

Aesthetic Uniqueness of Public Space. Based on the Example of the Region of Łódź(Poland) Basic Terminological Issues

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Abstract

The concept of uniqueness can be an important critical tool. But as related to architecture, buildings, or the entire architectural and visual landscape of the city it appears frequently in many different contexts.

One can state that describing objects in public space and even entire urban complexes in terms of uniqueness plays a marketing role – it increases the tourist attractiveness of the area – as well as socio-cultural role, because it helps to strengthen the city and build its community's sense of identity. Indicating these goals or the intention to create uniqueness in the region of Łódź draws attention to another, more fundamental theoretical-linguistic issue, namely, what it means that something is unique.

Taking into account etymology, theoretical approach, as well as possible values attributed to 'uniqueness,' I will consider main terminological problems with the notion. Bearing in mind these basic theoretical-linguistic issues, I will consider whether there are unique objects in the city of Łódź and the region.

Trying to answer this question I will review phenomena and objects that could be considered as unique. Identifying possible uniqueness of the places and objects located in public spaces of the region of Łódź, I will consider what can create a unique panorama of urban space in Łódź and its region, and on what scale this uniqueness can be considered in order to avoid the feeling that in some sense everything is unique, or nothing is, because it imitates or resembles existing solutions, ideas in other cities of Poland or Europe.

Keywords: uniqueness; urban values; aesthetic values; Lodz

Resumen

El concepto de unicidad puede ser una herramienta crítica importante. Por lo que respecta a la arquitectura, los edificios o todo el paisaje arquitectónico y visual de la ciudad, el concepto aparece con frecuencia en muchos contextos diferentes.

Se puede afirmar que describir objetos en el espacio público e incluso conjuntos urbanos enteros en términos de unicidad juega un papel en el marketing- aumenta el atractivo turístico de la zona- así como un papel sociocultural, al ayudar a fortalecer la ciudad y construir el sentido de identidad de la comunidad. Indicar estos objetivos o la intención de crear unicidad en la región de Łódź llama la atención sobre otra cuestión teórico-lingüística más fundamental, a saber, ¿qué significa que algo es único?.

Teniendo en cuenta la etimología, el enfoque teórico, así como los posibles valores atribuidos a 'unicidad', consideraré los principales problemas terminológicos con la noción. Teniendo en cuenta estas cuestiones teórico-lingüísticas básicas, consideraré si existen objetos únicos en la ciudad de Łódź y en su región.

Tratando de responder a esta pregunta, revisaré fenómenos y objetos que podrían considerarse únicos. Identificando la posible unicidad de los lugares y objetos ubicados en los espacios públicos de la región de Łódź, consideraré si se puede crear un panorama único del espacio urbano en Łódź y su región, y a que escala se puede considerar esta unicidad para evitar la sensación de que, en cierto sentido, todo es único, o nada lo es, porque imita o se asemeja a soluciones, ideas existentes en otras ciudades de Polonia o Europa.

Palabras clave: unicidad; valores urbanos; valores estéticos; Lodz

Resum:

El concepte d'unicitat pot ser una eina crítica important. Pel que fa a l'arquitectura, els edificis o tot el paisatge arquitectònic i visual de la ciutat, el concepte apareix amb freqüència en molts contextos diferents. Es pot afirmar que descriure objectes en l'espai públic i fins i tot conjunts urbans sencers en termes d'unicitat juga un paper en el màrqueting- augmenta l'atractiu turístic de la zona - així com un paper sociocultural, a l'ajudar a enfortir la ciutat i construir el sentit d'identitat de la comunitat.

Indicar aquests objectius o la intenció de crear unicitat a la regió de Łódź crida l'atenció sobre una altra qüestió teòric-lingüística més fonamental, és a dir, què vol dir que alguna cosa és única ?. Tenint en compte l'etimologia, l'enfocament teòric, així com els possibles valors atribuïts a 'unicitat', consideraré els principals problemes terminològics amb la noció. Tenint en compte aquestes qüestions teòric-lingüístiques bàsiques, consideraré si hi ha objectes únics a la ciutat de Łódź i a la seva regió.

Tractant de respondre a aquesta pregunta, revisaré fenòmens i objectes que podrien considerar-se únics. Identificant la possible unicitat dels llocs i objectes situats en els espais públics de la regió de Lodz, consideraré si es pot crear un panorama únic de l'espai urbà a Łódź i la seva regió, i a quina escala es pot considerar aquesta unicitat per evitar la sensació de que, en cert sentit, tot és únic, o res ho és, perquè imita o s'assembla a solucions, idees existents en altres ciutats de Polònia o Europa.

Paraules clau: unicitat; valors urbans; valors estètics; Łódź

In local strategic documents and on websites dedicated to the monuments of the region of Łódź and its cultural heritage, the notion of 'uniqueness' appears frequently.

The notion is used in relation to specific buildings, the entire urban landscape, or even the artistic potential of Łódź universities. For example, according to The Development Strategy of the Region of Łódź 2020 (Strategia Rozwoju Województwa Łódzkiego 2020), unique is Romanesque architecture of the region of Łódź and its factory-residential complexes. We can also read that

'Authors of the first plans of city development imagined Łódź as a middle-range industrial centre. Most of the plans were prepared and implemented in the middle of the 19th century and the city's borders were not extended up to 1915. This limitation, in combination with fast development and dynamic population growth, resulted in very dense and truly unique urban fabric which can be characterised by a mix of factories, tenement houses, villas, and palaces' (Sokołowicz 2013: 129).

In The Promoting Strategy of Piotrków Trybunalski 2017–2021 (Strategia Promocji Miasta Piotrkowa Trybunalskiego na lata 2017–2021), the notion of 'uniqueness' refers to cultural heritage in relation to the buildings and architectural landscape of the old town. In The Socio-Economic Development Strategy of the City of Tomaszów Mazowiecki 2008–2022, there is a phrase a 'unique historical and natural resource' used in relation to the entire city (Strategia Rozwoju Społeczno-Gospodarczego Miasta Tomaszowa Mazowieckiego 2008–2022).

However, one may ask—referring to these documents and websites as well as to linguistic practices, or the aesthetic approach—why the region of Łódź has ambitions to possess some objects that could be considered as unique and whether there is anything that is truly unique in the region of Łódź.

These two questions draw attention to another, more fundamental theoretical-linguistic issue, namely, what it means that something is unique. In the context of the aforementioned documents and websites, it is difficult to clearly answer the last question, as there is no explanation why those buildings or the entire urban landscape are called 'unique' by the authors of these texts. One may only assume that those objects and the urban landscape have special value for the local community due to their historical importance and some aesthetic as well as artistic features and attributes.

Taking into account the context, which is developmental, strategic, promotional, and not purely informative, one may risk an assumption that there are two major goals behind naming things 'unique' in local documents or on websites.

The first goal, a marketing one, seems to be based on the common conviction that uniqueness increases tourist attractiveness of the region. The other goal, a socio-cultural

one, corresponds with the belief that uniqueness strengthens a sense of community or belonging to a place and its identity in the collective and individual minds. It seems that the marketing goal as well as the socio-cultural one arise from the belief that uniqueness is something beneficial and positive, and it is worth promoting and describing objects or cities located in the region of Łódź as unique.

However, indicating these goals or the intention to create uniqueness in the region of Łódź does not solve the problem with the notion of 'uniqueness' and its meaning. This issue is extremely extensive and would probably require a separate overview, yet pointing out several basic terminological issues with 'uniqueness' as well as an attempt to consider possible solutions to these issues seem to be important from the point of view of identifying possible uniqueness of the places and objects located in public spaces of the region of Łódź.

The main terminological problems with 'uniqueness'

An attempt to answer the last, at the same time fundamental, question requires both a reference to the etymology of the notion of 'uniqueness' and to theoretical approaches in which this notion is considered as an aesthetic value. As noted by Yakov Malkiel: '*Basically, etymology always meant something approximating to the paraphrase "original meaning, or use, of a given lexical unit or proper name"*' (Malkiel 1993: 1). However, '*etymology can also trace dramatic changes in meaning*' (Durkin 2009: 1), pointing to the specificity of the language itself, its ontology, and different cultural conditions.

In the case of 'uniqueness,' we may consider the contemporary meaning of this notion in various languages that may indicate some subtle differences in its understanding. Nevertheless, this issue may require a separate and deeper reflection that takes into account both cultural and linguistic-ontological perspectives, therefore I will concentrate on the core meaning of 'uniqueness' which is revealed in the Latin origin of this notion.

The core meaning is provided by Latin 'unus' and 'unicus'. Latin 'unus' means 'one,' but also 'one and only,' while 'unicus' corresponds to words 'singular,' 'one of its kind,' and 'exceptional' – in both positive and negative sense (Plezia 2007: 493, 495–496). The positive sense of 'unicus' should be read as 'remarkable,' 'special,' 'unusual,' and 'extraordinary,' while the negative one as 'exceptionally hideous' (ibid. 2007: 493).

Based on the Latin original meaning of 'unus' and 'unicus,' we can see that the notion of 'uniqueness' may function in a semantic family in which there is a risk of the pola-

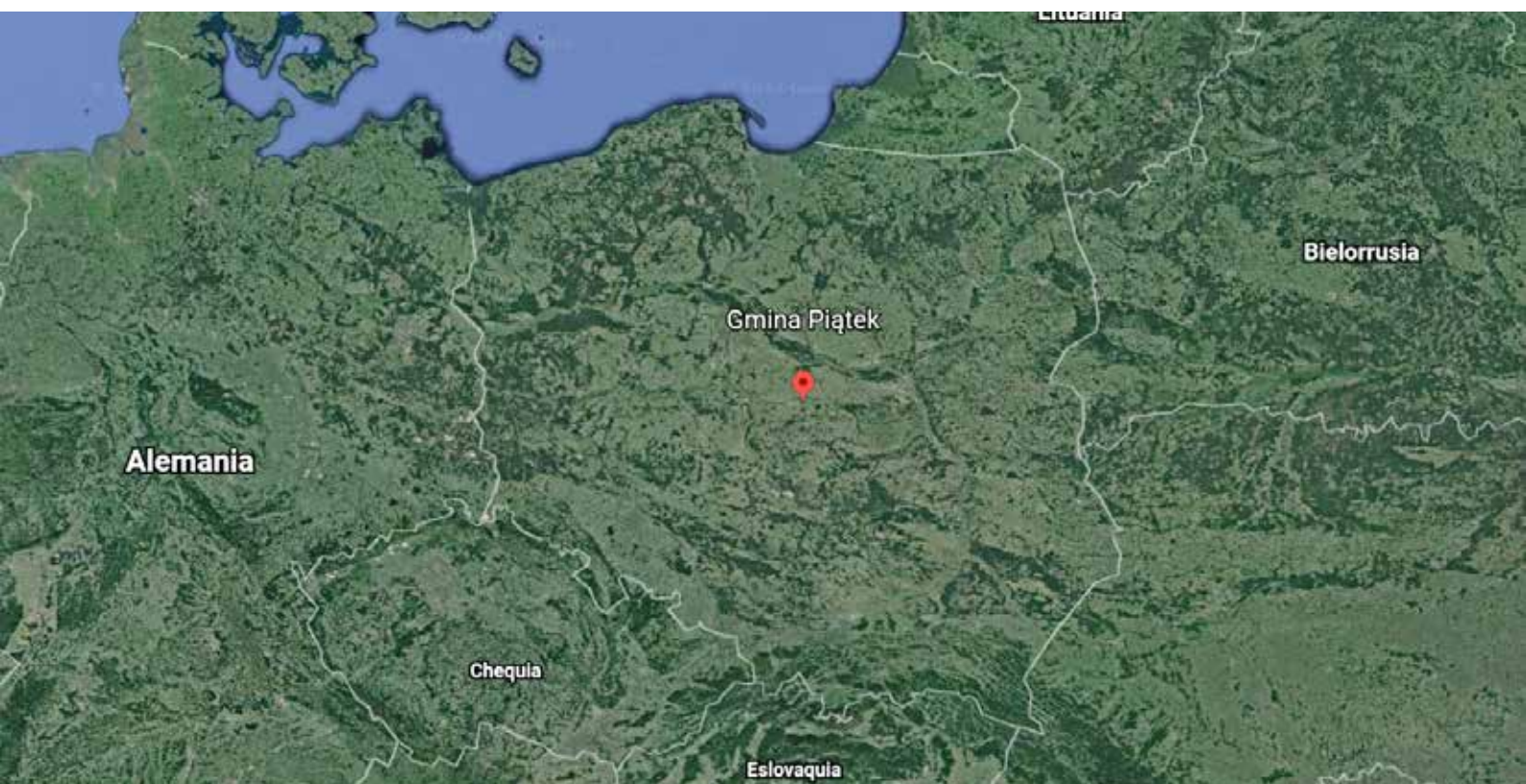
risation of meanings. A possible consequence of this polarisation may be that some phenomena and objects described as unique could be regarded as positive, negative, but also neutral. Terminological connotations that indicate the positive aspect of 'uniqueness' are, for example, 'one of a kind,' 'exceptional,' 'special,' 'original,' and 'extraordinary.' The negative or neutral potential of 'uniqueness' is revealed in its correlation with notions such as: 'peculiarity,' 'curiosity,' 'singularity,' or 'rarity.' 'Rarity' itself seems to be a notion consisting of three aspects: negative, positive, and neutral. Interestingly, the Latin origin of 'rarity' – raro, rarus – refers to notions such as: 'single,' 'not very common,' etc. (Plezia 1999: 451). Therefore, in relation to 'uniqueness,' there is a possibility to describe by this notion not only things that are 'one and only' but also everything that is rare or rarely seen.

Bearing in mind these three basic and possible values attributed to 'uniqueness,' it may be appropriate to look at it from two perspectives: descriptive and normative.

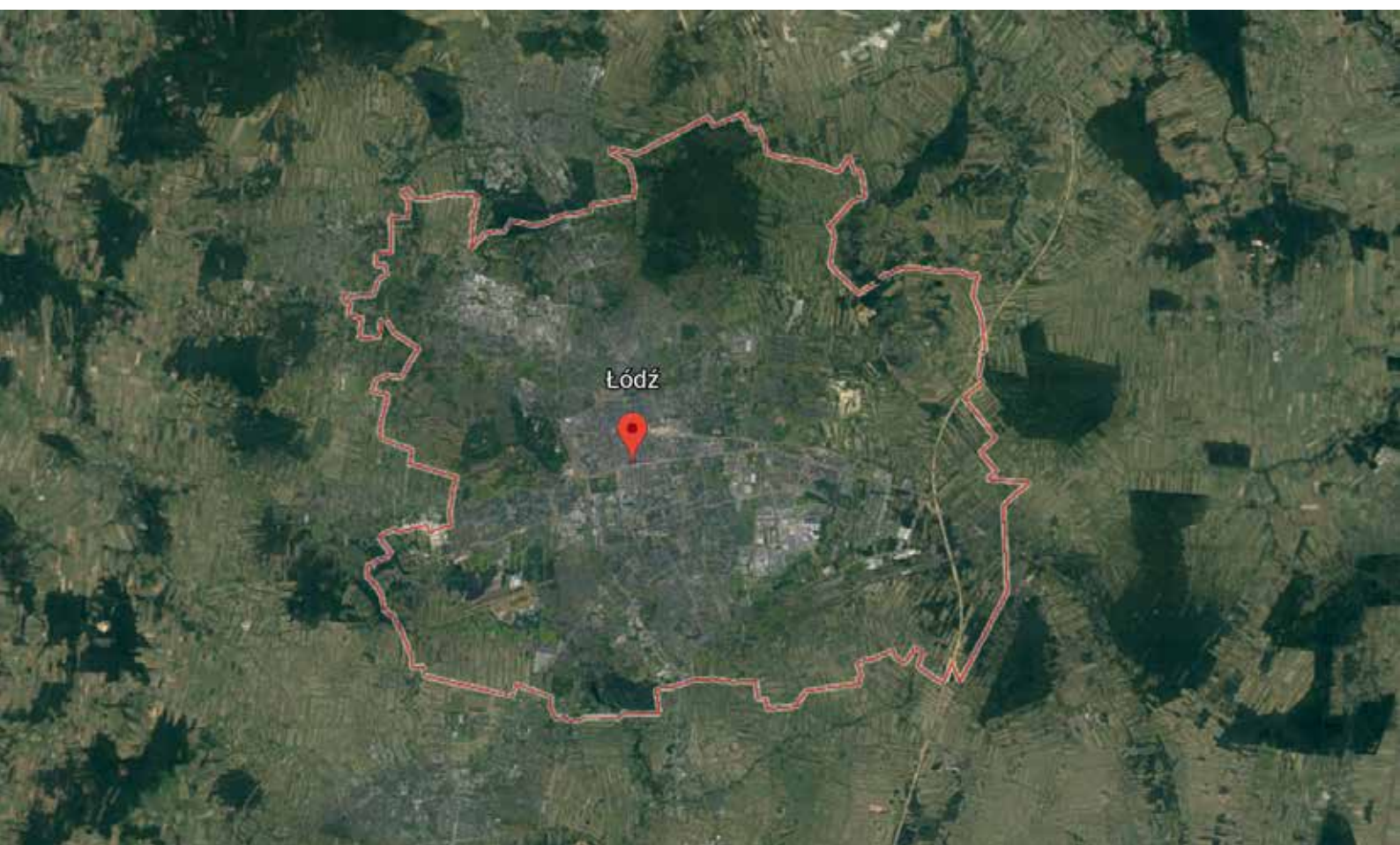
The descriptive perspective would lead us to the point that uniqueness is axiologically neutral, i.e. that when we say that something is unique, we just think that there is no other object like this and that the object is only one, but we do not employ any emotional or evaluative approach. In the perspective in which uniqueness would be normatively neutral, it is not about the special values of the object. It seems that this perspective may correspond with some ontological reflection rather than aesthetic one. A good example of application of that perspective could be the town of Piątek located in the region of Łódź [Fig. 23].

Piątek is the geometric midpoint of Poland, so there is only one place like that not only in Poland but also in the world. At the same time, the visual landscape of that place is very common and ordinary, and there are lots of cities, especially in Poland and Central and Eastern Europe, that have a similar architectural landscape to Piątek. And yet, despite the lack of some attractiveness or visual and architectural originality, one can consider Piątek as a unique place, since it is the only such spot, and there cannot be another geometric midpoint of Poland (in recent years, there have been some controversies and changes in determining the geometric midpoint of Poland, to which I will refer below, analysing the example of Piątek in more detail).

The normative aspect of 'uniqueness' draws attention to both positive and negative potential of uniqueness. The linguistic practices, however, referring not only to the common language but also to theoretical approaches, reveal that normative uniqueness seems to be axiologically positive rather than axiologically negative. This means that normative uniqueness would correlate with a special value of an object, or would be a category that raises the value of this object, makes it more attractive, or draws attention to some of its other values. Thus, one could say that in this normative ap-



Piątek, the geometric midpoint of Poland



Łódź metropolitan area

proach we expect from what is unique also some special quality, for example, craftsmanship, original application of means, etc.

This normative overtone as well as the descriptive perspective could be complemented by Roger Scruton's approach to uniqueness. In Scruton's work called *Beauty*, uniqueness appears in the context of his reflection on style. Scruton claims that:

'(...) anyone who shares the repertoire is seen as a mere copier or pasticheur, and not as an artist with a style of his own [...] the unique style is one that has identified a unique human being, whose personality is entirely objectified in his work (...)' (Scruton 2009: 107, 108).

Scruton adds the following:

'That is what is going on in art—the communication of individual experiences, in the unique form that identifies their individuality. And that is why artistic expression is so valuable—it presents us with the unconceptualized uniqueness of its subject-matter' (Scruton 2009: 116).

Therefore, based on Scruton's approach, one can say that uniqueness is related to that which is individual and one of the kind, that which cannot be imitated.

Yet, even when one takes into account all the elements mentioned, such as etymology, the descriptive and normative perspectives and the theoretical approach, still some problems with uniqueness remain. The first problem is the contradictory feeling that, in some sense, everything is unique while at the same time nothing is. Every and each thing is unique and non-repeatable in its own way, but it is also in some sense similar to others, for example, as the post-industrial landscape of Łódź resembles visual landscapes of other industrial cities in Europe, and at the same time it is, in some sense, the only one. As Jerrold Levinson has noted, aesthetic uniqueness requires consideration on a level that goes beyond the mere observation that no two things are physically identical and that in this sense each thing is unique (Levinson 1980: 435).

Thus, there must be some criterion for 'uniqueness' and its application, even though it is arbitrary and diversative. Such an arbitrary and diversative criterion could be considered in each case separately. This means that, considering, for example, Łódź as unique, one may take as a criterion not originality of the architectural landscape but the rapid pace of the city development, which could be unusual in comparison with the other industrial cities in Europe that were developing in similar period.

The other one, which manifests itself mainly in the context of the aforementioned local documents and websites, comes down to the issue that what is unique for some region may turn out to be something completely standard in the perspective of the whole country. A proposed solution to that problem may be to consider uniqueness

on a specific scale. This solution to the problem could be applied in the normative perspective as well as in the descriptive one. It is worth mentioning that probably there are no limits for uniqueness in the context of scope. Therefore, unique could be architecture, an event, a visual landscape, phenomena, and even, as Scruton has noted, a human being (Scruton 2009: 108). To capture this proposed solution, it is worth mentioning that each region of Poland has its own folk culture, sometimes even more than one, that might not be unique on a scale of Poland but might be considered as unique on a scale of the region. This view of uniqueness reveals also a comparative character of uniqueness, which means that anytime we call an object unique, we compare it with some other objects.

What could be considered as unique in the region of Łódź?

Uniqueness on a local scale, the visual and historical landscape criterion

A selection of the examples presented below takes into account the descriptive and normative aspects of uniqueness, the core meaning of 'uniqueness' as 'one of its kind' or 'that there is no other thing like that,' as well as the issue of the scale of uniqueness. Returning to the initial issues—local documents that describe objects or a visual landscape in terms of unique—it is worth mentioning the Sulejów Abbey (Strategia Rozwoju Województwa Łódzkiego 2020) [Fig. 1, 2, 3].

The Sulejów Abbey is a Cistercian abbey founded in 1176 by Duke Casimir II the Just (Kajzer 2016: 19). Sulejów was chosen by the Duke because it was located at the junction of travel routes, therefore it was important from the point of view of Duke Casimir's political ambitions (Ibid.: 19). The city itself is located approximately 65 kilometres from Łódź—the capital of the region. In the early Middle Ages, which means at the time when the the abbey in Sulejów was established, there were three monastic centres in Central Poland.

The other two are the abbeys in Łęczyca and Witów, also located in the region of Łódź (Ibid.: 18). It is worth pointing out that it is not the only Cistercian abbey on a scale of the country, and it even constitutes a part of the European tourist route that includes the monasteries of the Cistercian Order located on the whole continent. Nevertheless, the Sulejów Abbey is the only one of its kind in the region of Łódź, and as such, it is on the official list of Poland's National Historic Monuments (a full list of Poland's National Historic Monuments is available on the website of the National Institute of Cultural Heritage, Pomnik historii, 2013).



Fig. 1. Sulejów Abbey, the monastery complex of the Cistercian abbey in Sulejów, 1232–(expansion to)18th century, Poland, Sulejów, 13 Opacka St. Source: Redakcja PDR, Portal of the Diocese of Radom, 2017, www.sulejow.cystersi.pl.



Fig. 2. Sulejów Abbey, southern wall. Photo by Singdrossel, 2011, CC BY-SA 3.0.



Fig. 3. Sulejów Abbey, chapter house. Source: Public Domain.

Not evaluating the architectural value of the Sulejów Abbey but merely focusing on the descriptive perspective and the context of the historical landscape criterion and visual specificity represented by the whole monastery complex [Fig. 1], it can be said that it is unique on a scale of the region and that mentioning and promoting it as unique in local documents finds its justification especially in the relation to the core meaning of 'uniqueness.'

Uniqueness on a local scale; the heritage and cultural identity of the city criterion

Another example of uniqueness in the region of Łódź could be the Łódź Fairyland. The Łódź Fairyland is a project which creates a family tourist route around the city of Łódź following the small sculptures made of bronze depicting characters from TV series for children and films of the Se-ma-for Studio of Small Film Forms (Łódź Bajkowa, 2020–2021) [Fig. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9]. Between 2009 and 2018, ten places appeared on the route to promote Łódź in terms of its film heritage and achievements of Łódź animation. The Łódź Fairyland can be treated as a branch or a local transformation of the trend of creating monuments without pedestals presenting what is important for the local community (Ciszewska 2016: 211).

The sculptures placed along the route are situated mostly in the centre of Łódź. However, there are also other similar projects in Poland. For example, the Fairyland Garden in Międzygórze in the south of Poland, which is also a kind of route with sculptures of fairy-tale characters. Interestingly, this project was realised earlier than the Łódź Fairyland, and dates back to the interwar period. In the northeast of Poland, in the city of Białystok, there is a route called the Fairytale Trail of the Suwałki Region (Baśniowy Szlak Suwalszczyzny) which was opened in 2014.

Taking into account these two other projects, one may consider the Łódź Fairyland as an example of the uniqueness on a scale of the region of Łódź rather than on a scale of the whole country. However, it is worth noting that it has the potential to be unique on a scale of Poland. This possibility reveals itself when we bear in mind the cultural context, i.e. Łódź's film traditions and achievements of Łódź animation that are unique in themselves and make Łódź the centre of the Polish cinematographic heritage. The sculpture series sends us back to the animation studio Se-ma-for, founded in 1947, in which two Oscar-winning short animated films were created: Tango in 1982 and Peter and the Wolf in 2008, but also reminds us of the International Film Festival of the Art of Cinematography Camerimage, which was held in Łódź between 2000 and 2009. It also refers to the reputation of one of the oldest film schools in the world – the Leon Schiller National Film School in Łódź, in which generations of great Polish and world-renowned artists were studying, working and creating, and its importance for creating



Fig. 4. Marcin Mielczarek, *Ćwirek Sparrow*, 2013, sculpture, Poland, Łódź, Park Źródlińska. Photo by Zorro2212, CC BY-SA 3.0.



Fig. 5. Marcin Mielczarek, *Coralgol*, 2018, sculpture, Poland, Łódź, Sienkiewicza St./ Traugutta St., Photo by Zorro2212, CC BY-SA 4.0.



Fig. 6. Marcin Mielczarek, Magdalena Walczak, *Uzatek Teddy Bear*, 2009, sculpture, Poland, Łódź, Piotrkowska St. Photo by Guillaume Speurt, 2012, CC BY-SA 2.0.



Fig. 7. Marcin Mielczarek, Magdalena Walczak, *Filemon and Bonifacy Cats*, 2011, sculpture, Poland, Łódź, Muzeum Kinematografii [Museum of Cinematography]. Photo by Maciek Szostek, 2011, CC BY-SA 4.0.



Fig. 8. Marcin Mielczarek, Plastus, 2012, sculpture, Poland, Łódź, Sienkiewicza Park. Photo by Zorro, CC BY-SA 3.0.



Fig. 9. Plastus, the part of the sculpture including the information: 'The City of Łódź presents the sculpture of Plastus character from the film "Plastusiowy pamiętnik" [Plastus's Diary] based on Maria Konopnicka's book. Film director: Zofia Wdórkówna-Ołdak. Design of Plastus: Adam Kilian. Sculpture: Marcin Mielczarek.' Photo by Ixtlilito, 2012, CC BY-SA 3.0.

the identity of the city. The sculpture of Filemon and Bonifacy Cats, which is located in front of the Museum of Cinematography in Łódź, corresponds in an interesting way with this Łódź's film heritage [Fig. 7].

The Museum itself has a unique exhibit—the Kaiser panorama (fotoplastikon) invented by August Fuhrmann, the only one in Poland and one of few in the world. The composition of the sculpture of the cats allows them to 'play' the roles from the TV series, which further increases the pleasure of watching the film scene instead of frozen and static figures (Kazimierska-Jerzyk 2018: 176).

This sculpture, like other works comprising the Łódź Fairyland, contains the description with information about the authors of animation, books that were the inspiration for the films, and also their illustrators [Fig. 9], i.e. at the same time, the Łódź Fairyland is popularising different types of art and their creators (Ibid.: 177).

Uniqueness on a local scale, the architectural value criterion

Between 1928 and 1929, forest areas in Łask were parcelled out and guesthouses as well as holiday homes were built there. A summer resort called Miasto-Las-Kolumna or a garden city was created according to the design of architect Antoni Jawornicki (Łask-Kolumna is presented in an interesting way in the film entitled *Leśna Osada* realised by Anna Szymanek in 1994 (Taka była kiedyś Kolumna, 2021)).

The summer houses in Łask-Kolumna, similarly to other examples of this type of buildings constructed in the interwar period, were made of wood (Makowska-Iskierka, 2012: 108). The original concept of suburban holiday estates alluded to the idea of building a garden city and came from Ebenezer Howard (Ibid.: 89). Established in the 1920s, the garden city in Łask-Kolumna differed from the guidelines of Howard, primarily, the assumption of its self-sufficiency was not met (Ibid.: 90).

The idea of a garden city was implemented in its widest scope in Poland on the outskirts of Warsaw as well as in its housing estates and satellite towns, for example, an older part of Konstancin-Jeziorna, Milanówek, and Komorów, so from this point of view, Łask-Kolumna is not unique on a scale of Poland. Similar solutions can also be found in the region of Łódź, in Sokolniki and Grotniki. Therefore, Łask-Kolumna is not the only realisation of the idea of a garden city in the region and is part of the common strategy of creating 'green areas' around Łódź, which was, in some sense, one huge and bustling factory that was producing a great deal of pollution. However, considering the architectural values of the wooden guesthouses in Łask-Kolumna, one may describe this place as a unique example of a garden city on a scale of the region. It seems to be an interesting issue from the normative perspective of uniqueness. Łask-Kolumna was created by 'unique complexes of buildings that were homogeneous and consistent in their expression' (Pardała 2015: 61) [Fig. 10, 11, 12, 13, 14]. The form of the buildings refers to the best traditions of the modernist architecture and in some cases becomes its surprising and outstanding representation [Fig. 10, 11, 12].

These modernist forms might be the greatest value of the summer houses, though they do not suggest the material from which the buildings were made (Ibid.: 69). It is also worth mentioning that in the interwar period Łask-Kolumna was a luxurious place of special splendour. It was an extremely visually attractive resort, with riverside beaches, tennis courts, restaurants, dance areas, there was even a bottling plant of mineral water exported to Germany (Strumiłło 2017: 78). Unfortunately, the contemporary view of Łask-Kolumna does not fully show its former splendour. Due to the sale of river areas and large ponds, access to attractive public areas has been lost (Ibid.: 79). It is worth mentioning that there are some attempts to revive Łask-Kolumna by drawing more attention to its historical importance, but they mostly concentrate on mapping bicycle paths and jogging routes (Ibid.: 79).



from up to down , and from left to right:

Fig. 10. Łask-Kolumna, wooden guesthouse in Kolumna, Poland, 18 Wileńska St. Photo by MOs810, 2016, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Fig. 11. Łask-Kolumna, wooden guesthouse in Kolumna, Poland, the corner of Wojska Polskiego and Śląska St. Photo by Marcin Dybalski, 2021. Source: www.facebook.com/zielonakolumna/.

Fig. 12. Łask-Kolumna, wooden guesthouse in Kolumna, Poland, Kolonijna St. Photo by Marcin Dybalski, 2021. Source: www.facebook.com/zielonakolumna/.

Fig. 13. Łask-Kolumna, wooden guesthouse in Kolumna, Poland, the corner of Wileńska and Bazarowa St. Photo by Marcin Dybalski, 2017. Source: www.facebook.com/zielonakolumna/.

Fig. 14. Łask-Kolumna, wooden guesthouse in Kolumna, Poland, 1 Wileńska St. Photo by MOs810, 2016, CC BY-SA 4.0.



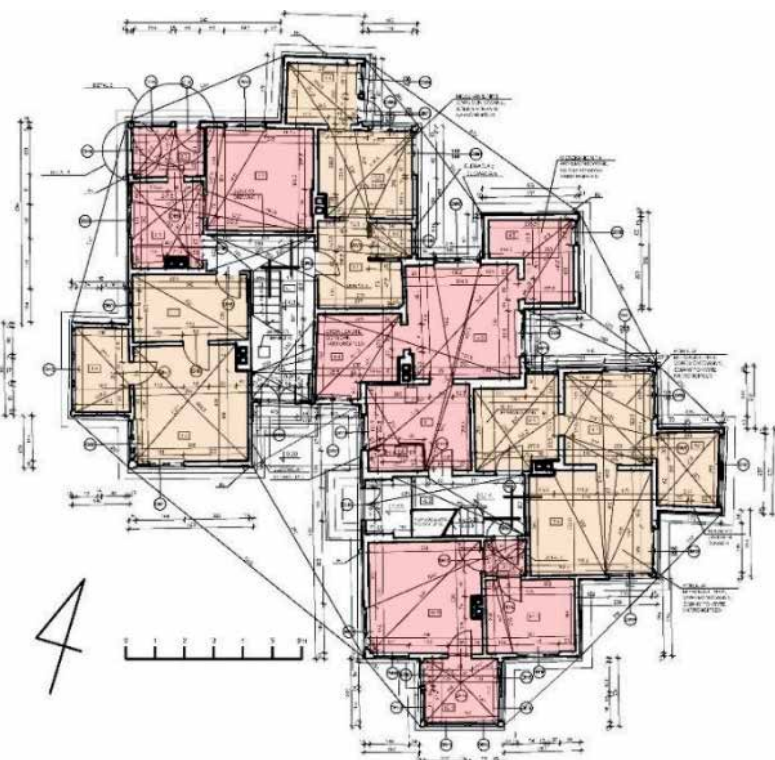


Fig. 15. Floor plan of the wooden guesthouse, Łask-Kolumna, 10 Jagiełły St. The inventory made by M. A. Frątczak, K. Gawron, A. Mażewska, M. Rogozińska, M. Szkatulska under the supervision of W. Witkowski and W. Pardała, the Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning of the Lodz University of Technology, September 2014. Source: Pardała 2015: 65.

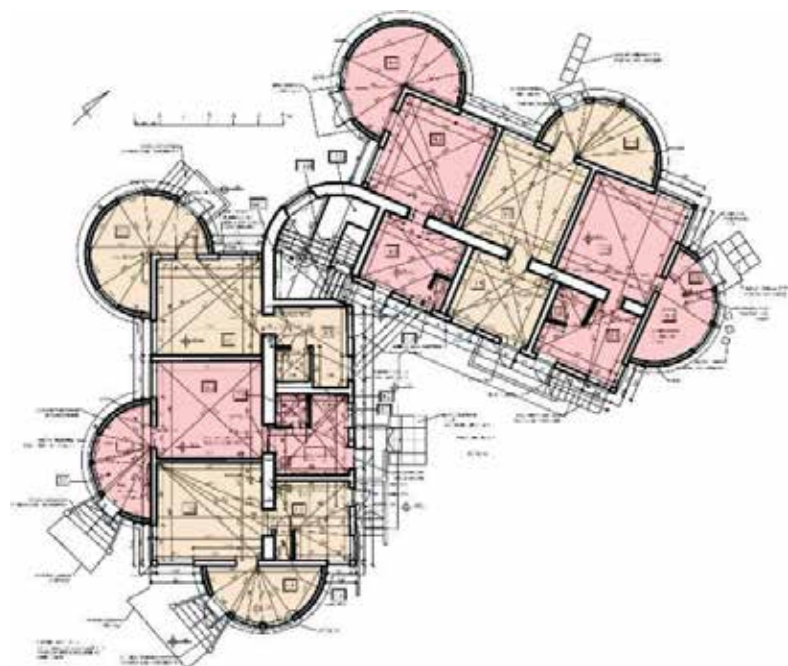


Fig. 16. Floor plan of the wooden guesthouse, Łask-Kolumna, 14 Wojska Polskiego St. The inventory made by M. Bamberski, A. Łapa, M. Markiewicz, A. Rochala, M. Stelmasiak, K. Weirauch, A. Żuchlińska under the supervision of W. Witkowski and W. Pardała, the Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning of the Lodz University of Technology, September 2014. Source: Pardała 2015: 66.

Uniqueness on a scale of Poland, the criterion of idea and historic importance of a place

Rosa's Passage in Łódź can be considered as another example of uniqueness in the region. I would like to thank Professor Antoni Remesar for providing this example of uniqueness in Łódź. The work of art that may bring to mind the "Quixote", specifically in the "Knight of the mirrors" that the bachelor Sansón Carrasco incarnated' (Remesar 2020: 67) is not an obvious example of uniqueness, especially when we take into account long and rich traditions of mosaic art in Eastern and Western Europe.

It is also worth mentioning that in this case pointing out the scale seems to be more difficult. However, it can be assumed that Rosa's Passage is unique on a scale of Poland. Work on Rosa's Passage began in 2013 and was continued until 2014. The author of this work, Joanna Rajkowska, describes the Passage as follows

"Rosa's Passage" as the title of the project for the city of Łódź and as a phrase has a twofold meaning for me. On the one hand, this is a reference to the project's location—a narrow courtyard at the back of the tenement building at 3 Piotrkowska St. The courtyard became a passage in the literal sense. So Rosa's Passage is an idea of a special place and a route, thus redirecting human presence and attention. On the other hand, Rosa's Passage depicts the path that

my daughter, Rosa, travelled, from not seeing to seeing' (Rajkowska, 2019) ¹.

The work was created with broken mirrors, covering 800 m² of walls, which probably makes it the largest glass mosaic in Poland [Fig. 17]. Covering the façade with mosaic seems to be not an unusual phenomenon in public space. One can mention, for example, the mosaics located in Barcelona, Lisbon, or Istanbul, but also in Szczecin in Northern Poland.

The criterion of the artistic value of the structure of this work [Fig. 18, 19] also seems to be not adequate, especially when we compare Rosa's Passage to the South of Poland's mosaics that also were created with fragments of mirrors and glass. However, Rajkowska's project arises from a special and non-repeatable idea, as

'the intention of the artist was to stop the viewer at the level of enchantment with the very possibility of seeing. The architectural skin that the buildings have grown is nothing but a retina, a light-sensitive tissue with which eyes are equipped. [...] The project also has its strictly architectural dimension. A monumental mosaic of cut mirrors, arranged on the facades of the outbuildings, is, according to Rajkowska, an attempt to visually dematerialise the body—an attempt to overcome the weight, scale and enormity of the building' (Ibid.).

This idea behind the project, as well as the meta-level of reception of the work, which is not limited to purely sensual experience, although Rajkowska's intention is to 'stop the viewer at the level of enchantment with the very possibility of seeing' (Ibid.), is also an inspiration for deeper reflection. All these elements make Rosa's Passage one of its kind, unique certainly on a scale of the region, but also possibly unique on a scale of Poland. What constitutes an additional though not less important argument for the uniqueness of Rosa's Passage is the place itself and its history. The first hotel in Łódź called Hotel Polski was located where Rosa's Passage is today (Kazimierska-Jerzyk 2018: 145). Rajkowska's work transformed a neglected and hidden space into a place that is always visited and admired (Ibid.: 144, 145), which allowed residents to rediscover its uniqueness in the context of the historical significance of the place.

Uniqueness on a scale of Poland, the urban solution criterion

Another example of uniqueness in the region of Łódź is the triangular market square in Łowicz [Fig. 20]. It is one of the three originally preserved triangular market squares in Europe, two others are located in Bonn and Paris (Trójkątny rynek w Łowiczu, 2007–2013). The triangular market square in Łowicz, called also the New Market, was built at the beginning of the 15th century.

1.- As Agnieszka Sural mentions, Rajkowska posted on Facebook in 2012 the explanation about her daughter being diagnosed with retinoblastoma, a type of eye cancer: *'For now, we believe that, following six cycles of chemotherapy, Rosa will undergo a laser operation or radiotherapy in London, where this kind of treatment is best done at private clinics. It will cost around 20 thousand pounds'* (Sural, 2014). The girl's treatment was successful.



from up to down , and from left to right

Fig. 17. Joanna Rajkowska, Rosa's Passage, 2016, Poland, Łódź, 3 Piotrkowska St., the largest glass mosaic in Poland (mirror glass). Photo by Wioletta Kazimierska-Jerzyk.

Fig. 18, 19. Joanna Rajkowska, Rosa's Passage, details. Photo by Wioletta Kazimierska-Jerzyk.



Originally, there was a wooden town hall, which was replaced in the Renaissance with a brick town hall, unfortunately destroyed in the 17th century. For centuries, the market served as a town marketplace, and the streets diverging from it, lined with craft stalls, formed its continuation.

The uniqueness of the spatial experience of the market square in Łowicz resulting from its unusual shape might be difficult to capture as indicated by the excavation works carried out in the 1990s. As a result of those excavations, the fountain built in the 1950s was removed, and the sidewalk and travel routes were demolished (Ibid., 2007–2013). In 2005–2006, the triangular market square in Łowicz was revitalised and currently numerous city events and temporary exhibitions are organised there. During this revitalisation, awarded even by the Society of Polish Town Planners in the category 'Revitalised public space' (Michrowska 2015: 92), the layout of the foundations of the mentioned Renaissance town hall was recreated and visualised on the sidewalk [Fig. 21, 22]. The example of the triangular market square in Łowicz as unique on a scale of the whole country and a rarity in Europe reveals the importance of properly carried out revitalisation to maintain and expose this uniqueness and to allow for the internalisation of this unique value by the inhabitants.

Uniqueness on a world scale, the administrative criterion

The city of Piątek as the geometric midpoint of Poland is an intriguing example of uniqueness, especially in the context of scale and criterion. In some sense, it could be considered as unique not only on a scale of Poland or Europe but likely also in the world. In 1966, the geometric midpoint of Poland was determined by crossing the lines connecting from the farthest points to the north and south and to the east and west of Poland. In 1972, a commemorative stone was erected in Piątek, which in 1976 was replaced with a golden globe modern-shaped monument of symbolic significance (Piątek. 19°27'E-52°03'N, czyli geometryczny środek Polski? 2012) [Fig. 23].

It is worth noting that despite its importance and also a remarkable appearance, interestingly corresponding to the Łódź Sculpture Gallery in Rubinstein's Passage created in a similar period, finding information about the author of the sculpture seems to be very difficult. According to Stanislaw Cisak, the sculpture was created by two artists Zdzislaw Lenart and Stanislaw Wilczyński (Cisak 2001: 9). In 2019, the Monument of the Geometric Midpoint of Poland underwent restoration works, it was given a new colour—metallic silver. Although the monument is very characteristic in the region of Łódź, the visual landscape of Piątek is, as already mentioned, very ordinary and



from up to down , and from left to right

Fig. 20. New Market Square in Łódź (one of the three preserved triangular markets in Europe), Poland, Łódź, New Market Square in Łódź. Source: Google Earth

Fig. 21, 22. New Market Square in Łódź, details: fragments of a Renaissance sidewalk. Photo by Zorro, 2012, CC BY-SA 3.0.



Fig. 23. Zdzisław Lenart and Stanisław Wilczyński, Piątek—the Geometric Midpoint of Poland, 1976, sculpture, Poland, Piątek, Market Square in Piątek . Photo by Merlin, 2005, CC BY-SA 3.0.

typical. This also draws attention to a certain irony of this category of uniqueness in its descriptive aspect and in relation to specific objects in public space; objects that are not unique themselves but could be made unique in a specific or adequate context. In this case, an administrative decision determines uniqueness, which means that a different administrative decision may take away this uniqueness of place and its inhabitants. This, in a way, happened to Piątek as the geometric centre of Poland, which according to the latest measurements—taking into account the correction of the boundaries of coastal municipalities—is situated not in Piątek but in Nowa Wieś, also located in the region of Łódź (Toza 2018).

From the descriptive perspective, this change does not affect the fact that there is only one geometric centre of Poland, regardless of whether it is in Piątek or Nowa Wieś. However, when one is trying to look at this example from the normative perspective, some important problems can be identified referring to the identity of inhabitants and place as well as its visual landscape. Interestingly, the new geometrical centre is located in a marshy area, where it will be difficult to build any sculpture or monument (Ibid. 2018) or emphasise the uniqueness of this place in another way. In this context, taking care of the centre of Piątek and the sculpture, which has become part of the collective consciousness of the inhabitants and Poles as a symbol of the centre of Poland—despite the new measurements—appears to be even more important. This

sculpture a

trative criterion of uniqueness, could be visually interesting and important due to the historical values and identity issues, but also because they are the dominant feature of the city landscape.

Conclusion

These are selected examples of unique elements in the region of Łódź that definitely do not exhaust the topic and do not conclude the discussion around uniqueness of public space in the region of Łódź.

The first recognition of the functioning of the uniqueness category based on the example of the region of Łódź concentrates mostly on the modernist architecture, projects and works of art that were created in the 1970s and the two first decades of the 21st century. This does not mean that the historical objects of the region are not unique. This is indicated primarily by the example of the Sulejów Abbey and the triangular market square in Łowicz.

Rather, one may assume that historical significance is not a necessary and sufficient condition for uniqueness. Certainly, it is worth making in the future a deeper analysis of historical objects and urban complexes, such as wooden sacred architecture in Wieluń and surrounding area, which has potential to be unique because of frequent appearance of high value monuments in close vicinity.

The example of Wieluń could also indicate that unique objects of the region are not only located in Łódź and the vicinity of the city but also occur in places away from the capital of the region [Fig. 24]. Such dispersion of unique objects could have a beneficial effect on these areas, both increasing its tourist attractiveness and strengthening their social and cultural significance for the region of Łódź. One may also wonder whether the artistic and cultural values should play a more important role in defining objects in terms of uniqueness.

This is definitely an open field for reflection, and the aforementioned examples do not exhaust the list of possible unique objects in the region of Łódź and its capital, as well as the questions concerning the scale of their uniqueness. However, it is worth noting that these selected examples reveal some problematic issues that centre around uniqueness but also suggest solutions to these problems. In particular, they emphasise—at a practical and not only theoretical level—the importance of proper revitalisation, preserving and protecting those objects and places that could be considered unique. These examples reveal that if something is preserved in memory and consciousness as unique, and thus shapes the identity of a place and its inhabitants, it is worth stri-

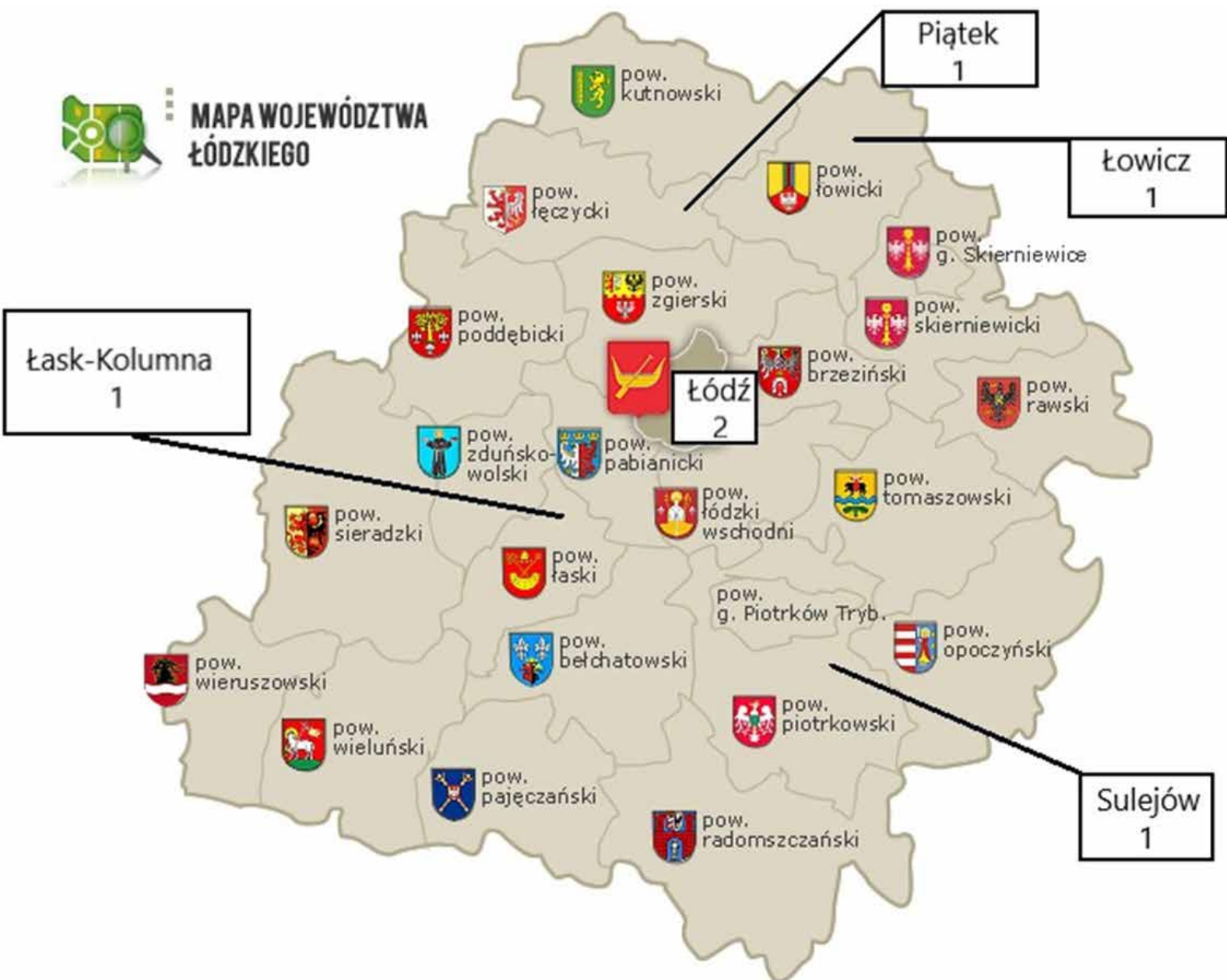


Fig. 24. Map of the region of Łódź, the location and number of unique elements in the region of Łódź. Map source: Łódzki Urząd Wojewódzki w Łodzi.

ving to strengthen this feeling and the attachment to the value itself by specific and thoughtful practices that take into account the context of the place and its history, the origin of the object and the information about its author, as well as the possibilities and conditions of the experience of public space.

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