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## ***Cittaslow*, a qualitative approach to small towns' local development**

Summary: The Cittaslow idea raised in Italy in 1999. It is a way for many small towns in the world to combine different aspects of life and to create a sophisticated product – a town where life is good. There is a long list of requirements to be filled to be able to join the 192 towns' world network. Acting according to the requirements, adequate for sustainable development, forces the towns governance, not only at the beginning of the process, to make an effort to think about the sustainable development but also to keep on the development to a very high level. It is dictated by a process of checking the level of development of towns every five years.

The network of Cittaslow in Poland and France has been investigated as part of joint Polish-French project<sup>1</sup>. The paper focuses on motives for joining the network, the changes made to reach the aim and the ideas to be introduced as well as the results coming from the presence in the group. The aim of the paper is to show whether the Cittaslow towns differ a lot from other similar towns in the regions and if the quality of life is higher. Since the social aspects seem crucial they were dealt with through questionnaires and interviews held both in Poland and France.

The question to be answered is whether the Cittaslow towns are the best examples of promoting and introducing the sustainable development.

Keywords: small towns, Cittaslow network, quality of life

### **The context and idea of *Cittaslow***

*Cittaslow* refers to towns where living is easy and it is a relatively new idea of looking at the local development in a new way through a prism of a high quality of life. The idea promotes the use of technology oriented to improving

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<sup>1</sup> PHC Polonium 2011–2013, on quality of life and small towns' development, conducted by the authors K. Wiedermann and J.-C. Edouard.

the quality of the environment, local products using natural and environmentally-friendly techniques, communication and dialog between producers, customers, inhabitants, "slow" ordinary life style rather than modern trends. In a globalizing world it should result in more human, environmentally correct and sensible policies for present and future generations' life style. By considering the town itself and thinking of a different way of development, the project respects small realities in a more and more global connected world.

The *Cittaslow* idea and its success should be contextualized. Indeed, in a context of political and social demand for a better quality of life, linked with increasing impacts of sustainable development criteria (since the Rio Conference in 1992), and growing mobility, due to more extended commuting distances that can become a constraint or an opportunity for small towns, depending of their location from bigger urban centres, small towns seem to have the opportunity to take part in the competition between spaces. The promotion of local amenities such as good images, "natural" environment, better property prices, social solidarities or inter-acquaintance is more topical than ever.

In this changing context, criteria of quality of life, well-being and well-living are more often used by stakeholders as attractiveness factors. As pointed by Niedomysl "The attractiveness of places is currently gaining a high policy salience in policymakers' efforts to draw mobile capital" (Niedomysl 2010). In fact, many studies, either empirical or theoretical, have been conducted in order to estimate or evaluated place attractiveness. Urban performance currently depends not only on the city's endowment of hard infrastructure ('physical capital'), but also, on the availability and quality of knowledge communication and social infrastructure ('human and social capital'). Quality of life refers to conditions of living depending on space quality and opportunities for the well-being of inhabitants. Public actors give an increasing importance to the qualitative dimension of spaces. Space is not only considered from functions opportunities but as a potential for well-being and well-living. It is questioned through its capacity to answer the needs and demands of inhabitants with high quality surroundings (functionality, social links, emotional links, etc.), suitable for a personal and family (well-being) as well as collective blossoming (togetherness).

Many indicators and certifications have been developed in order to classify and rank cities according to those new and more combined criteria but also to evaluate implemented policies (McCann 2004). Notions or labels are created to qualify those new dimensions of attractiveness, such as local Agenda 21, *Smart cities*, *Green cities*, *Quality cities* or *Healthy Cities*, depending on either social, environmental or technical aspects. They can be applied to large cities but also, for some of them, to small towns which tend to take part in the competition between spaces and cities.

Cittaslow is one of them, specifically dedicated to communes with less than 50 000 inhabitants. There is a long list of 72 requirements to be met to become a *Cittaslow*. They are listed in seven main groups, and at least 43% of all should be complied (31 requirements are obligatory). The indicators are called "requirements for excellence" and the seven groups include:

1. Energy and environmental policy (e.g. air and water quality conservation, pollution).
2. Infrastructure policies (e.g. plans favouring alternative mobility over private transportation, verified accessibility to medical services).
3. Quality of urban life policies (e.g. creation of spaces for the commercialisation of local products).
4. Agricultural, tourist and Artisan Policies (e.g. protection of handmade and labelled artisan production (certified, museums of culture, etc).
5. Policies for hospitality, awareness and training (e.g. systematic and permanent information for the citizens regarding the meaning of Cittaslow (even pre-emptively on adherence).
6. Social Cohesion (e.g. integration of disable people).
7. Partnership (e.g. support for *Cittaslow* campaigns and activity).

Communes which want to become a *Cittaslow* should fill an application form which is evaluated by other members (belonging to the national network when available). The evaluation is repeated every 5 years to control the progress in the development. In the recent past, a Corean town Shinan was suspended in membership and other, Jangheung, lost its membership.

The research conducted in small towns in Poland and France proved that much afford and knowledge is needed for the local authorities to apply for the membership. Much work for the better development and a higher quality of

life in small towns is done before the accession to the organisation. It seems to be very important to check the towns performance every few years as often new majors and new local authorities are not always aware of the activity and the organisation itself. That can even lead to taking the advantages without the further afford for development.

## The network

The present network of the *Cittaslow* towns consists of 192 towns in 29 countries (November, 2014). The idea of the movement was born in Italy in 1999 thanks to the mayor of the small Tuscan town of Greve-in-Chianti. It is reasonable that 38.7% of towns (74) in the network are Italian ones. There are not only European towns in the list but also towns from Australia, Canada, China, Japan, New Zealand, South Africa, South Korea, Taiwan and the USA.

The Polish network (Fig. 1) is developing dynamically from the first talks and activities associated to the town of Reszel in the north of the country dating back to 2004. The Polish network of towns (Reszel, Lidzbark Warmiński, Biskupiec and Bisztynek) was officially established in 2007. New towns appeared quickly in the network: in 2010 Nowe Miasto Lubawskie and Murowana Goślina; in 2012, Olsztynek, Ryn and Lubawa; in 2013, Gołdap, Barczewo, Dobre Miasto Lubawskie, Kalety, Rejowiec Fabryczny and in 2014 Pasym, Górowo Iławieckie, Nidzica and Nowy Dwór Gdański. Two more towns of Bartoszyce and Prudnik are waiting for the certification. The geographical distribution of *Cittaslow* towns in Poland refers the history of the Polish network established in the north-eastern part of the country in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Province in 2007. According to the first stadium of the contagious diffusion the neighbouring towns quickly found it useful to follow the idea (Domański 2012). In 2014 14 of 38 small towns of the province have been certified in *Cittaslow* movement. In the light of the common membership in the *Cittaslow* network, the question of the real “mark of excellence” may be asked.

The French network (Fig. 1) is much newer, however it develops very dynamically and is spreading geographically as the first members were located in the south western parts of France. There are eight communes in

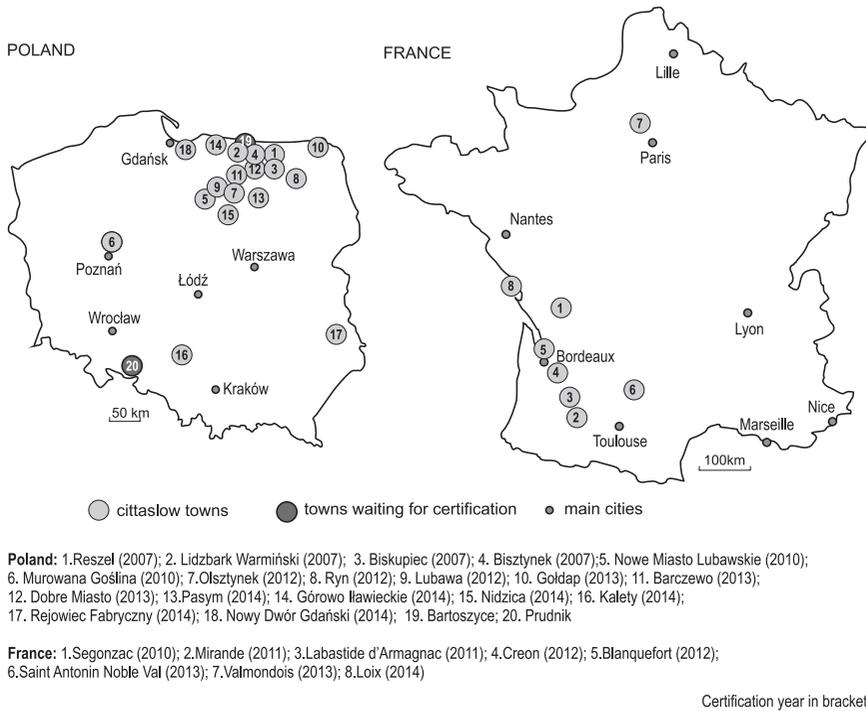


Fig. 1. Cittaslow network in Poland and France in 2014

Source: authors' work based.

the network, which was established in 2012. The first town, which joined the *Cittaslow* group in 2010 was Segonzac, in 2011 Mirande and Labastide d'Armagnac were certified, followed by Créon and Blanquefort in 2012, Saint Antonin Noble Val, Valmondois and Grigny<sup>2</sup> in 2013. Loix is the last commune of the French network. It is difficult to explain why French communes have been so slow to adopt *Cittaslow*. The movement is not well-known in France, so far. The fact that the official languages of the international network are Italian and English was also considered as an obstacle, especially for small communes. In the case of Segonzac and Labastide d'Armagnac, Italian-speaking citizens were mobilized to help filling the application form.

<sup>2</sup> In 2014, the newly elected mayor of Grigny decided to withdraw from the Cittaslow association.

The existence of an international and national networks is quite important. National networks have the charge of translating official documents (the charter, the application forms) and of adapting them to national contexts. For example, the German network suggested to add a criteria dealing with the banning of GM crops (which was not in the international charter so far). German communes proposed to insist on the need to promote local products and productions, education to health and food, and alternative energy systems (Mayer, Knox, 2009). Italian members have stressed the importance of environmental issues such as waste management, reduction of light pollution and local economic development through tourism. In the French context, an interesting stake is the importance to adapt this commune-based charter to a political-administrative context deeply influenced by intercommunality.

Another objective of the network is to develop sharing and pooling of policies between members through annual meetings and the development of Internet platform (www 1) and its extensions on social networks (*Twitter*, *Youtube*). The objective is to create linkages between members but also to share good practices and experiences, if not expertises. Besides, opportunities of exchanges are also important with associations like *Slow Food* or *Terra Madre* in which meetings *Cittaslow* can have a forum to promote the movement and local actors (like local producers).

## Motives for joining

The reasons for joining the network differ. For the first towns in the network it was just following the new good idea, for some of them the decision was implemented/ influenced by/from the regional authorities and it was not strictly a local initiative. For some towns, the idea was in accordance with the former groups activities in *Slow Food* movement that helped introducing the *Cittaslow* idea.

It is also worth stressing that motives for joining the network seem to be different for towns of different geographical location. For peripheral, towns the development of tourism, better and often easier promotion, is often the most important impulse to join the *Cittaslow* network, which is

already globally recognisable. The real concern on good food together with the promotion of handcraft and local products together with the hospitality become strong impulses for tourists to visit *Cittaslow* towns. Knox states that there is a danger of overwhelming the small towns' attractions by tourism (Knox 2005). The common promotion with the help of the province funds is an important element for small towns located in the northern part of Poland in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Province. The French cases of Mirande, known for its country festival, or of Loix in the very touristic Ré Island, show the importance of tourism (new facilities, etc.) but with the good balance to the understanding of the inhabitants needs.

For small towns located within the metropolitan areas (such as Murowana Goślina close to Poznań or Créon and Blanquefort close to Bordeaux) the motives for joining the *Cittaslow* movement are strongly correlated to the issues of attractiveness and quality of life to attract potential new inhabitants to settle down in the town. In view of the towns' shrinkage and population aging processes, attracting new inhabitants should become an important element in the development strategies and policies of the towns. The population decrease was reported in French towns in the Census of the 1970's while in Poland the process has intensified in the 1990's. Polish small towns located within the metropolitan areas are almost the only examples of towns with the population increase and these are often also towns which have the population policy well developed. Population policy and the need to attract new inhabitants to a town by different programs, advertising and promotion is generally better developed in French small towns than in Polish ones. In developed towns it does not seem to really bother local authorities. *Cittaslow* as a mark of towns where life is easy becomes an ideal tool for local actors in the local development strategy. The question arises whether and to what extent it is used as that.

## Effects of the membership

The effects coming from the membership are, on the other hand, not obvious and difficult to measure on the other. It is impossible to say whether

the changes, if seen, are the result of the membership or if other factors influenced them. It should be mentioned that the first advantages are already seen during the time of the preparation to the first certification process of *Cittaslow*. Fulfilling the long list of requirements makes the local authorities think carefully about the current situation and the prognosis for the development of a town (e.g. Creon and building the velo town). As stated by the mayor of Segonzac, “Small communes are less able to withstand modern development. What is interesting for us, is the intention. We have important choices to be made and *Cittaslow* will give coherence in our local policy”. *Cittaslow* certification helps to identify, certify and promote behaviours, objectives and actions implemented. Apart from taking part in a global policy of quality of life and sustainable development promotion, members are looking for answers to local problems and capacities to answer them (which are often difficult for small communes, very often lacking money and engineering). What is interesting from interviews with local actors is that most of the time communes were already involved in qualitative policies. “We were doing *Cittaslow* without knowing it” (Segonzac). One of the interests of the network is to transform already initiated actions into a more coherent and identifiable program. It is an international recognition of locally developed policies in terms of sustainable quality of life.

A survey conducted in small towns in Poland in Warmińsko-Mazurskie Province shows a relatively better economic and social condition and a higher level of quality of life in *Cittaslow* towns than other towns of the same region (Fig. 2, 3, 4 and 5). Two *Cittaslow* towns were analysed in 2012, Lidzbark Warmiński with the population of 16.5 thousand (77 surveys) and Biskupiec with the population of 10 thousand and 40 surveys and compared with Barczewo (7 thousand and 38 surveys) and Pasym (2.5 thousand and 48 surveys). It must be added that the last two towns were not in the network during the survey and field research and joined the *Cittaslow* movement later (Barczewo in late 2013 and Pasym in 2014). The differences can be seen in terms of the quality of life perception (“excellent” answers are already seen in Lidzbark Warmiński and Biskupiec), 42% of respondents have a good image of those towns, while in others it was 10% less. For 38% of inhabitants the reason for settling down in Lidzbark Warmiński and Biskupiec

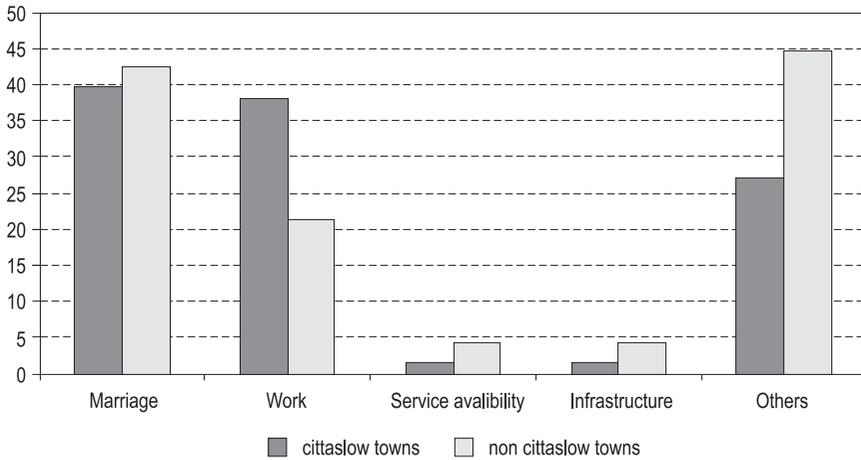


Fig.2 Reasons for settling in the town

Source: authors' work based.

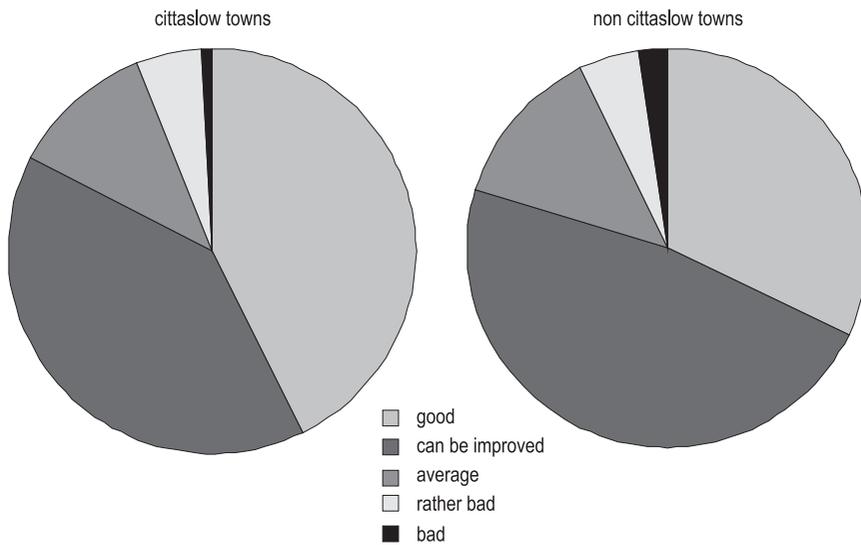


Fig.3 Image of the town of residence

Source: authors' work based.

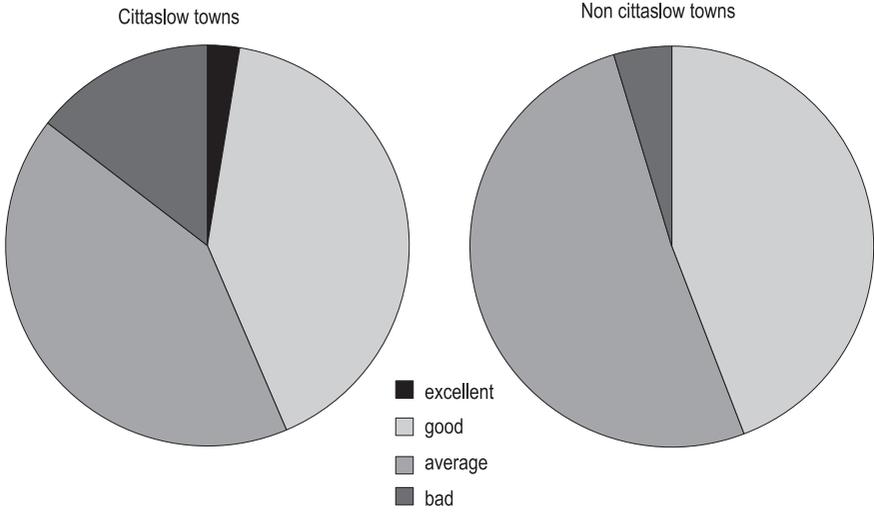


Fig. 4 Perception of life quality

Source: authors' work based.

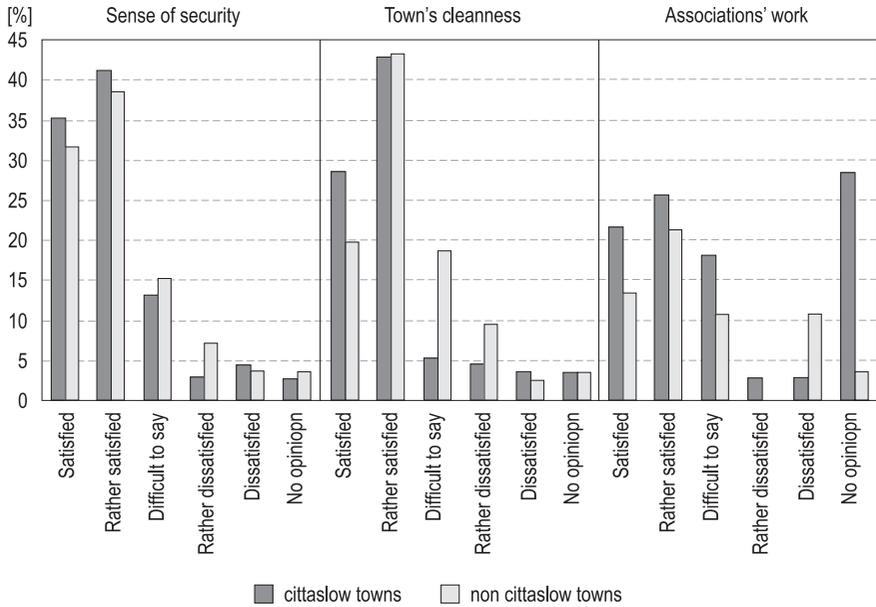


Fig.5 Aspects of quality of life satisfaction

Source: authors' work based.



Fot. 1. Segonzac (photo A. Kwiatek-Sołtys)



Fot. 2. Segonzac (photo A. Kwiatek-Sołtys)



Fot. 3. Créon  
(photo A. Kwiatek-Sołtys)



Fot. 4. Lidzbark Warmiński  
(photo H. Mainet)

was work as special economic zones have been established there. For those towns *Cittaslow* means also well economically developing towns. This aspect is extremely important in the region with a low development indexes after the Second War World. People asked about the idea often said “we don’t want to be slow, we want a fast life and a fast development as for many years the towns were much too slow”. It shows how important the promotion of the whole idea among towns’ inhabitants is and that there is still a lot to be done. Without the local community involvement it is not possible to talk about the success of the project (Grzelak-Kostulska et al. 2011). It must be said that most of the time, in investigated French and Polish communes, citizens were not involved from the beginning in the *Cittaslow* membership decision. People were informed after the success of the application and very often were quite surprised by the very idea of this “slow” city. The *Cittaslow* logo, an orange snail carrying a town on its shell is also interesting. It is derived from the *Slow Food* logo and should be visible on the signs and promotion materials available in all *Cittaslow* towns (Photo 1–4). If for some people it has been well adopted (in some French communes, like Segonzac and Créon, it is associated with local snails and is used as a friendly mascot), in other towns, it is still almost unknown and not appropriated.

## Conclusion

The Polish and French towns differ a lot due to the development level, the level of the prepared strategies and the local authorities and community commitment.

The research showed that in terms of the quality of life the differences between the *Cittaslow* towns and other small towns in the regions are not necessarily significant and obvious yet. It has also been shown that the project works better when it is a bottom up one rather than the idea implemented from the higher administrative units.

The idea of *Cittaslow* can be seen as a new, better way of building rural communes and small towns strategies regardless the geographical location of towns (peripheral or included in the metropolitan zones). “Think global, act

local” is the credo of sustainable development but also of the *Cittaslow* movement. In that sense, it seems to be well adapted to secondary towns as it helps them differentiate (it is the only label dedicated to this range of communes) and promote transversal policies through a whole coherent international certification (the role of the network is important for small communes with few means and engineering). It is based on objective criteria of quality of life but also on more subjective ones, aiming at strengthening collective well-being. It favours a process of improvement of implemented policies with an interesting adaptation and flexibility to local contexts. It will therefore be interesting to follow the effects and to measure the capability of local stakeholders to take into account inhabitants positions and to communicate on the fact the “slow” does not refer to a backward-looking form of action or to the pace of life in the town but to an objective dedicated to a qualitative approach of local development.

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## **Webpages**

www 1: , <http://www.cittaslow.org>

www 2: <http://cittaslowpolska.pl>

## ***Cittaslow, jakościowe podejście do rozwoju lokalnego małych miast***

### **Streszczenie**

Przedmiotem pracy są małe miasta w Polsce i we Francji należące sieci miast Cittaslow. Autorki analizują przyczyny ich przystąpienia do sieci, dokonane zmiany i korzyści płynące z uczestnictwa w światowej sieci miast Cittaslow. W artykule podjęto też próbę odpowiedzi na pytanie, czy małe miasta Cittasow różnią się od innych miast małych w danym regionie i czy jakość życia mieszkańców jest w nich wyraźnie wyższa.

Słowa kluczowe: małe miasta, sieć miast Cittaslow, jakość życia

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