized and partially limited, with designated spaces for people with disabilities; additionally, in Dobrodzień a space for families with children has been designed.

It seems questionable to allow parking between the new tree plantings in Ujazd, without designated parking spaces. Reduced curbs have been introduced at pedestrian crossings, which are highlighted with, among other things, grey and black strips of granite blocks or strips of different textures. In Biała, pedestrian crossings are additionally provided with attention areas, and solutions to assist visually impaired people.

In the area of the analyzed market squares, the lighting infrastructure has been upgraded, as a result of which the space is well-lit after dusk and safe for all its users. New surfaces made of stone materials with a rough and non-slip surface (e.g. flamed granite slabs) make it easier for people with disabilities and special needs to move around. The use of fieldstone paving (so-called cobblestone) on relatively large parts of the market square in Otmuchów and Paczków on the one hand alluding to historical solutions, on the other - hinders mobility and limits accessibility. In the case of the market square in Otmuchów, the problem is reinforced by its location on land with a 6% slope. Also, a part of the market square in Paczków is located on a slope; the terrain stairs and retaining walls in this area limit accessibility. A good solution for the slab's surface given its location on a slope (with lanes perpendicular to the slope) was applied in the market square in Ujazd.

Worthy mentioning is the delineated recreational zone in Biała, Dobrodzień, Paczków, and Ujazd either in the form of a strip in the central part of the slab or peripherally. In Otmuchów this function is absent, and in Korfantów it is limited to the fountain area.

The site visits also revealed a certain lack of coordination in the location of individual types of street furniture, e.g. a collision was observed between some of the benches and information boards or lamp posts (Biała, Ujazd). Also, the introduction of too many elements of street furniture such as flower pots, concrete/stone cubes or cuboids, information boards, or the metal fence of the two fountains in Otmuchów reduces the legibility of the development and, as a result, accessibility, especially for the visually impaired.

All market squares were transformed after the Revitalisation Act (2015) came into force. An analysis of the solutions applied in the revitalization projects of the surveyed market squares does not indicate a noticeable change in approach linked to the coming into force of the Accessibility Act (2019).

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