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POLAND IN EUROPEAN SPACE: THE URBAN PERSPECTIVE

The paper assesses the state and conditions of the development of Polish cities in the context of processes and issues that occur in the cities of highly developed European countries. The latter, particularly those located at the very core of Europe, enter a new phase of development. Interconnected through networks of various links, the countries form economically integrated urban spaces characterised by the highest competitive potential in the global economy, at the same time losing their nature of self-contained, self-standing socio-economic systems. The author describes the underlying processes, pointing to the fact that they are visible in Poland, but rather not yet advanced. Poland is a country of retarded urbanisation with insufficiently competitive in Europe economic base of cities, quite well-developed human capital, but with mediocre social capital and low quality urban space. The main challenges of Polish cities' development are outlined from the perspective of European integration, including a discussion of the most common visions of European cities of the 21st century, in the context of developmental aims and ways to attain them.

Introduction

The advancement of urbanisation processes, economic power of cities, their social capital and cultural potential, institutional capacity and quality of the urban space are all fair manifestations of the development level of both countries and regions. In the era of economic globalisation, they largely determine their development prospects. In this perspective, a review of Polish cities seen against the European background can be a pertinent element in appraising Poland's role in European space. Such a review, however, exceeds the scope of this paper and the state of research concerning Polish cities.¹ I would only like to offer a number of my opinions on the situation and development conditions of Polish cities in the context of processes and problems encountered in the cities of the wealthy European countries, and in view of some visions of the European city in the 21st century. In this, I draw on the achievements of the Congress of Polish Town Planners, organised in September 2003 in Gdańsk by the Polish Town Planners Association (*Miasto... 2003*), the Congress of Polish Cities held in autumn 2003 (*I Kongres... 2003*), Hall and

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Pfeiffer's report, delivered at the Berlin URBAN 21 conference (Hall, Pfeiffer 2002), and the preparatory work on the New Charter of Athens, proclaimed in Lisbon by the European Council of Town Planners in November 2003 (*The New Charter...* 2003).

Role of Polish cities in the development of European cities

Regardless of their distinct individual features, European cities show a similarity in their paths of development resulting from common civilisational circumstances. Their development was neither linear nor monotonic, and seldom harmonious. Nonetheless, throughout their history, cities usually remained relatively self-contained, self-standing social and economic systems, regardless of their hierarchical or horizontal links with other cities and their direct vicinity, which was usually rural in character. Conurbations which evolved mainly in mining areas can be seen as exceptions to this rule. Owing to an accumulation of cultural codes from successive civilisational epochs, European cities have retained their identity and diversity in a way that remains unparalleled anywhere in the world.

At the same time, numerous diagnoses of European cities produced mainly in the last decades of the 20th century indicate that cities of Europe are facing disintegration, accompanied by a loss of identity and stability. They emphasize that cities are increasingly suffering from:

- social disintegration, affecting the family, neighbours, workplace and urban communities, as well as relations between the city and its region;
- economic disintegration manifesting itself in a hiatus between enterprises and financial institutions operating in global networks and the local economy;
- spatial disintegration caused by the collapse of functional and spatial structures existing in the city and a chaotic sprawl of urban development into the surrounding areas.

It is stressed that elements which are becoming weakened include: a sense of historic continuity of the city's community and its culture, a sense of attachment to the form of the urban space, and historical ties with the region. Concerns are expressed about the stability of cities in the face of their growing dependence on external factors, sometimes occurring on a global scale, which leads to a sense of insecurity and lack of independence, as well as reduced confidence in the city as a socio-political entity capable of defending its distinct identity, accepted system of beliefs and economic standing. This, in turn, invited the questions on the character of a contemporary city, the ownership of the city and whether such a phenomenon as the city will survive in the global economy, information society and an increasingly amorphous town planning (Sassen 1998).

It has to be pointed out, however, that the city is a dissipative structure (Domański 2000), whose development is evolutionary only at some stages. In the face of substantial changes in its surroundings, the city undergoes a deep

transformation process to enter a new development stage. In fact, every epoch in the history of civilisation produced a new type of the city, based on different economic foundations, social and political structures and manner of the organisation of the urban space than before.

European cities are currently entering a new stage of development, in which the distinct character of individual cities is waning, and they are departing more and more from the Weberian ideal (Weber 2002), but this does not mean that the phenomenon of the city is doomed to disappear. Cities which are mutually connected by networks of different kinds of relations create a continuum in the form of polycentric – though still amorphous – urban areas and zones of intensive urban development. Such a new urban space, in a way that is most easily visible in the EU core countries, is created by economically integrated areas with the strongest competitive capacity in the global economy. In such areas, rural settlements and rural areas perform urban functions and provide housing for the population employed outside agriculture, which renders the division of space into urban and rural even less legitimate. At the same time, the monocentric and coarse spatial structure of classical cities is disappearing. Cities are merging into an increasingly continuous, multipolar and multifunctional urbanised space. In such a space, they become city centres rather than cities – merely hubs of contacts and service activities, and not self-contained socio-economic systems (*ESDP... 1999*).

Instead of a hierarchical settlement structure underpinned by a specific territorial structure of social and economic ties, a network-based structure is emerging, where geographical vicinity plays a lesser and lesser role (Jałowicki 2001). Although there exists a hierarchy of structure hubs created by the cities, it is flattened, unlike the hierarchy which is typical of traditional European settlement patterns. The main hubs in the structure are metropolises which concentrate the decision-making and control functions of the economy, specialised producer services, as well as centres for the production and diffusion of knowledge and innovation. At the same time, the placement of production and distribution functions and services for the population which previously showed strong concentration tendencies is now more and more unrestrained. Nonetheless, zones of intensive urbanisation are emerging which connect the metropolises with one another, while cities located far from metropolises and intensive urbanisation zones are threatened with marginalisation – unless they have some unique and desirable assets.

This new stage of urban development is a result of many interdependent processes, which mainly include:

- changes in the structure, technology and organisation of production activities, increasing their freedom and location criteria, reducing the impact of the ‘economies of scale’, thus allowing for deconcentration of industry and spatial division of individual components of the production process, which helps to increase labour productivity and, as a result, leads to a reduction of employment in industry;

- changes in the technology and organisation of agricultural production and food processing, which have reduced employment in agriculture to a small percentage of alle employed people and have led to a decreased demand for agricultural land;
- rapid progress in technology and development of infrastructure for transport and information transmission; this results in the decrease of unit costs and reduction of the time needed to transport goods and transmit information;
- growing concentration of business activities in the hands of multinational corporations;
- increased demand for financial brokerage services and services for producers, and their concentration in decision and control centres of the economy;
- efforts taken by cities to enhance their attractiveness and, at the same time, to ensure resistance to changes in the operation of powerful economic actors through strengthening ties between cities;
- increased inconvenience and higher costs of living and of business operations in crowded cities.

Although most of the above listed processes can be observed in Poland, they are not considerably advanced as yet. Polish cities have still a long way to go before they will enter the new stage of urban development outlined above. This stage is invariably preceded by attaining a high level of urbanisation by the regions and the country as such, as well as a high quality by most cities. The problem that Polish cities are facing is that the processes referred to above are taking place in a situation when the agrarian civilisation is not, as yet, a song of the past in some parts of the country, and the belated industrial civilisation has not reached a sufficiently high level.

Polish cities do have a European origin. Their development, however, has followed a path similar to that taken by Western European cities only in the western and northern part of the country and only until the outbreak of World War II. Urban development in the territory of the First Republic of Poland, particularly in the areas which were occupied by Russia following the partitions, was less fortuitous, and occurred in less favourable economic, political and social circumstances. In relation to Western European countries, Poland is a country of delayed urbanisation and enormous disparities in this regard. In the voivodships (provinces) of Silesia (*Śląskie*) and Upper Silesia (*Dolnośląskie*), the urban population exceeds 70 per cent of the total population, while the rate of employment in agriculture is under 15 per cent. At the same time, in the Lubelskie, Świętokrzyskie or Podkarpackie voivodships less than a half of the population live in cities, with the share of employment in agriculture exceeding 50 per cent (if we include owners of subsistence farms). To complete the picture, the subregions of Biała Podlaska, Chełm and Zamość, and Krosno and Zamość have the lowest GDP and value-added levels per capita, and the Lubelskie voivodship is the region with the lowest GDP per capita in the enlarged European Union (European Commission 2004).

The rapid industrialisation of the country in the years 1950–75 proved to be structurally mistaken, costly and ineffective. Not only did it fail to produce a substantial reduction in the spatial disparities concerning the level of urbanisation, but it also fashioned the economic foundations of cities in a way which makes them uncompetitive in Europe. In 2002, the value of the relation between exports of goods and services to GDP in Poland was the worst among all the countries joining the EU, and the value of exports per capita was three times lower than in the Czech Republic and Hungary. In addition to that, many cities were made dependent on the industrial plants which are today going bankrupt, and which is the reason for their deep crisis and structural unemployment.

In the period of transformation, despite the dynamic development of market services, the legacy of the former economic and political system can still be felt. The former system limited the functions of cities as centres for the exchange of goods, information and ideas, created a minimal demand for business-environment infrastructure and a tiny though unsatisfied demand for services for the population. In the early 1990s, no city east of the Elbe was perceived as capable of performing the function of a centre for the management of world-open, market economy of a European significance (Hall 1990). Fourteen years after the transition, Warsaw is the only metropolis in Poland which plays a significant role in the European network of metropolises, yet is ranked lower in the hierarchy than Budapest or Prague. Other Polish cities have a merely regional significance and are facing a realistic threat of being overshadowed by foreign metropolises (Ziobrowski 2002; Śleszyński 2002).

The polarisation of development around large cities which can be observed today is interpreted as an increase in the spatial concentration of socio-economic processes in urban and industrial agglomerations, typical of the development stage which is coming to an end in Europe. This process was accelerated as a result of Poland's opening to the global economy, in which large cities (mainly Warsaw) became primary locations for foreign investments, including investments in industry (Furman 2001b). An urban area is quite distinctly emerging only around Warsaw. It is not extensive, however, and the impact of Warsaw on the development of the remaining part of the Mazowieckie voivodship is rather limited. Recent research on the prospects for an integrated development of Polish agglomerations did not reveal the existence of any specific ties or relations between them or the emergence of any zones of more intensive urbanisation and business activity (Kuciński et. al. 2002). Polish cities remain loosely connected socio-economic systems, which practically have no ties with the network of European cities (with a few exceptions).

Major challenges and development factors of Polish cities in view of European integration

Backwarded Polish cities have to compete with other European cities for investments and jobs. Although unemployment affects cities in all European countries, in Polish cities it has crossed the threshold of 20 per cent. Such

a high unemployment rate is mainly due to the need to implement, in a very short time, radical structural changes in the economic base of the cities; liquidation of excessive employment inherited after the former system; low competitiveness of Polish enterprises on the global scene, as well as lack of capital and investment potential.

Due to the shortage of indigenous capital, the main focus of the efforts aimed to attract new investments and create new jobs falls on gaining significant foreign direct investments. This, however, is going to be more and more difficult, because in the global economy capital flows and portfolio investments oriented to deriving profits from the existing production assets rather than to generating new ones are going to grow faster than foreign direct investments (Sassen 1994). Although Poland's share in the value of global FDIs is higher than the share of Poland's GDP in the global GDP, in 1999–2001 it represented only 4.4 per cent of GDP as compared to an average 6.9 per cent in the EU15 and 20.7 per cent in Ireland (European Commission 2004, Table A.2.9), which means that in per capita values it is much lower than in the Czech Republic or Slovakia and, regrettably, has been declining since 2000.

Poland's urban policy needs to make a better use of the cities' own resources, in recognition of the fact that the unlocked indigenous potential of cities was the driving force behind the creation and great activity of SMEs in the initial years of the transformation (Furman 2000). In every city, a market related to exogenous functions is operating alongside a market geared to meeting internal needs. These markets are mutually interdependent and although the market related to exogenous functions has a stronger influence on the city's position and overall dynamics of its development, it is the market related to endogenous services that is, as a rule, the main source of employment and a factor stabilising the city's economy. Creating favourable conditions for the development of the local economy must be treated as an urgent priority by the city authorities, especially because the experiences of the European cities indicate that Poland is also a country where, potentially, enterprises owned by huge corporations can exert a destructive influence on the local economy. Since these enterprises may operate in a way that runs counter to the city's interests it is extremely important to make them 'take root' by encouraging their links with local companies, which in turn should lead to a better coherence and complementarity of the city's markets related to exogenous and endogenous markets.

In a global economy characterised by free flows of goods and capital, the factors which determine the location of both foreign and domestic investments increasingly include the human and social capital of cities, the quality of urban space and its transport and telecommunication links, as well as the legal environment and efficiency of municipal institutions.

The human capital of Polish cities now guarantees a sufficient supply of labour resources. The current concern is the low utilisation of these resources, not to mention the surplus of labour resources in rural areas. The employment rate of the economically active population, which was 56 per cent in 2002,

was 8 percentage points lower than the EU15 average. Despite an unquestionable progress in this respect, the level of education is not entirely satisfactory. The percentage of the population aged 13+ with higher education still remains lower than the average in the EU, although it exceeds 17 per cent in the cities, with 33 per cent of the urban population having secondary education. In the years 1988–2002, the share of city dwellers with elementary education among the urban population aged 15+ fell by 10 percentage points. Unfortunately, the profile of higher and secondary education does not seem to correspond to the needs of the contemporary economy, with continuing education only in its nascent stage.

The human capital in Polish cities is not free from threats represented by stagnation in the number of the population, reduced fertility of women, decreasing population reproduction rates and population ageing. These threats are less imminent in Poland than in Western European countries, particularly Germany, but should not be ignored. At the Berlin conference devoted to the 21st century city, Hall and Pfeiffer declared population ageing to be the main distinguishing feature and the major problem facing European cities. In 2025, population aged 65 or older will represent over 40 per cent of the working age population in 42 regions of the EU15 (European Commission 2004, p. 18). The ageing process of the urban population will have far-reaching consequences, including the reduction of the economic power of cities, an increased demand for public services coupled with dwindling sources of their financing, and increasing fiscal burdens for the working population to finance allowances and benefits of the non-working population in addition to their own social security contributions, which in turn depresses demand for consumer products and investment potential. Population ageing will have a negative effect on the ability to create and assimilate innovation and on the propensity of the mobile global capital to invest in cities with an ageing – and thereby less and less active – population. A question can also be posed about the willingness of the young generation to finance public expenditure to satisfy the needs of old people and about the future of small and medium-sized cities which may soon suffer from a shortage of labour and sources of income. These problems are also pertinent in the discussions about the Polish cities, mainly in view of the inevitable – sooner or later – opening of the Western labour markets to Polish workforce. In the pre-enlargement European Union, two thirds of the population growth is the result of migratory inflow from outside the Community. In this context, we should look from another perspective at restrictions concerning the closure of the labour markets in the EU15 to Poles and pose the question whether the period when such restrictions are in force will be sufficient to create such labour conditions in Polish cities that will prevent the outflow of best-qualified human resources to other countries.

It is difficult to look with optimism at the social capital of Polish cities, which has never been high, considering the long-lasting dominance of the landed gentry culture. We can speak of a historical continuity of the local

communities only in a few of Polish cities. As a rule, these communities would be re-established after World War II, following the huge migrations forced by the changes in the state borders and the tragedy of the Holocaust. The middle class is weak, well-established political and intellectual elites are nearly non-existent, emotional ties of the city dwellers with their cities are shallow, and the cities themselves are seldom perceived as the common good and common civic duty. Weakness of civic institutions, corruption and rising crime are all proofs of feeble social ties and a lack of social trust.

It has to be said, though, that Polish cities are as yet free from problems and tensions caused in Western European cities by the migration of people from other cultures on the one hand, and on the other – by the emergence of an extremely influential though not so numerous group of ‘jet set’ executives. The former and the latter do not have any significant emotional ties with the cities they have found themselves in, and both the former – through their mass-scale presence, and the latter – through their power and influence, tend to restrain the role of the native population of their cities. Some tensions in Western Europe also arise between the urban population and the population of urbanised suburban areas, which undermines the very foundation of the municipal self-governance system. The outflow of more affluent population to the suburbs reduces the tax base of the cities, which still do have to develop infrastructure used by the suburban residents. On the other hand, residents of the suburbs do not have any say in the election of municipal authorities or formulation of municipal policies, even though by working and doing shopping in the city they contribute to its development.

What remains a major problem in the Polish cities is the poverty of the population, largely brought about by high unemployment, and frequently structural in character, which has a particularly adverse influence on social capital. Poverty is also relative to general impoverishment of the country. The percentage of the population threatened with poverty, which is usually understood as people living in households with an income level under 60 per cent of the average household income in a given country, is the same in Poland as the average in the EU15. Nonetheless, disparities in the level of income between households are growing rapidly, which is manifested, among other things, by the spatial segregation of the poor and the rich, maybe not as much as in the form of ghettos of poverty but rather pockets of prosperity. This is further exacerbated by loosening family ties, evident in an increasing ratio of the number of divorces to that of marriages, which in 2002 in cities was as high as 1 to 3, and over two million single parents bringing up children (20 per cent of all families and one third of families with dependent children). Single-person and two-person households account for 40 per cent of all households in Polish cities. This is a much lower rate than in the EU15 countries, but it has to be concluded that similarly to those countries, the family in Poland is less and less performing caring functions vis à vis elderly people, and Polish cities are suffering from an acute shortage of both infrastructure and means to replace the family in the performance of this task.

As compared with cities in the west of Europe, Polish cities are characterised by a low quality of urban space development, mainly as regards city centres and public space. The reasons for this are very complex and strongly rooted in the past, and include the destruction of cities during the two World Wars; a careless use of their resources, taking no heed of future needs, and a model of urbanisation accompanying forced industrialisation processes. In addition, the existing spatial development structures are not consistent with new urban functions and new requirements of both the economy and the city residents. Economic, social and cultural processes, started in 1990, add new meanings and values to urban development. Owing to the diversification of the economy, the face of the cities is becoming more varied, with decreasing spatial disparities in the access to services and jobs. New, modern office and retail facilities are built, the economic effectiveness of land use is increasing, and the quality of residential development is improving. This is coupled by a marked progress in the development of municipal and business-environment infrastructure. It has to be said, however, that transformation, especially in large cities, rarely proceeds as a planned 'refashioning' of the city. The process is characterised by a general spatial chaos and impaired efficiency of the city's operation due to distorted proportions between private capital investments and public investments in technical and social infrastructure. On top of that, the lack of strong local traditions and a sense of attachment to the cultural heritage and the historic landscape of the city, which in many cities throughout Europe comes from different cultural milieus, is manifested in a proneness of Polish cities to yield to cultural uniformisation (Furman 2001a).

The housing resources of Polish cities are insufficient and pose a barrier to mobility, thus hampering any effective combating of unemployment. There are 114 households per 100 apartments, while the ratio of usable floor area per resident is slightly above 20 sqm, with 60 sqm as an average floor area of the apartments. These values are substantially lower than in EU15 cities, and are improving at a very slow rate. To close the gap between the Polish and EU residential standards, Polish cities would need to build several million new apartments and prepare about 100 000 hectares of land for new residential development. Over 20 per cent of cities were built before 1945, of which several hundred thousand are too old and run-down to be renovated. Residential buildings accounting for two thirds of the housing stock were built in the years 1950–1990, and their moral depreciation is relatively high. In this situation, a slump in the construction industry is highly worrying, especially in view of the fact that in 2003 the value of building production per capita represented a mere one fifth of the average for EU15 and one tenth of the total production in Ireland alone.

In addition to housing, the condition of transport infrastructure is another major problem that Polish cities will have to tackle. Cities in Poland have no connections with one another or with European cities which would be suitable for the current traffic intensity and the quality of infrastructure; they also lack

sufficiently developed internal networks both in public and individual transport. The condition of the transport infrastructure is a disarrangement to Polish space and poses a huge barrier to the development of cities, a barrier which must be removed if the competitiveness of the Polish space and its cohesion with the European space is to improve in any significant way.

In order to attract foreign and domestic investment, Polish cities need to substantially upgrade their technical and social infrastructure and to improve the quality of the urban environment, including spatial organisation. All this requires public funding. Unfortunately, municipal budgets and the state budgets lack the necessary funds to foster regional and urban development. EU structural funding can be an important source providing the means to implement public investments in the cities. The cities, however, have a limited access to loans, without which it may prove impossible for them to raise the funds for the pre-financing of investment projects. This necessitates the establishment, from scratch and at a fast rate, of new institutions and other instruments for the implementation of development-oriented regional policy, and mainly involves increasing access of cities to loans offered by commercial banks. The cities also need public-private partnerships to support them in the implementation of their development programmes. Regrettably, no legal environment which would facilitate such partnerships has been created as yet, and, similarly, legal arrangements which would encourage venture capital to participate in city revitalisation programmes are still lacking.

Polish cities will only be able to compete with other European cities when the competitiveness of the Polish economy, which is currently very low, substantially increases. It reflects poor links between the science and economy sectors and low expenditure on R&D, which is mainly financed from the state budget. No Polish city represents an environment which would be a distinct manifestation of an interactive social process of the creation and diffusion of innovation. The share of new and upgraded goods in the industrial production sold is three times lower than the average in the EU countries, and the number of inventions and granted patents is very low. Among the Polish cities, only Warsaw is a relatively well-developed academic and research centre on the European scale. This can lead to some concerns that the development of knowledge-based economy in Europe, which is heralded in the Lisbon strategy, can mean a decrease in the competitiveness of Polish cities and the weakening of their already weak position among European cities.

Another difficulty hindering urban development is the lack of coherence in the legal system, which is made up of legislation that is prepared by individual government departments and intended to serve narrowly understood departmental interests. This leads to obstructions in the decision making process and to adoption of inconsistent solutions, which contradict the principles of harmonious development. Public institutions which influence urban development are inefficient, there are no effective mechanisms for the coordination of public policy both vertically, between the individual sectors of government, and

horizontally, between the municipalities (gminas) themselves. This can be particularly acutely felt in the emerging metropolitan areas, which play a critical role in the country's development.

Visions of the European city in the 21st century

Due to changes caused by globalisation, emergence of information society and entering into new development stages by the cities, the visions of the 21st century city refer to values which the city should create, the resulting development goals and ways to achieve such goals rather than future structures and forms of the city. I would like to focus on three visions: vision of an enterprising city, vision of a friendly city and vision of a connected city, set out in the New Charter of Athens drawn up by the European Council of Town Planners.

The enterprising city is a centre of activity competing in effectiveness and innovation for a better position in the world of global economy. It is a liberal city, open to change and to various styles of behaviour; multi-ethnic, but also allowing a certain cultural uniformisation. Its development strategy aims to intercept capital and investments moving around the world, with a view to ensuring high economic growth and domination in one of the economy sectors. This is intended to raise funds required to solve the city's problems and to improve the material and civilisational standards of living for all its inhabitants. In this strategy, endeavours to embrace opportunities prevail over the concern to solve immediate problems. Such a strategy is implemented by strong leadership, public and private partnerships and aggressive marketing of the city, while the instruments employed include ensuring favourable conditions and providing attractive locations for business activity; public investments in culture and recreation which improve the city's prestige; supporting the development of an innovation-friendly environment; efficient business-environment infrastructure and a broad offer of residential property which would help to attract business executives and intellectual elites (Hall, Hubbard 1998).

A friendly city is a city that guarantees security and a healthy, comfortable working and living environment; a city that is developing in concord with tradition and in harmony with nature, with a reliable local economy which can offer its residents a sense of stability. The strategy adopted by such a city is to defend its position by strengthening the local economy and global economy enterprises which already have a presence in the city, to observe the principles of eco-development and care for its organisation of space. This is a vision that is adopted by well-developed, affluent European cities, with strong and conservative local communities that resist changes, respect the principles of local democracy and actively participate in the city's governance (Inoguchi, Newman, Paoletto, 1999).

A connected city is a city that has strong links, via many networks, with the region and other cities of Europe and the world. It is a city that is internally connected physically, socially and economically, but open to other cultures

and offering conducive conditions for the development of a multi-ethnic community; a city well-rooted in its history and creatively merging the past with the future, aware of its identity but also drawing on the cultural diversity of its multi-ethnic community. This is a city that integrates innovation with a political courage to introduce unconventional solutions in all the spheres of life; a city connected with the natural environment and protecting it through the economical use of its nature resources (*The New Charter...* 2003).

In all visions of the European city, particular attention is placed on good governance: an integrated effort of the local authorities, civic society and the private sector, which is both the means and the precondition for the realisation of the concept of sustainable development. Good governance means observing the principles of subsidiarity, solidarity, private and public partnership, coherent actions at all levels and sectors of authority, as well as a willingness to learn at all times and to follow good examples. This is a wonderful vision, but it seems to be quite remote from the reality of the Polish cities today.

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