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## Introduction

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## **Small Towns as European Cultural Heritage. Introduction.** **Lud'a Klusáková and Marie-Vic Ozouf-Marignier**

Towns and cities as carriers of culture of European countries and nations, who would believe that besides iconic metropolises, the small towns and their hinterland are prevailing type of environment in which people in Europe live? Statistics are however very straightforward, predominantly urban, 35.1% intermediate and of 22.42% predominantly rural regions.<sup>1</sup> The map on the same site showing the distribution of cities according to their size confirms the image of societies where the small town experience is shaping the life of very significant proportion of population.<sup>2</sup>

Contrasting is the fact that the research devoted to small towns in comparative perspective, and in a European scale in any period of history is rare. It does not mean that there is none about small towns. Considering how large proportion of European, not speaking about global population, still lives in small towns, we have to admit neglect of the topic among urban historians.<sup>3</sup>

It is not a novelty. In France, where the intermediate and predominantly rural regions constitute almost sixty five percent (64,95%) of the area and seventy seven percent of population lives in cities, we can trace ups and downs of the Association for the history of small towns, which was very active in the last third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and produced a series of conferences and collective volumes. It was the period of the decentralization policy of the socialist government of François Mitterrand. The sensibility to this issue was not reserved to France only. The evidence can be seen in the foundation in 1984 of European Council for the Village and Small Town. This campaigning organisation based in UK has a number of national sections. Although the dynamics of this body is not at all clear, it confirms their existence and importance.<sup>4</sup> It is not surprising that quite active section of ECOVAST is the German one. The small towns in peripheral position represent very strong phenomena, as we read in the reports produced by the researchers of *Leibniz-Institut für Regionalentwicklung und Strukturplanung e.V.* (IRS). The 1300 peripherally located small towns, 75% characterised by demographic regress and yet other economic and social criteria in decline,

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<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/RSI/#?vis=typologies.urb\\_typology&lang=en](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/RSI/#?vis=typologies.urb_typology&lang=en) (16.09.2016)

<sup>2</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/RSI/#?vis=city.statistics&lang=en> (16.09.2016)

<sup>3</sup> Eveline S. van Leeuwen, *Urban-Rural Interactions. Towns as Focus Points in Rural Development, Contributions to Economics*, Physica Verlag, Berlin – Heidelberg, 2010, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.ecovast.org/english/index%20.htm> (28.10. 2016)

however do not mean that small towns have to be inevitably in decline, provided they will be able to benefit from regional cultural landscape and heritage of small historic market towns.<sup>5</sup> This perspective reminds us of research of Bernard Kayser on creative urban people in villages and small towns, and his typology of various strategies of *Renaissances Rurales* claiming also that the fate of the small towns, is in large extent the result of the strategies chosen by people involved in their governance.<sup>6</sup>

Looking back to France, in last fifteen years is not visible any significant project or publication, despite the fact that France is famous for its regional diversity grounded on small towns in rural regions, and in suburban belts around metropolises. In Czech Republic the ratio between large and small, rural and urban is comparable with France, which is surprising, but the gap in research on small towns has to be acknowledged. Urban sociology and geography have slightly larger output. Already Peter Clark, who has in early 1990s coordinated a project on small towns in early modern Europe, acknowledged this situation in the editorial preface to the collection of chapters offered for comparative analysis.<sup>7</sup> Twenty years after, the authors of the present book, tempted to learn about changes in the research area. They started to think about publication of their research on the ground of the same conviction – the small towns in contemporary Europe are numerous, they are attractive and difficult in many ways for their inhabitants, and fascinating for the authors of this book. Plus the problems their inhabitants face and the cities themselves are still neglected in historical research.

In the last decades, rural geography and history have paid attention to the revival of small towns as regards to periurbanization and fight against desertification of countryside. Towns record a renewal of attractiveness for populations which look for the quality of the living environment. They try to maintain a good level of equipments and services. The heritage and the tourism, especially the cultural tourism, are becoming important resources for the local development. In most of the European countries, the decentralization revalued the role of small towns and gave them more skills and powers. Since the 1990's, the European regional policy demonstrated the importance of social and territorial cohesion: the spaces of closeness are crucial levers to carry out the ideal of solidarity and to generate concerted action regarding

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<sup>5</sup> Manfred Kühn, Small Towns in Rural Areas – What are the Possibilities in the Periphery? in *Peripheral Small Towns*, IRS Aktuell, Newsletter for Social Science-Based Spatial Research, No 6, September 2014, p. 3-4.

<sup>6</sup> Bernard Kayser, *La renaissance rurale . Sociologie des campagnes du monde occidental*, Paris 1990; Idem, Les citadins au village. In: Espace, populations, sociétés, 2001-1-2. Repopulation et mobilités rurales. pp. 152-153.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Clark (ed.), *Small Towns in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge University Press and Editions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, Cambridge 1995, p. xvii.

to economic development. The local values, the peculiarity and the specificity of territory or goods become successful tools of attractiveness and competitiveness. National and European public policies, for example the program “Leader”<sup>8</sup>, encourage the structuring action of small towns.

The valorisation of smalltownness does not come only from the political power and the governments. Activism grows in the academic and militant groups. One of them is the Society of Territorialists whose leader is Alberto Magnaghi, urbanist, professor at University of Florence. In 2011, the so-called “Territorialist school” began to advocate for regional planning based on “urban villages” and local projects. It finds a lot of supports among local authorities. Born in Italy, this network of territorialists is spreading in France nowadays. Other initiatives are linked with creation of defence associations. In France, since 1990, the Association of small towns of France (APVF) federates cities from 3000 to 20 000 inhabitants to promote their specific role in regional and urban planning. It has 1100 members and is lobbying actively in Parliament and in European institutions. The president of the APVF, Martin Malvy, is also the president of the Confederation of Small Towns and Municipalities of the European Union (CTME) which was officially launched in Brussels in 2011. According to its founders, “its aim is to ensure that the voices of Europe’s small and medium-sized towns are heard at European level and that their interests are fully represented”. We must mention as well one specific kind of associations whose purpose is defence of small historic towns: The Association of Small Historic Towns and Villages of the UK (ASHTAV) is “an organisation that works to unite amenity and civic societies, parish and own councils in small historic towns and villages throughout Britain”. As several similar institutions in Europe, *I Borghi più belli d'Italia* is an association of small Italian towns of historical interest. It was founded in March 2001. This institutional and militant blooming hardly demonstrates the consciousness of small town identity.

It is not surprising that this associative movement resulted into creation of a European Association of Historic Towns and Regions uniting the efforts of large number of historical towns, many of them small, but not making the size an issue.<sup>9</sup> Among the members are

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<sup>8</sup> As local development approach, and its upgrade – strategy of Community-Led Local Development (CLLD).

<sup>9</sup> „Heritage Europe was formed as “The European Association of Historic Towns and Regions” by the Council of Europe in October 1999 as part of the initiative “Europe – A Common Heritage”.“ <http://www.historic-towns.org/> (26.10.2016).

individual towns and national associations. We would expect that in the countries of Central Europe, which is always classified as a region of smaller and small historical urban settlements would be these associations particularly strong and active. It does not seem to be the case. In Czech Republic such association was founded in 1990 as an NGO.<sup>10</sup> It confirms to have 214 members by 1<sup>st</sup> August 2016, having as the main goal preservation, protection and heritage's practical utilizability. All its many diverse activities for professionals and the large public are carried on in Czech Republic and abroad to reach this goal. Most important among them is the systematic regeneration of urban heritage reservations and heritage areas. Since 1994 the "Historical Town of the year" is elected in consequence of the evaluation of the success of this urban regeneration program. The association joins the European Heritage Days – EHD under the auspices of the Council of Europe and national governmental institutions.

Thus the question how the small and historical towns cooperate requires to look more to the past. The Association of Polish Towns<sup>11</sup>, The Association of Towns and Cities in Slovakia<sup>12</sup> are recently founded bodies. The Association of towns and communities of Czech Republic<sup>13</sup> which is source of important information about networking of cities has today more than 2600 members.<sup>14</sup> The Association went through several stages which were result of political conditions.

The association has commissioned an article about its origins, where we read that it all began in 1907 in historical town of Kolín. There 210 delegates met and wished to create a formal corporation as other estates and professions in the country create.<sup>15</sup> The efforts to establish the association of towns in reality has its roots even deeper at a meeting of city representatives in 1895 – on both occasions the present mayors of cities legitimized their meeting by arguments pointing to the danger of selfgovernment, by the need to join the efforts to overcome the pressure of the government (Austro-Hungarian in Vienna). About one hundred of cities in 1907 convention were represented by 200 delegates, and they have decided to meet regularly, and to build an association which would organize meetings and work in between the meetings. The main interest of the association was the governance, the laws concerning the cities, regulating their infrastructure, briefly all aspects of their functioning. Quite soon – 1909

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<sup>10</sup> Sdružení historických sídel Čech, Moravy a Slezska (SHS ČMS) <http://www.historickasidla.cz/> (26.10.2016)

<sup>11</sup> Związek Miast Polskich, <http://www.zmp.poznan.pl/strona-22-historia.html> (26.10.2016).

<sup>12</sup> Zdržzenie miest a obcí slovenska, <http://www.zmos.sk/> (26.10.2016).

<sup>13</sup> Svaz měst a obcí České republiky (SMO ČR)

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.smocr.cz/cz/svaz-mest-a-obci-cr/kdo-jsme/kdo-jsme.aspx> (26.10.2016).

<sup>15</sup> <http://smocr.cz/o-svazu/z-historie/koreny-svazu.aspx>; Lenka Zgrajová, Svaz měst a obcí očima století.

the association started a newsletter (Vestník) which displays now the spectrum of its activities and interests. While primary goal was to reach some sort of benefit out of unified action, secondary appears curiosity about the situation in other countries. They studied the experiences, and looked for literature. However the national conditions, the tensions between Czech and German cities, minorities in the cities, or magistrate was the issue number one. However during the Great War the cities were loyal to the Hapsburg state, the association issued declarations of loyalty to the house of Hapsburgs. Even in 1918 the main issues of debate were conditions of supply of cities by alimentary products.

After the establishment of the independent state, the cities could continue to function as an organised body, since they never stopped doing that. They claimed that actually cities are building the new state, are the major investor into the infrastructure however city finances were in difficult state after the war. In 1920 the association met for the first time in a new state and invited representatives of all 155 cities regardless their being or not members of the association.

The political power saw in the association a rival and this resulted in the closure of its activities after World War II, 1960´witnessed its reappearance and again closure after the defeat of reforms introduced in 1968. The Association was re-opened in the last decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century, when it became important partner in efforts to develop regional politics and networks between regions and EU. The Czech association is as well member of the international – European body: The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR).<sup>16</sup>

This association shows its prestige through its own historicity – in its presentation it is the first information - it was founded in Geneva in 1951 by a group of European mayors; later, it opened to the regions and became what it is now - the largest organisation of local and regional government in Europe; its members are more than 50 national associations of towns, municipalities and regions from 40 countries. Together these associations represent some 100,000 local and regional authorities.

Second such association, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) represents and defends the interests of local governments on the world stage, regardless of the size of the communities they serve. Headquartered in Barcelona, the organisation's stated mission is:

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.ccre.org/en/page/3> (3.3. 2012)

“To be the united voice and world advocate of democratic local self-government, promoting its values, objectives and interests, through cooperation between local governments, and within the wider international community”. They develop a targeted work programme, which focuses on:

- Increasing the role and influence of local government and its representative organisations in global governance;
- Becoming the main source of support for democratic, effective, innovative local government close to the citizen;
- Ensuring an effective and democratic global organisation.

United Cities and Local Governments supports international cooperation between cities and their associations, and facilitates programs, networks and partnerships to build the capacity of local governments. It promotes the role of women in local decision-making, and is a gateway to relevant information on local government across the world.<sup>17</sup>

The association is organized into workgroups, in which are represented cities and local governments from all continents, although Europe is somewhat underrepresented. Very active are French representatives, who are numerous. Central Europe was represented on about eight occasions by German delegates, twice Slovak, and twice Polish. No Czechs, no Hungarians, not speaking about other countries which declare themselves as Central European.

When we dig again more to the past we find the associations with specific goal – promoting cultural heritage – associations and clubs of UNESCO, and associations promoting culture of peace. In Spanish Guernica in 1987 the 50th anniversary of the bombing was commemorated. The town hosted the Preliminary Congress of the World Association of Martyr Cities. The full congress was held subsequently in Madrid, bringing together representatives of cities all over the world. Since then, Guernica-Lumo has been a member of this association.<sup>18</sup> The association has not left much sign about its activities in cyber space, but lead us to another association, which promotes the culture of peace: International Association of Peace Messenger Cities<sup>19</sup>. It was founded in 1987, and among the founding members are several central European capital cities: Prague, Vienna and Warsaw.

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.cities-localgovernments.org/sections.asp>

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.gernika-lumo.net/datu\\_orokorrak/in\\_historia.htm](http://www.gernika-lumo.net/datu_orokorrak/in_historia.htm)

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.iapmc.org/cities.aspx>

The idea of this association takes us even more to the past – to the years shortly after the end of World War II, when the many destroyed cities in Europe (Warsaw, Oswiecim, Volgograd, Sankt Peterburg), as well as in Asia ( Japanese Hiroshima and Nagasaki) arose sympathy and support for recovery. International Cities of Peace<sup>20</sup> stem out of the idea of town-twinning, which emerged with the aim to prevent another military conflict in Europe. In the argumentation which is used to legitimize the association, the initiators speak about unique occasion to meet for Citizens of European cities, to learn, become familiar, overcome prejudices.

As we do not find Central European cities often enough in global networks, we have to look for other ways of cooperation these cities explore – individual contracts, or regional and micro regional networks. There is no background in these reports which would help to answer the question why their contribution is missing. Is it sign of self-centred interests? Have they no funding to cover the membership costs? Partnerships /Twinning movement, founded on real meeting of citizens, personal contacts and friendship is viewed as an effective tool which supports cohesion and can effectively help the integration of EU.<sup>21</sup>

Association´s analysis identifies three types of interactions. (1) On local scale, micro/regional, and regional. Today very much linked to EU projects and EU funding. First of all Euro regions, initiated by EU policy, regions which also cross the state borders and always revolve around centres on both sides of borders, which in their countries are usually peripheral centres and regions. The inclusion/exclusion is identified on territorial basis, while network has territorial definition it does not respect state territorial borders. (2) On the national / state scale – they create national networks of cities. They are highly inclusive, while their members have to accept the constitution of the association. (3) On the international level they create larger networks covering macro regions. The membership is voluntary, and the motivation has to come from within the city´s leadership. The three levels of collaboration however aim at different goals. The first to overcome peripherality and local difficulties, the second to overcome problems with financing and governance of the cities, and dangers to limit the self-government. The third level points to macro regional interests and global issues. The associations however do not help to understand our primary question about the link between the size and the function (role).

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.internationalcitiesofpeace.org/what/what.html>

<sup>21</sup> <http://smocr.cz/cz/partnerstvi-mest/default.aspx>



What is a town and when a town is considered to be a small town? What it means small town? In urban history research we can trace persisting diversity in understanding or definitions which could lead to a clear answer to the two questions. Although the functional definitions are applied in urban studies, the comparative overview of situation in a number of European countries displays a large variety of approaches.<sup>22</sup> Vincent Houillon and Laurence Thomsin have discovered that yet at the beginning of the third millennium are in some cases towns and cities defined by their status in state administration, while demographic criteria are used in the others. Knowing this, we have left the authors the freedom to formulate their own definition of the small town as their study object. From the perspective of English countryside it is the town below 10 000 inhabitants. From the Spanish perspective we are suggested to deal with towns functioning in a network, a set of towns which represent sixty percent of the land structure, without confirming their size, we learn that they are not decaying but growing in size and population. The Greek chapter is pointing on the overwhelming position of capital city and small towns on the other hand about which few historians care and thus we know little. What is a small town we will learn from the example of Rethymno which is central town of the island of Crete, despite its regional function, it is a small town in Greek context. Yet different idea about the smalltownness formulates chapter on Russian provincial town Myshkin. The authors follow the perspectives on small towns in contrast with metropolises formulated by Georg Simmel. Small town is first of all local community based on cohesion and solidarity which help them to survive. The primary relationships and focus on collectivity define the small town.<sup>23</sup>

The threshold of urbanity and smalltownness thus cannot be set one for all case studies we are going to present. We have since the beginning resigned on the aim to produce a complex collection, or systematic survey. We have conceived our book as an exploration, as a probe into the research area.

As reminded in the Preface, our book emerged as a result of a session organised at the international conference of European Association of Urban History in 2014 in Lisbon. Its purpose was to revisit the notion of small town in the context of the changes of the second

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<sup>22</sup> Vincent, Houillon – Laurence, Thomsin. Définitions du rural et de l'urbain dans quelques pays européens. In: Espace, populations, sociétés, 2001-1-2. Repopulation et mobilités rurales. pp. 195-200.

[http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/espos\\_0755-7809\\_2001\\_num\\_19\\_1\\_1989](http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/espos_0755-7809_2001_num_19_1_1989)

<sup>23</sup> G. Yudin and Y. Koloshenko quote G. Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', in G. Bridge, S. Watson (eds.), *The Blackwell City Reader* (Chichester, 2010), p. 107.

half of the 20th century in interdisciplinary perspective. Our call received a very good response of over twenty proposals amongst urban geographers, architects, anthropologists, and historians, which had confirmed us that we have chosen an important issue.

We were looking for contributions which would discuss a set of questions:

- What is understood as a small town in academic and public discourse and in various areas? Are they defined primarily by size of population, by their social functions, or by other criteria, such as morphology or distinct kind of culture?
- Are the small towns only shrinking, losing population, and even dying since the 19th century, or have they shown capacity for sustainability and growth as well?
- Is their economic, cultural and social function disappearing? Do they keep administrative functions?
- How has globalisation influenced the fortunes of small towns?
- What strategies are adopted by the local and regional officials for their small towns in order to keep towns alive, to cope with the small town condition, and to overcome stigma of smalltownness?
- What frames of identification are used in (self) presentation of small towns? Do they relate to local, regional, national, or supranational contexts?
- Is history important for small towns? How is history and memory used for representation and socialisation of their society? How do small towns encounter the process of musealisation?
- How do small towns perceive and represent their position with regard to the border between urban and rural? With which side do they identify? Do they play with their “urban” nature and “urban” past?

The session has generated a small group of authors who wished to continue the debate and offered five chapters which created this volume. They have in common concern with historical and cultural heritage. What the small towns understand as heritage and how they treat it. Geographically their scope stretches across Europe, touching towns in England, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Czech and Moravian lands, and in Russia. In all five cases authors discuss the problem of small town as a cultural product, as a phenomenon which produces culture, and which is itself European cultural heritage. These chapters work as well with very different cases of towns which their authors considered as small, respecting the rules of their national statistical institutes and criteria set for their research. Saying that town is a cultural product

implies that we have accepted constructivist approach, and are analysing a process, a continuum, resulting of efforts of individuals – actors who have been following their goals and interests. They were using examples from history to achieve them.

The first chapter written by Tom Hulme and his colleagues Angela Bartie, Linda Fleming, Mark Freeman, and Paul Readman is highlighting traditional amusements organized in small towns - historical pageantry which went through their heyday in the first half of twentieth century. Virtually disappearing in its second half. However very popular and repeated reconstructions of historical events, like battle of Austerlitz or Royal coronation of Charles IV in September 2016 in Prague suggest, that pageantry is not a dead tradition and not reserved only for the social life of small English towns. The choice of the chapter from history to be used for reconstruction.

The Spanish/Portuguese case study written by an architect, Blanca del Espino, who's topic are provincial rural towns, shows how they are interacting with yet smaller settlements in their surroundings. Striving with decline of their agricultural function, and going through the transformation, adapting to a new function be it industrial, tourist or services. Two urban networks – one in Spanish province of Andalusia, second in Portuguese Alentejo, point to the cross border regional interactions. The case study of two towns Lucena in Andalusia and Beja in Alentejo point to contrasts and tensions between economic and urban interests. Del Espino also discusses the role of heritage in the process of small town's adaptation as a success story from the southern part of the Iberian Peninsula.

Also the Greek chapter, the case study of Rethymno was written by an architect. Olga Moatsou is concerned with one town on the island of Crete, case *as pars pro toto*, viewing Rethymno insular capital but small town, in the context of national urban network. Amalgam of overlapping historical layers suggesting overlapping identities typical for small towns in Greek islands as well as on continental territory. Stagnating till 1960s took tourism as a tool for adaptation to new economic conditions and a path to growth. For these towns historicity and the way it was used is author's main concern.

Greg Yudin and Yulia Koloshenko are discussing the multiple modes of historical work that contribute to the development of tourism in small towns on the grounds of analysis of only one case - Myshkin. Town which has achieved its contemporary touristic glory through

construction of myth, or false story strictly speaking. Tourism is an especially attractive economic solution for many small towns facing the challenges of the global economy. However, building an efficient tourist industry requires learning how to manufacture specific tourist experiences. Sometimes, creating an appealing myth can make a town more attractive to visitors than a careful reconstruction of its history. However, does this kind of constructivist approach facilitate the creation of a sustainable community capable of maintaining the tourist experience? This chapter argues that building a proactive local community demands both preserving and inventing local history and tradition. Drawing on a study of the successful development of tourism in a Russian small town, the authors explain how constructing phantasy and safeguarding authenticity reinforce each other and provide a variety of opportunities for tourism and the local community.

Martin Horáček deals in his chapter with the theme of small towns from the perspective of architectural historiography. One of the recurring topics in urban planning in the last century was the criticism of oversized cities combined with the proposal for alternative kinds of residential sites. Thus these authorities may be source of clarifications of smalltownness understanding. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, several authors supported the garden city movement, while others highlighted historical small towns. They tried not only to put their surviving appearance under protection, but also to turn them into a model for architects and urban planners. They considered small towns to be user-friendly, healthy and, last but not least, beautiful. Art historians, architects and heritage conservators started studying the morphology of small towns, their specific street layouts and the relations between various types of buildings. Based on such studies they formulated design codes for future planning. The belief in the vitality of small towns had been fostered by supporters of the *Heimatschutz* movement in Germany, Austria and Switzerland until World War II, as well as among influential art critics and architects in interwar Czechoslovakia. In the decades of economic growth after the war, the small-town ideal seemed to disappear; however, new criticism of the ‘modern ugliness’ of cities led to a revival of interest in the aesthetic qualities of small towns. Following a general overview, this study focuses on two important defenders of the charm of traditional small towns in the Czech Lands – Zdeněk Wirth and Jiří Kroha. Wirth, an art historian and heritage conservator, persuaded architects to imitate small town architectural patterns existing before the Great War. On the other hand, Kroha, an architect and influential communist ideologue, juxtaposed the design of small towns against the reinforced concrete high-rise housing estates in the 1960s. Using the arguments presented by Wirth and Kroha,

the study compares and contrasts the promotion of the small town ideal in the capitalist period and the postwar communist era.

Thus the five chapters display five cases of small towns which were products of national and regional cultures, and represented varieties of smalltownness. They have in common interest in valorisation of heritage, culture based on historicity. It is rediscovered, rehabilitated, reconstructed, and in one case constructed as an emerging heritage. History has double function, it is a tool for town's adaptation to the new situation, and simultaneously it facilitates to construct the unique identity of the town. History, its interpretation and its usage is undeniable part of production of small town's culture. The way history is interpreted and used is stemming from cultural traditions. The authors are convinced that through the variety of approaches and cases they can contribute to better understanding the role of small towns in European urban development.