

THEME: 1b – Policies, principles & procedures

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Types of Localities in the Standardization of Locality Names in Poland

Official names of localities in Poland are established based on the “Act of 19 August 2003 on Official Names of Localities and Physiographic Objects”. According to this act, any changes to locality names must be approved by the Minister of the Interior and Administration and are published annually as a ministerial ordinance in the “Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland”. The act sets out, among others, the rules and procedures for establishing, changing, and abolishing official names of localities and their parts. It also defines the types of localities – what is specific to the standardization of geographical names in Poland is that the type of a locality must be officially designated alongside its name. There are 22 types of localities in Poland.

Two of these types refer to urban areas: ‘town’ and ‘part of a town’. In Polish, and consequently in the types of localities, no distinction is made between ‘city’ and ‘town’. Cities or towns are those localities that have been granted municipal rights and they have defined boundaries and territories.

All other localities in Poland are classified as rural. There are six types of independent rural localities: village, housing estate, colony, settlement, hamlet, and forest settlement. However, the distinctions between these types of localities are not always clear and are often a subject of debate.

All of the above types of localities (except villages) may also exist as non-independent localities. Consequently, 14 types of non-independent localities are distinguished in Poland, for example part of a village, colony of a settlement, hamlet of a village, or part of a colony.

The formal classification of locality types sometimes leads to certain complications. For example, in 2021, the “Regulation of the Minister of Development, Labor and Technology on the Register of Localities, Streets and Addresses” introduced changes to the rules governing the assignment of addresses and building numbers. The new regulation stipulated that separate building numbering could only be assigned to independent localities. However, since local authorities at the municipal level had frequently assigned separate address numberings to non-independent localities as well, this created a problem. One possible solution was to change the addresses, but this would have been highly inconvenient for residents. Instead, many municipalities opted to apply for a change of the officially established type of locality – from a non-independent locality to independent one. As a result, the ordinances of the Minister of the Interior and Administration issued between 2022 and 2024 regarding changes locality names included 1,175 changes of locality type from a non-independent locality to an independent locality (including 649 cases where the change was to ‘village’).

This raises the question of whether such a formalized system – where the type of locality is so closely tied to its name – is truly necessary.