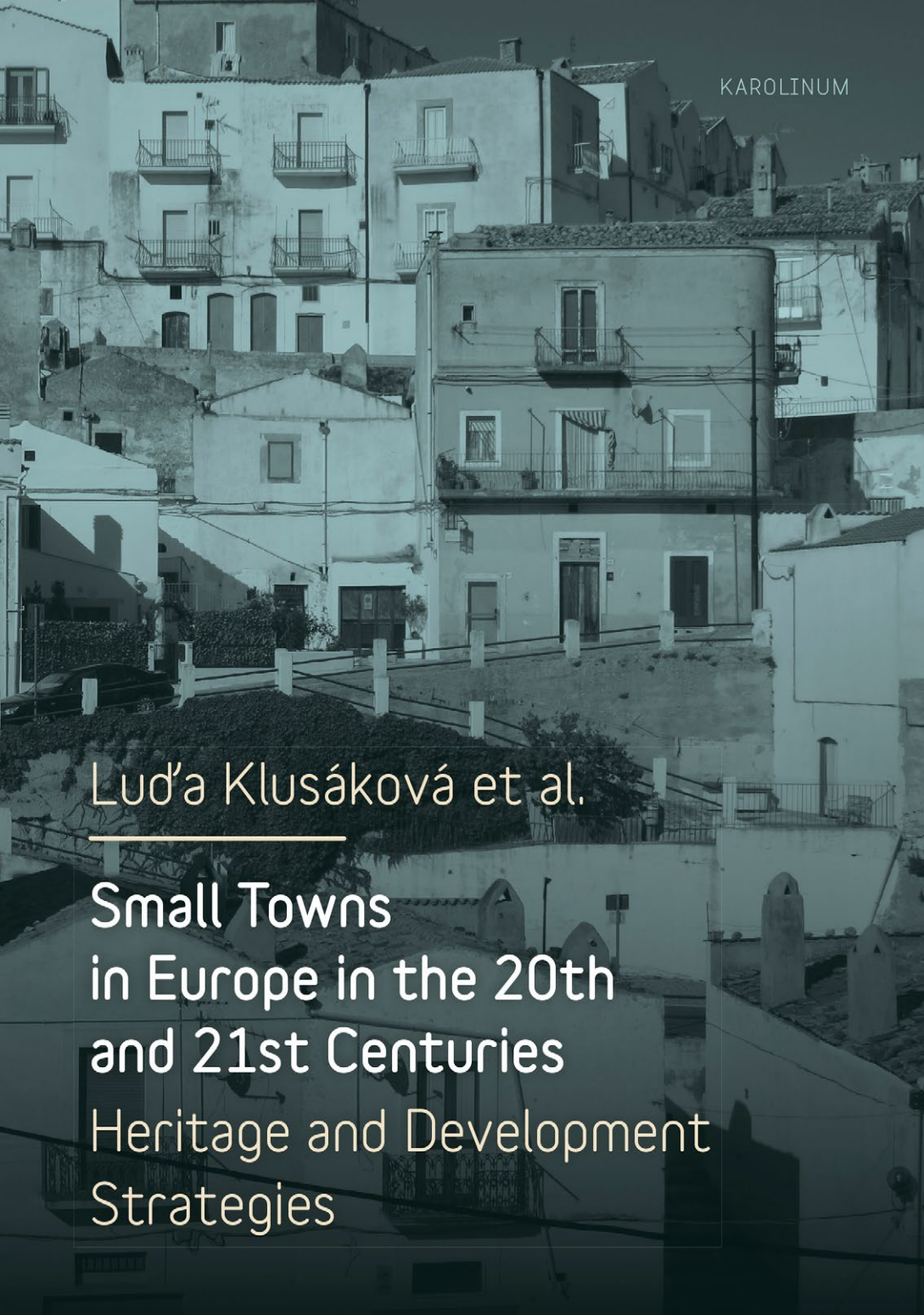

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Luďa Klusáková et al.

Small Towns in Europe in the 20th and 21st Centuries

Heritage and Development Strategies

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Preface

Luďa Klusáková

Our book presents the results of research carried out by scholars of various disciplines (historians, sociologists, architects, and art specialists) and is focussed on the status of contemporary small towns in several European countries. The authors study how town managers and others try to make the best of the not very favourable situation of being a relatively unimportant, peripheral area dependent on a large, influential urban conglomerate. In addition, they examine how architects and planners view the organization of space in a small town.

Small towns, overshadowed by big cities and metropolises, remain a distinct feature of European settlement. While large urban sprawls, with their concomitant suburban malls, highways, skyscrapers, and the like, may seem to lack individuality when compared globally, small towns, on the contrary, retain specific spatial organization, forms of social life, including face to face contact, and engender variety and different regional types.

Which towns qualify as small towns? In scholarly discourse, small towns are classified as those that maintain their traditions and memory, as opposed to large towns where the focus is on the future with, in consequence, a progressive loss of memory. The first are categorized as societies of memory, the second as societies of change.[1] Such an interpretation, however, suggests a rather gloomy prognosis for the future of small towns.

When the co-authors of the book met at a conference of the European Association for Urban History in Lisbon in 2014, they found that their

1 Mariusz Zemło quoting Danielle Hervieu-Léger in "Tradycjonalizm małego miasta." In *Małe Miasta. Historia i współczesność* ["Small Town's Traditionalism." In *Small Towns. History and Present Times*], edited by Mariusz Zemło and Przemysław Czyżewski (Supraśl 2001), 133–134.

research had a common denominator: an interest in the social function of small towns. The problem of defining what constitutes a small town is touched on only when choosing examples but the point is not laboured. The case studies discuss the interconnection between cultural heritage and its commodification in various situations.

What were the issues that confronted small towns in various parts of Europe in the 20th and 21st centuries? In five chapters the authors present their findings and their selection of illustrative cases. A shared feature in all is a questioning of the role of history and how it is displayed and exploited, at times even manipulated. Indeed, heritage appears to be an underlying characteristic in all the chapters.

A team of British historians, Angela Bartie, Linda Fleming, Mark Freeman, Tom Hulme and Paul Readman, in the chapter entitled "Performing the Past: Identity, Civic Culture and Historical Pageants in Twentieth-Century Small Towns," discuss the modifications and changes made to traditional pageants – shows depicting historical scenes – which used to be very popular in England. The chapter is a revealing and incisive analysis of local patriotism that resonates with the following one on Myshkin, which focusses on the building of a local community through constructing/reconstructing history and the setting up of regular town-wide events.

The authors, Greg Yudin and Yulia Koloshenko, both specialists in economic sociology, examine the process of the "touristification" of a previously not very interesting provincial Russian town, which had no particular historical monuments and, many would say, no real potential for becoming a tourist destination. In their chapter, "Strategies of manufacturing tourist experience in a small town," they discuss the success story of Myshkin, where the struggle over town/village status has been crucial for local identity.

The following two chapters, on the other hand, were written by historians of architecture. They deal with regional examples from the southern part of Europe. In "Urban Cores and Urban Identity: Appropriating and Rejecting a City's History," Olga Moatsou looks at small towns in Greece, particularly Rhetymno on the island of Crete. Setting the case study in the context of the national urban network, the author stresses the pertinence of disputes concerning the administrative classification of small towns and their borders in terms of political organization, urban planning and economic development. The Iberian section explores towns in both Andalusia and Alentejo, cross border regions in the south-west of Spain and the south of Portugal. Blanca Del Espino Hidalgo

in "Miraculous Equilibrium. Keys for a Sustainable Network of Small South Iberian Cities," analyses the strategies adopted by town officials from the perspective of the local network of border regions. Finally, the architectural and urbanistic approach to small towns, from a historical point of view, is introduced by the Czech art historian, Martin Horáček: "'The Architectural Rhythm of a Small Town ... Is Very Familiar to Us.' A Small Town as an Aesthetic Ideal of the Twentieth Century."

The aim of the book's authors was to create a multi-faceted collection of studies that would portray different aspects of the contemporary situation of small towns. By means of selected case studies, the notion of the small town is thematized, and its various meanings in different social and geographical settings are assessed. In their research the authors focus on an analysis of the identity of urban communities. This is their first collaboration and followed from the EAUH session proposal on small towns. Their belief that an understanding of small town perspective would make a considerable contribution to the ongoing debate in their respective regions convinced them of the need to research a topic which does not seem so very important, at least at first sight.

The only previous project on European small towns was carried out by Bernard Lepetit and Peter Clark more than 20 years ago, and focussed on the early modern period. There was no further attempt to systematically research small towns in the 19th century and later, on a supranational scale. This is surprising since in Europe small towns remain a quite visible type of urban settlement even in the 21st century, regardless of previous urban growth, regional urbanisation, and the dominant position of metropolises, metropolitan agglomerations, and large cities in general.

Our perspective is of course European, claiming as we do that the number of small towns is still quite large, and that the experience of life and sociability in such a community is important. This is one of the neglected themes in the urban history of the modern and contemporary period, and the gap cannot be filled by one research project or by one book. The notion of the small town in the context of the changes that have occurred in the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the third millennium deserves to be revisited, and perhaps this study might stimulate the interest of other scholars in the topic.

All the chapters in the book underwent the process of anonymous peer review and critical comments were highly appreciated and integrated by the authors. We would like to express the gratitude of the authors to our colleagues PhDr. Kathleen Brenda Geaney for the linguistic review

and Mgr. Iva Sokolová for the careful preparation of the manuscript for printing. Their role was essential in the final stage. Co-authoring the book was a learning process as well as a very agreeable and rewarding experience.

Small Towns as a European Cultural Heritage. Introduction

Luďa Klusáková
and Marie-Vic Ozouf-Marignier

Towns and cities are carriers of the culture of European countries and nations. Alongside iconic metropolises, small towns and their hinterlands are the prevailing type of environment in which people in Europe live. The statistics are very straightforward. Europe is predominantly urban, but, in terms of area, also has 35.1% of intermediate status, and 22.42% mainly rural regions.[1] The map on the site referred to, which shows the distribution of cities according to size, confirms the image of societies where small town experience shapes the lives of a very significant proportion of the population.[2]

Yet these figures notwithstanding, the amount of research that has been devoted to small towns from a comparative European perspective in any period of history is rare. There is of course some but considering how large a proportion of the European population, let alone the global, still live in small towns, it is clear that this topic has suffered neglect among urban historians.[3]

The subject is not new. In France, where the intermediate and primarily rural regions constitute almost sixty five percent (64.95%) of the land area while 77% percent of the population live in cities, we can trace the ups and downs of the association dedicated to the history of small towns, which was very active in the last third of the 20th century, and initiated a series of conferences and collective volumes. This was the period of the decentralization policy introduced by the socialist government of François Mittérand. Nor was interest in the issue confined to France.

1 http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/RSI/#?vis=typologies.urb_typology&lang=en (accessed 16. 9. 2016).

2 http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/RSI/#?vis=city.statistics&lang=en (accessed 16. 9. 2016).

3 Eveline S. van Leeuwen, *Urban-Rural Interactions. Towns as Focus Points in Rural Development, Contributions to Economics* (Berlin – Heidelberg 2010), 1.

In 1984 the European Council for the Village and Small Town was set up. This campaigning organisation based in the UK has a number of national sections. Although the dynamic behind this body is not at all clear, it confirms the importance of both.[4] It is not surprising either that the German unit of ECOVAST is quite active. Small towns in a peripheral position in Germany represent a very striking phenomenon, as we read in the reports produced by the researchers of *Leibniz-Institut für Regionalentwicklung und Strukturplanung e.V.* (IRS). Of the 1,300 such towns, 75% are characterised by a decline in demographic, economic, and social criteria. This does not mean, of course, that small towns inevitably have to be thus, provided they are prepared to benefit from the regional, cultural landscape and the heritage of small, historic, market towns.[5] This viewpoint is reminiscent of the research carried out by Bernard Kayser on creative urban people in villages and small towns and his typology of the various strategies of *Renaissances Rurales*. His contention is that the fate of small towns, is to a large extent the result of the strategies adopted by those responsible for their governance.[6]

Looking again at France, we find that the last fifteen years has not seen any significant project or publication in the field, despite the fact that France is famous for its regional diversity, which in turn is based on small towns in rural regions and suburban belts surrounding metropolises. In the Czech Republic the ratio between large and small, rural and urban is comparable with France, which is somewhat surprising, but the gap in research on small towns has to be acknowledged. Urban sociology and geography have a slightly larger output. In the early 1990s, Peter Clark, who 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.[7] Twenty years on, the authors of the present study attempted to learn what changes have occurred and, in due course, considered publishing their findings on the grounds that small towns in contemporary Europe are numerous,

4 http://www.ecovast.org/english/index%20.htm (accessed 28. 10. 2016).

5 Manfred Kühn, "Small towns in rural areas – What are the possibilities in the periphery? Peripheral Small Towns," IRS Aktuell, *Newsletter for Social Science-Based Spatial Research*, no. 6 (September 2014), 3–4.

6 Bernard Kayser, *La renaissance rurale. Sociologie des campagnes du monde occidental*, (Paris: Armand Colin 1990); Idem, "Les citadins au village," *Espace, populations, soci*étés, *Repopulation et mobilit*és rurales (1 February 2001), 152–153. www.persee.fr/doc/espos_0755-7809_2001_num_19_1_1983 (accessed 14. 4. 2017).

7 Peter Clark (ed.), *Small Towns in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995), xvii.

attractive, difficult in many ways for their inhabitants, and fascinating for the authors of this book. In addition, the problems small towns and their dwellers face are still neglected in historical research.

Over the last decades, rural geography and history have paid attention to the revival of small towns with regard to peri-urbanization and the fight against the desertification of the countryside. The towns themselves have recorded a renewal of interest from people attracted by the quality of the living environment, while the authorities have tried to maintain the services and facilities available at a good level. Heritage and tourism, especially cultural tourism, are becoming important resources for local development. In most European countries, decentralization revalued the role of small towns and gave them more skills and powers. Since the 1990s, European regional policy has demonstrated the importance of social and territorial cohesion. Spatial proximity is seen as a crucial lever for implementing the ideal of solidarity and for generating concerted action in respect of economic growth. Local values, the uniqueness and specificity of a territory or the goods on offer have become successful tools of appeal and competition. National and European public policy, for example the "Leader" program,[8] encourage structuring action in small towns.

The valorisation of "smalltownness" does not come only from the political powers that be. Activism also grows within academic and militant groups. One such is the Society of Territorialists whose leader is the urbanist, Alberto Magnaghi, a professor at the University of Florence. In 2011, the so-called "Territorialist school" began to advocate regional planning based on "urban villages" and local projects. The movement has found a lot of support among local authorities. Though originating in Italy, this network of territorialists has now spread to France. Other initiatives are linked with the creation of defence associations. Since 1990, the Association of small towns of France (APVF) has federated cities from 3,000 to 20,000 inhabitants to promote their specific role in regional and urban planning. It has 1,100 members and is lobbying actively in Parliament and in European institutions. The president of the APVF, Martin Malvy, is also 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 Euro-

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

pean level and that their interests are fully represented." Mention should also be made of associations whose purpose is to defend 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 town councils in small historic towns and villages throughout Britain." Like several similar institutions in Europe, *I Borghi più belli d'Italia*, founded in March 2001, is an association of small Italian towns of historical interest. This flowering of institutional and militant organisations demonstrates the consciousness of small town identity.

It is not surprising that this movement has resulted in the creation of a European Association of Historic Towns and Regions, which unites the municipal endeavours of a large number of historical towns, many of them small, although size in itself is not an issue.[9] Among its members are individual towns and national associations. It might be expected that in the countries of Central Europe, which has always been classified as a region of small historical urban settlements, these associations would be particularly strong and active. This, however, does not seem to be the case. In the Czech Republic, such an association was founded in 1990 as an NGO.[10] Having as its main goal the preservation, protection and the practical utilization of regional heritage, it had 214 members by 1 August 2016. All of its many diverse activities both for professionals and the public at large are carried out in the Czech Republic and abroad to achieve this objective. Most important among them is the systematic regeneration of urban heritage sites and settlements. Since 1994, the success of this urban regeneration program has been evaluated annually and the "Historical Town of the Year" selected. The association has joined the European Heritage Days – EHD – under the auspices of the Council of Europe and national governmental institutions.

The question as to how the small and historical towns cooperate requires a closer look at the past. The Association of Polish Towns[11] and the Association of Towns and Cities in Slovakia[12] are recently founded bodies. The Association of Towns and Communities of the Czech Repub-

9 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/ (accessed 26. 10. 2016).

10 *Sdružení historických sídel Čech, Moravy a Slezska (SHS ČMS)*, http://www.historickasidla.cz/ (accessed 26. 10. 2016).

11 *Związek Miast Polskich*, http://www.zmp.poznan.pl/strona-22-historia.html (accessed 26. 10. 2016).

12 *Združenie miest a obcí Slovenska*, http://www.zmos.sk/ (accessed 26. 10. 2016).

lic,[13] which is a source of important information about the networking of cities, has today more than 2,600 members.[14] The association went through several stages as a result of political conditions.

The association commissioned an article on its origins in which we learn that it all began in 1907 in the historic town of Kolín. There, 210 delegates met and decided to create a formal corporation, as was the case with other estates and professions in the country.[15] In reality, efforts to establish an association of towns had even deeper roots and can be traced to a meeting of city representatives in 1895 – on both occasions, incidentally, the mayors of the cities legitimized their meeting by arguments about the danger of self-government while, at the same time, urging the need to join in efforts to overcome pressure from the government in Vienna. 200 delegates from about one hundred cities met at the 1907 convention. They decided to hold regular meetings and to build an association which would carry out the policies agreed. The main interest of the association was on the governance and functioning of the cities and on regulating their infrastructure. Shortly afterwards, in 1909, the association started a newsletter (Věstník), which illustrates the scope of its activities and interests. While the primary goal was to derive some sort of benefit from unified action, the secondary appears to have been to satisfy curiosity about a parallel situation in the outside world. They studied the experiences of other countries and sought relevant literature on the topic. However, national conditions, tensions between Czech and German cities, and the position of one or other minority within the towns or magistracies themselves preoccupied them. During the Great War, the cities remained faithful to the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the association issued declarations of loyalty to the Hapsburgs in Vienna. In 1918, interestingly, the main topic for debate was the supply of alimentary products to the cities.

After the establishment of the independent state, the cities could continue to function as an organised body, since they had never ceased in this activity. In fact, they claimed that it was the cities which were building the new state and were the major investor in the infrastructure. City finances, however, were in a difficult state after the war. In 1920, the association met for the first time in the new state and invited representa-

13 *Svaz měst a obcí České republiky* (SMO ČR).

14 http://www.smocr.cz/cz/svaz-mest-a-obci-cr/kdo-jsme/kdo-jsme.aspx (accessed 26. 10. 2016).

15 Lenka Zgrajová, *Svaz měst a obcí očima století* [Cities and Communities Association in Historical Perspective], 2009, http://smocr.cz/o-svazu/z-historie/koreny-svazu.aspx (accessed 14. 4. 2017).

tives from all the 155 national cities to attend, regardless of whether or not they were members of the association.

After World War II, the political authorities viewed the association as a rival and this led to its termination. 1960 witnessed a revival but closure again followed with the defeat of the reforms introduced in 1968. The association re-opened in the last decade of the 20th century, when it became an important partner in the efforts to develop regional politics and networking between the regions and the EU. The Czech association is also a member of the international European body: The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR).[16]

This association was founded in Geneva in 1951 by a group of European mayors. Later, it expanded to include the regions and become what it is today – the largest organisation for local and regional government in Europe. Its membership comprises more than 50 national associations of towns, municipalities and regions from 40 countries. Together these associations represent some 100,000 local and regional authorities.

The 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: "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." A targeted work program has been developed 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.[17]

The association is organised into workgroups, in which cities and local governments from all continents are represented, although Europe is

16 The Council of European Municipalities and Regions http://www.ccre.org/en (accessed 4. 4. 2017).

17 United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), http://www.cities-localgovernments.org/sections.asp (accessed 3. 3. 2012).

somewhat underrepresented. Very active are the French representatives, who are numerous. Central Europe was represented on about eight occasions by German delegates, twice by Slovak, and twice by Polish, but not by Czechs or Hungarians or indeed any other nationality which declares itself Central European.

When we delve more into the past, we find other associations with the specific goal of promoting cultural heritage, such as those affiliated with UNESCO and associations promoting the 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 Union of Cities for Peace. The full congress was subsequently held in Madrid, bringing together representatives of cities from all over the world. Since then, Guernica-Lumo has been a member of this association.[18] While information on its activities is somewhat lacking in cyber space, it does point to another association which promotes the culture of peace: the International Association of Peace Messenger Cities[19]. This was founded in 1987, and among its founding members were several central European capital cities, including Prague, Vienna and Warsaw.

The impetus behind this association is likewise rooted in the past, to the years shortly after the end of World War II, when the many destroyed cities in Europe (Warsaw, Oswiencim-Auschwitz, Volgograd, Saint Petersburg), as well as Asia (Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan) evoked sympathy and support for recovery. The International Cities of Peace[20] organisation stems from the idea of town-twinning. The aim is to create occasions for citizens of European cities to come together, learn about one another, and thus help to overcome prejudices and prevent another military conflict in Europe.

Since Central European cities are often missing from global networks, other ways of enhancing cooperation among them, such as individual contacts, or regional and micro-regional networks, have to be explored. It is not clear why their contribution is overlooked. Is it a question of self-centred interests at play or perhaps a lack of funding to cover membership costs? The Partnership/Twinning movement, creating as

18 http://www.gernika-lumo.net/datu_orokorrak/in_historia.htm (accessed 3. 3. 2012); World Union of Cities for Peace (WUCP) http://www.uia.org/s/or/en/1100046107 (accessed 4. 4. 2017).

19 International Association of Peace Messenger Cities, http://www.iapmc.org/cities.aspx (accessed 3. 3. 2012).

20 The International Cities of Peace Organization, http://www.internationalcitiesofpeace.org/what/what.html (accessed 3. 3. 2012).

it does opportunities for real meeting of citizens, personal interaction and friendship, is viewed as an effective tool to support cohesion and effectively help EU integration.[21]

The association identifies three types of interaction. (1) On the local scale, micro-regional, and regional: today very much linked to EU projects and EU funding, this band encompasses those peripheral European regions which cross state boundaries and always revolve around centres on either side of borders. Inclusion/exclusion is categorized on a territorial basis. However, although the network is similarly defined, it does not respect state territorial borders. (2) On the national / state scale: this comprises national networks of cities and is highly inclusive with members obliged to accept the constitution of the association. (3) On the international level: here larger networks cover macro-regions. Membership is voluntary and motivation has to come from within the city's leadership. The three levels of collaboration however have different goals. The first is to overcome peripherality and local difficulties, the second to surmount problems of urban financing and governance, and limitations to self-government. The third level points to macro-regional interests and global issues. The associations however do not help to resolve our primary question about the link between size and function.

What is a town and when is a town considered to be a small town? What does small town actually mean? Urban history research provides no clear-cut answers to these two questions. Although functional definitions are applied in urban studies, a comparative overview of the situation in a number of European countries displays a large variety of approaches.[22] Vincent Houillon and Laurence Thomsin discovered that even at the beginning of the third millennium some towns and cities are defined by their status in state administration, while demographic criteria are used in others. With this in mind, we have left the authors free to formulate their own definition of a small town as befitting their own particular study. From the perspective of the English countryside, it is a town with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants. From the Spanish perspective, we are faced with a set of towns functioning in a network, representing

21 Svaz měst a obcí České republiky [The Association of Cities and Communities of Czech Republic] http://smocr.cz/ (accessed 4. 4. 2017); http://smocr.cz/cz/partnerstvi-mest/default.aspx (accessed 3. 3. 2012, this page does not exist anymore, returning visitor to http://smocr.cz/ and consequently to http://www.partnerskamesta.cz/ (accessed 15. 4. 2017).

22 Vincent Houillon – Laurence Thomsin, "Définitions du rural et de l'urbain dans quelques pays européens," *Espace, populations, sociétés*, 2001-1-2, Repopulation et mobilités rurales, 195–200. http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/espos_0755-7809_2001_num_19_1_1989 (accessed 4. 4. 2017).

60% of the land structure, of indeterminate dimension, but which far from decaying are actually growing in size and population. The chapter on Greece, on the other hand, looks at the overwhelming position of the capital city compared to that of small towns, a subject few historians are interested in and about which we know little. What a small town is in the Greek context we learn from the example of Rethymno, a central town on the island of Crete, which, despite its regional function, is thus classified. A different slant on "smalltownness" emerges from the chapter on the provincial Russian town of Myshkin. The authors follow the perspective of small towns in contrast with metropolises as formulated by Georg Simmel. A small town is above all a local community bound by cohesion and solidarity which help it survive. Primary relationships and a focus on collectivity are what define a small town.[23]

The threshold of urbanity and "smalltownness" thus cannot be definitively set for all the case studies presented. From the outset, the aim has not been to produce a complex, systematic survey. To the contrary, the book has been conceived as an exploration, a probe into the research area.

As mentioned in the Preface, the idea of the book emerged from a session at the international conference held by the European Association of Urban History in Lisbon in 2014. Its purpose was to revisit, from an interdisciplinary perspective, the notion of small towns in the context of the changes that occurred in the second half of the 20th century. Our call had a very good response with over twenty proposals received from urban geographers, architects, anthropologists, and historians, thereby confirming our belief that we had chosen an important issue.

Contributions were sought which would address a set of questions:

- What is understood by small town in academic and public discourse and in other areas?
- Are small towns defined primarily by population size, by their social functions, or by other criteria, such as morphology or distinctive culture?
- Have small towns simply been shrinking, losing population, and even dying since the 19th century, or have they shown a capacity for sustainability and growth as well?
- Are their economic, cultural and social functions disappearing? Do they still retain administrative functions?

23 Greg Yudin and Yulia Koloshenko quote Georg Simmel, "The metropolis and mental life," in *The Blackwell City Reader*, edited by Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (Chichester 2010), 107.

- How has globalisation influenced the fortunes of small towns?
- What strategies have been adopted by local and regional officials to keep small towns alive, to cope with the small town condition, and to overcome the stigma of "smalltownness?"
- What frames of identification are used in the (self) presentation of small towns? Do they relate to local, regional, national, or supranational contexts?
- Is history important for small towns? How are history and memory used for the representation and socialisation of their society? How do small towns react to musealization?
- How do small towns perceive and portray 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 generated a small group of authors who wished to continue the debate and offered the five chapters which make up this volume. They have in common a concern for historical and cultural heritage, for what small towns understand as heritage and how it is treated by them. Geographically, the scope of the work stretches across Europe, touching towns in England, Spain, Portugal, Greece, the Czech and Moravian lands, and Russia. In all five case studies the small town as a cultural product, and its place in the European cultural heritage, is discussed. The chapters examine a variety of different towns which the authors, respecting the rules of their national statistical institutes and the research criteria, consider small. Saying that a town is a cultural product implies that we have accepted a constructivist approach and are analysing a process, a continuum, resulting from the efforts of individuals who have been following their own goals and interests.

The first chapter written by Tom Hulme and his colleagues Angela Bartie, Linda Fleming, Mark Freeman, and Paul Readman highlights a traditional amusement organized in small towns in England, historical pageantry, which had its heyday in the first half of the twentieth century and appeared still in the 1950s. Long and rich in presentation of important events, pageants virtually disappeared in the second half of the century. According to the authors, historical shows staged in the second half of the century were shorter, featuring only episodes from history. The authors call the events, which emerged in England in the 1970s and 1980s, a community play, and as such they indeed served. And wherever they appear now, they have a similar purpose although they are not presented as the successor of pageantry. The authors focus on the case of Axbridge, where the shows were staged even in 2000 and 2010 as an argu-