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## MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE LANDSCAPE OF THE SMALL CITY

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### ZABUDOWA WIELORODZINNA W KRAJOBRAZIE MAŁEGO MIASTA

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#### Abstract

The small city is a relatively well examined and widely described subject in literature. Usually, the urban structure of the small city is considered in relation to its original and historical spatial layout with juxtaposition of all subsequent developments in relation to the historical core of given settlement. The article attempts to identify various systems of urban structures in which one of the elements is a group or a single multi-family residential building, examine internal and external scenic relations and determine their impact on the landscape of the small city.

**Keywords:** city, small city, multi-family development, urban landscape

#### Streszczenie

Małe miasta jako problem urbanistyczny to zagadnienie stosunkowo dobrze rozpoznane i szeroko opisane w literaturze przedmiotu. Zwykle strukturę urbanistyczną miasteczek rozpatruje się w odniesieniu do genezy i budowy historycznego (pierwszego) układu przestrzennego, wszelkie późniejsze interwencje oceniając w odniesieniu do historycznego trzonu badanej jednostki osadniczej. W artykule podjęto próbę identyfikacji różnych układów struktur miejskich, w których jednym z elementów jest zespół lub pojedynczy obiekt zabudowy mieszkaniowej wielorodzinnej, a następnie zbadano relacje widokowe wewnętrzne i zewnętrzne oraz określono ich wpływ na krajobraz małego miasta.

**Słowa kluczowe:** małe miasto, miasteczko, zabudowa wielorodzinna, krajobraz miejski

## 1. Introduction

The small city is a relatively well examined and widely described subject in literature. The widespread existence of small cities as units in the settlement structure in Poland, causes persistent interest in them as research subjects in geographical [2, 7, 5], urban or landscape studies [15, 1, 6, 10]. It is worth noting that existing literature often focuses on the historical aspect of the existence of small settlements, and considers issues of development and functional/spatial transformation of small cities from the point of view of the fine development with a distinct market square [15, 1, 8].

It seems that the above-mentioned features are most often present in the smallest units, called little towns by Wejchert. Considering the size of these settlements, the background and foreground of harmonic view panoramas are clearly visible and they become the scenery for historical central zones, roofs and towers of town halls or churches. The little town is a small community which functions on the basis of a long-existing sense of identity based on memory, identification and consciousness. The values as well as cultural, social and economic characteristics of such a community are different from those of a big city.

It is worth noting that small settlements are no longer charming old towns and their functional structure has changed. Apart from single-family housing and small industrial units, these structures now consist of multi-family buildings (detached or formed in groups) and large commercial/service buildings, warehouses, storage facilities, industrial and production facilities. These transformations, particularly the implementation of multi-family development, are often described as dysfunctions eradicating small city landscapes. Unified apartment blocks constructed in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which were often built in comb layouts, are now presented as destructive elements to the images and identities of places [3, 13] and also as a detriment to the skylines. At the same time, existing groups of multi-family buildings have in fact become integral elements of urban structures. The acceptance of 'large cubature' development is easier when one realises how small city units transformed in recent years. Only the units omitted by transformations have kept their historical structure and silhouette. Changes of architectural characteristics primarily took place during the socialism period, when new forms of residential development appeared even in small villages (multi-family buildings) and advanced during the political transformation period, when such development continued within zones under the influence of large cities.

## 2. Characteristics of small city landscape

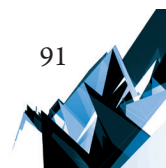
One of the best-known definitions of the small city is given by S. Gzell, who wrote that it is a settlement unit with the following features: small spatial dimensions, a defined and clearly marked area and a close connection to the landscape. As indispensable elements of small cities, the historical aspect and the tradition of the spatial layout are presented, along with the historical formation of the role of the capital of a certain area, the interior aspect of the layout and the scale of the city, which determines the short-distance visibility [6]. This definition

coexists in full accordance with the concept of urban landscape as a meta-concept, which is superior to the constructed environment and is a conglomeration of cultural elements and natural variables in time [4]. This idea was extended by J. Nyka, who interpreted urban space as a specific landscape associated with the narrative of the road. The prospect of receiving urban structure in motion instigated the perception of the city in a formally undetermined and topographic manner, where the dynamics of the natural environmental interactions and the social interactions became important elements of reception [9].

The contemporary small city is not merely an idealistic vision of a historical skyline surrounded by nature. It seems that transformations which take place over time have caused the need of redefining the small city landscape paradigm. This can be seen on the example of some Polish cities transformed during the modernism period (mainly socialist modernism), with their spaces finally devastated in the transformation period (1989 onwards), where the lack of coordinated spatial planning and the continuity of planning decisions, legalisation of illegal constructions and, above all, the priority of spatial management over spatial planning caused irreversible changes to the shape of small cities.

Apart from the geographical and morphological interpretations that refer to hard data such as the number of inhabitants, the administrative status or various quantitative indicators, one can attempt to outline the framework describing small cities from the point of view of identification and perception (with elements of valorisation) of the urban landscape of this settlement unit.

Based on Gzell's definition, the contemporary small city has a limited area and height and is not necessarily clearly defined in space (e.g. Boguchwała, Podkarpackie Province). Another principle is the fact that the city usually functions in connection with the natural landscape (sometimes in a limited way, e.g. small cities of the Upper Silesian Industrial District (GOP) which are elements of an industrial conurbation). This example indicates that the small city landscape does not require references made to surrounding agricultural areas. The necessity of the existence of the impact of the city-forming factor on the plasticity of the city, the fragmentation of plots resulting from inheritance, the quarter development as well as the presence of buildings and complexes of a semi-rural nature have devalued over time. Today, buildings that are an integral part of small cities do not differ from those of large cities, or even metropolitan centres, and include: multi-family residential buildings, large shopping centres and industrial plants architecturally created according to the corporate archetype. Other contested features are "[...] tradition and history of the spatial arrangement; the interiority of the system: streets shaped as an interior with annexes derived from the irregularity of the plan, the integrity of interior enclosures [...]" [6]. There are small cities without any historical core (e.g. Nowa Dęba, Nowa Sarzyna, Podkarpackie Province; Poniatowa, Lubelskie Province). These were established in basic locations as factory residential estates for large industrial investments of the Second Republic (1919–1939), and eventually, they transformed into self-sufficient urban units. The cores of these cities are estates consisting of multi-storey apartment blocks without strictly formed enclosed interiors [11, 12].



### 3. Relations between functional/spatial zones in selected small cities of the Podkarpackie Province

In order to identify landscapes in relation to their location and type of multi-family development in the spatial structure of small cities, cartographic materials such as orthophoto maps were analysed and field inventory procedures were conducted.

The research identified the following four basic types of multi-family development in small city structures of the Podkarpackie Province (Table 1):

- ▶ single 'islands' located outside the main core of the city, which remains historical and traditional;
- ▶ boundary development present in quarters designated by the historical urban street layout, which complements previously integrated frontages;
- ▶ large groups of housing estates (structural units), which dominate over small tenement or single-family detached architecture;
- ▶ development which is the core of a settlement unit (the oldest part, a city-forming factor).

The above-mentioned types of development are the most common and reflect typical relations of functional/spatial zones. During the examination of small city structures in the Podkarpackie Province, one can also find conglomerate units of various types, and also cities where multi-family development is absent or too limited to affect the cityscape.

Table 1. Basic types of multi-family development in small city structure (own study)

	Type	Characteristics of the	City
I	island	single 'islands' located outside the main core of the city, which remains historical and traditional	Sokołów Małopolski Głogów Małopolski Kańczuga
II	frontage	boundary development present in quarters designated by the historic urban street layout, which complements previously integrated frontages	<b>Dukla</b> Błażowa Kolbuszowa
III	housing estate	large groups of housing estates (structural units), which dominate over small tenement or single-family detached architecture	<b>Ropczyce</b> Łańcut Przeworsk Leżajsk
IV	core	development which is the core of settlement unit (the oldest part, city formation factor)	<b>Nowa Dęba</b> Nowa Sarzyna

For the purpose of this study, drafts of selected small cities have been prepared (Sokołów Małopolski, Dukla, Ropczyce and Nowa Dęba), with the indication of possible view openings that are directed towards parts of urban structures with a multi-family development character. Urban units selected for this simplified visual analysis vary in terms of their natural, cultural, communicational and compositional conditions. Above all, they are represented in relation to spatial structures and reflect all four types of spatial structure connections.

The cityscape of Sokołów Małopolski (Fig. 1 – I) is dominated by the ordered pattern of small tenement houses and single-storey houses that form frontages. The central part of this compact urban structure, which is listed in the heritage registry, is a large market

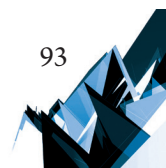
square (around 150 x 150 m), which is unfortunately overgrown with plants. The eastern frontage is the most transformed. Outside of the square, but in its immediate vicinity, there is a Roman Catholic church in the south, which forms the main dominant feature of the system. North of the square there is a building of a former synagogue, and next to it there are modernist department stores clearly standing out of the surrounding. Buildings of larger dimensions are located only on the northern periphery on the outskirts of the city, about 600 m from the market square and include schools, a swimming pool, a food discount store, a furniture warehouse and a small group of four apartment blocks built in a comb layout. The 40-m-long blocks are constructed in large slab technology and consist of five storeys and five staircases each.

**The island** of multi-family development is, by its size, clearly distinguishable from the background of small single-family houses and similar-scale service facilities. Due to its location next to a national road that goes through the city, these buildings become the second plan of 'the gate to the city' (Fig. 1, view A), and in the case of further perspectives, they become the main plan (Fig. 1, view C). Currently, the main transit route is national road, while on the west side of the city, a ring road is under construction. After completion of the investment, the island of multi-family blocks will be the most important dominant feature and landmark of the city, which will significantly affect the skyline of this old settlement.

Dukla (Fig. 1 – II) is a city located in a mountain landscape, which affects the spatial exposure of its structural elements. The urban structure together with the market square is located in the valley and only one national road leads to the city. Dukla does not have a ring road. The central part of the city is a small market square (around 90 x 55 m), with the city hall in the middle. The square is surrounded by two-storey tenement houses. The entry road to the city is also lined with two-storey tenement houses, which gives the town the impression of importance. Despite its urban layout, it is not protected by any form of legal protection, the city structure is dominated by order and harmony. This is evident on the example of the existing blocks of multi-family development, which are oriented in such a way that they imitate the walls of a quarter development. The multi-family development is located in the southern part of the city, and consists of two- and five-storey buildings from different periods. The southernmost buildings have sculpted facades, which makes them seem visually more interesting.

Distant scenic exhibitions are virtually impossible. The buildings are raised in accordance with a quarter development layout and have **frontages** covered with plants. Due to the local topography, the observer can see only close plans (Fig. 1, views D, E, F) and the multi-family development being practically unnoticeable fits perfectly into the cityscape.

In the case of another city, Ropczyce (Fig. 1 – III), the local topography also influences the perception of its cityscape, especially with regard to external sceneries. The settlement of Ropczyce belongs to larger settlement units in the category of 'small cities'. It is located on a hilly and varied terrain. The traditional spatial layout, much like Dukla, is located in the valley, but the modern urban structure has grown to such an extent that the buildings have spread over nearby hills. There are very few historical buildings in the city and those that





are preserved (the Roman Catholic church and several residential and service buildings) are scattered and do not form any group. The majority of the urban structure is comprised of objects constructed after World War II. The reason for this situation is that the majority of pre-war buildings in Ropczyce were wooden buildings and they have not survived. The historical spatial layout (recognisable in the street layout) includes a market square, which does not seem to be an important spot for the observer, due to the random modernist and postmodernist buildings surrounding it. Moreover, the shape of the market square is disturbed by expanding its scope up to the dominant features of the layout (a church). Multi-family development groups are located both in the urban structure (in the western part) and on the hills on the outskirts – such as the Górka Ropczycka. In the city centre structure, they have the island character, whereas in the higher parts of the city, the buildings form **housing estates** in the landscape style. Long five-storey blocks are built in lines and their layout follows the terrain in cascades. In between them, there are lines of tower blocks of similar height.

Ropczyce is a unit that is sufficiently large and dispersed for multi-family buildings to be analysed with regard to both internal and external sceneries. In the case of internal sceneries (Fig. 1, view K), the islands of multi-family development form a certain breach in the landscape, but the spatial chaos of the city in question is so evident that they do not diverge from the surroundings. In the case of external sceneries, view openings at the western entrance to the city were studied (Fig. 1 – I), where the multi-family development creates a gate and makes the observer unaware that they are entering the small city. The distant plan views from the ring road

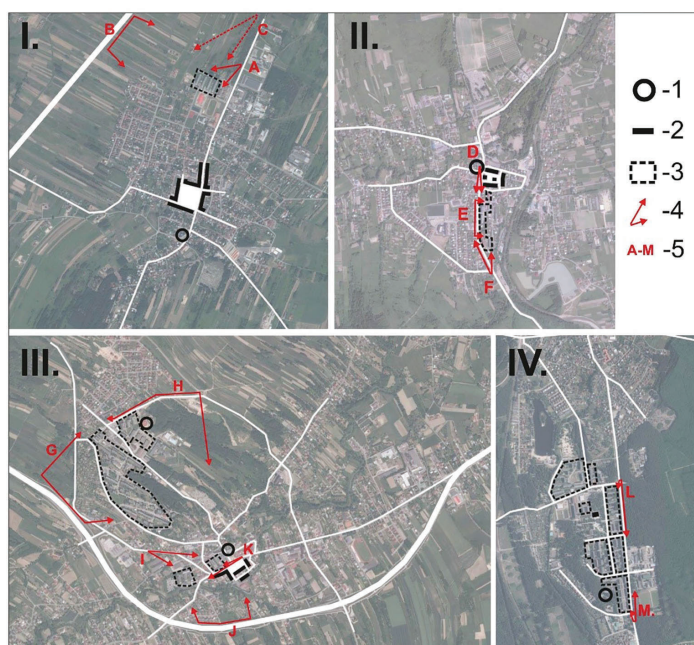


Fig. 1. Outlines of selected small cities, I – Sokółów Małopolski, II – Dukla, III – Ropczyce, IV – Nowa Dęba. Markings: 1 – the main dominant feature of the system, 2 – market square frontages, 3 – multi-family housing development areas, 4 – view openings, 5 – views described in the text (own elaboration based on orthophoto maps taken from the geoportal, 2019)

(national road) (Fig. 1, views H, J, G) were also studied. Distant plan views on the cityscape are often intended for passers-by. In this case, due to the local topography and the location of buildings on the hills, the development dominates over the small buildings of the city, overwhelming and obscuring them. The multi-family development in the landscape style, forms a kind of wall that makes the city seems to be uninteresting and not worthy of attention.

An entirely different type of city is Nowa Dęba (Figs. 1 – 4). This modern city owes its existence to the regaining of the independence of Poland and to the location of the Central Industrial District in the eastern part of the country (central Poland at the time). The industrial plant and the first apartment blocks were built in the interwar period, but the defined urban structure and its specific quasi-quarters were laid out in the period of socialist realism. Meandering-quarter patterns of five-storey residential buildings form the **core** of the city, which is also its oldest part and is usually associated with old tenement houses and a centrally located market square. In the case of Nowa Dęba, the square was formed secondarily by transforming the fragment of the Municipal Forest, which explains the lack of characteristic frontages and makes the interior rather objective. Apart from the core, the city consists of residential estates built in subsequent years in comb and comb-fan layouts. The multi-family core of the city is surrounded by modern single-family development. The typical feature of cities that were established in basic locations, as a part of COP investment, is their location in dense forest areas, which clearly limits the boundaries of the development.

The location of the city in the forest causes limitation of its visibility from distant schemes. The city does not have a ring road, so the main view openings are located at the entrances to the dense urban structure (Fig. 1, views L, M). From these perspectives, multi-family development systems seem to be attractive. The organised modernist and socialist realism complexes, including service shops on the ground level, are rhythmical, calm and have static composition. The curve of impressions of such patterns is not very diverse, but it can be an asset in ubiquitous contemporary spatial chaos.

#### 4. Summary

The multi-family housing development within the structure of small cities has existed for many years. Literature concerning small cities has mainly offered publications on their origin, history and spatial changes over different historical periods, where small cities are identified with picturesque market squares and organic development. Multi-family buildings appear as single units or in groups, and similar to large commercial buildings, are sometimes considered dysfunctions or a source of harm to the cityscapes of small settlement units. Undoubtedly, an incorrectly located group of objects that have significantly different sizes or contrast with the existing cityscape and dominant features of the city may negatively affect the spatial perception of the city. This also means that such a situation may have an impact upon economic relations, local marketing as well as on living standards of the city. This article was an attempt to identify various systems of urban structures where one of the elements is a group or a single object of multi-family housing development. After examining the scenic relations, it was found that it is feasible to determine the type of relationship between positive and negative elements, depending on

the location and nature of the development, and the distances and locations of the view points and view plans see above note re use of 'plans'. Further research in this respect may lead to the development of methods of functional, compositional and spatial shaping of urban structures, which may allow the controlled creation of the harmonious landscape of the small city.

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