

Urban Settlements are a global phenomenon. In 2008, for the first time in human history, more people lived in towns, cities and urban agglomerations than in all rural settings combined. Understanding the historical developmental processes that have formed urban settlements is a prerequisite for a sustainable future and, hence, a profound research interest in history and geography. Historical maps are one of the main kinds of evidence to be used as a basis for research in past urban landscapes, most importantly large-scale survey maps derived from 19th century land taxation. However, such historic cadastral maps need to be processed in a way that supports comparative analysis. Some of the unresolved problems in this respect are the standards of map editing and the use of research data they contain. The project pioneers a conceptual approach which paves the way for future fundamental research in Urban Studies on a European scale.

The scientific value of historic cadastral maps as well as the basic processing methods have been established by the editorial work of Historic Towns Atlases (HTAs) currently practised in 17 active projects all over Europe under the auspices of the International Commission for the History of Towns (ICHT). While there is the abundance of material for individual studies (over 550 town atlases), we still lack comparative studies which reveal the similarities and differences of urban formation and development, the main obstacle being variations in map treatment and data processing.

Using case studies from Poland and Germany, the PROJECT presented here seeks to establish a standardised methodology for digital mapping, develop a model for comparative studies and standardise the process of publication of digital research data.

Common origins, parallels in their development as well as typological similarities and compatible source material make Polish and German towns an ideal but neglected object for such comparisons. Moreover, the cooperation draws on experiences and groundwork accumulated in both German and Polish partner projects.

The first aim of the project is to digitally edit cadastral maps for six urban settlements, three Polish and three German towns according to typological criteria. The six case studies represent three different town types: pre-modern metropolis (Warsaw – Magdeburg), medieval ecclesiastical town (Olsztyn/Allenstein – Ochsenfurt) and spa town (Inowrocław/Hohensalza – Bad Pyrmont). The historic maps are processed in a Geographic Information System (GIS) and the geodata is enriched with basic historical information and processed in a standardised way. A common ontology of clearly defined terms and a hierarchical structure of concepts provides a further basis for a uniform output in print and digital formats. The second aim is to analyse the towns on the basis of the edited cartographic evidence both individually and in a comparative setting as a proof-of-concept for the methodology applied.

The interpretation of the historic map data will be conducted with the use of other types of evidence (written records, archaeological data, modern maps) and shall build upon an existing ontology which facilitates the comparison of historical urban spaces.

(plot structures, building types, street networks and land-use patterns), identify the formative factors in these developmental processes and assess their influence on social interactions. The third aim of the project is to establish the processes and tools for digital map data publication and publish the project geodata to ensure its usability in future projects, accessibility by researchers as well as long-term storage and sustainability.