

**“The administrative division of Poland is out of step with history. Monuments suffer,” warns the “Local Government Portal” in reference to an interview about the newly established National Institute for Historic Preservation. That the current division makes rather arbitrary use of names coined from Poland’s historic districts is not news. But that something or someone suffers from it? And if so, are there monuments in particular? The biggest “historical” peculiarity of the current division of the Republic is the Silesian voivodeship. Half of its area is Lesser Poland. And Katowice itself is historically a Silesian border city. After all, neighbouring Sosnowiec is already the Zagłębie Dąbrowskie - Lesser Poland, not Silesia. The district of Częstochowa also belongs to Lesser Poland, as does the Żywiec region.**

To add to the absurdity, the historic capital of all of Silesia – Wrocław – remains the capital of the Lower Silesian voivodeship only. And Lower Silesia’s Zielona Góra is one of the Lubuskie centres, where the real Lubuskie Lands are just a sliver of today’s Polish territory around Gorzów. In contrast, there is no trace of Silesianness in the name of the Opole voivodeship, which is the only one that lies (almost) entirely in Silesia.

The second curiosity is the Mazovian voivodeship. Its northern and central parts are indeed Mazovia. But in the south, the Radom region – the historic Sandomierz district, is Lesser Poland. In the east – around Siedlce – southern Podlasie and Łukowska Lands (also Lesser Poland). In contrast, the indigenous parts of Mazovia – the Łomża Lands and the region of Łowicz and Rawa Mazowiecka – are now in the Podlaskie and Łódź voivodeships, respectively.

And these are just the most glaring examples. In any case, the division is indeed out of step with history. And should it? It would seem not. And yet, according to some – it must. So what should we change? The division, or history?

### ***Masovia et Silesia ante portas. Vae Poloniae Minori!***

Here is the “Silesian Flavours” Culinary Trail, provided by the Silesian Tourist Organisation. And there’s the Czenstochovia Brewery and a few other attractions in the Jura, where Casimir the Great built castles near the border with Silesia. But now the Eagles’ Nests are “Silesian”. And “Silesian Flavours” also include Żywiec honey and *oscypek* and cabbage with peas in the Częstochowa style. The “Silesian film location” – an innovative idea from the Silesian Film institution “Silesia Film”

operating in the Silesian voivodeship (the acquiescence of public entities in Poland to be named in English is a symptom of a similar problem). Each year, the title is given to a selected site – to bring it to the attention of film-makers as a potential outdoor location. In 2022, the “Silesian film location” is Okiennik Wielki – a distinctive hollow Jurassic rock in Kroczyce near Zawiercie. Nothing, just go to Jura or Zagłębie and make films about Silesia. Here you go: on TV: “Silesia without mysteries” – an episode about the Casimir castle in Będzin. “Silver Silesia” is a voivodeship support programme for pensioners. “By Wheel the Silesian Way” is a campaign by the Silesian Railways to encourage bicycle transportation on trains. The name, by the way, promotes the regional “Silesian language”, which is worth appreciating. Only that the promotion also works in Częstochowa, Zawiercie and Żywiec, where Silesian is not spoken.

And here is the “Mazovian Route of Traditions” under the custody of the Mazovian Tourist Organisation. They just bragged on Facebook about a new background photo: girls in distinctive dark Radom regional costumes. Over the past two decades in Radomsko, “Mazovian” traditions have been born, and how. On the “Princes of Mazovia Trail” are the castles of the Odrowąż family in Chlewiska and Szydłowiec, and of the bishops of Cracow in Iłża. On the “educational” noticeboards in small letters an explanation that it was, however, the Sandomierz region; but next to a large sign saying “Mazovian Heritage”. In Czarnoles, the project “Jan Kochanowski as the cultural inspiration of Mazovia”. At the marshal’s Museum of the Radom Countryside – the event “By Carriage Through Mazovia”. At the marshal’s Jacek Malczewski Museum, they will present a grant for the restoration of monuments: the beneficiary, in addition to the money, must accept the “Precious Monument of Mazovia” award. And so the Radom Parish Church turns out to be a “Monument of Mazovia”, where thanksgiving was given for the “Nihil novi” constitution after the Sejm of 1505; never mind that at that time Warsaw and most of Mazovia was still outside the Crown.

Introduced programmatically, the misuse of historical terms is becoming plentiful in everyday language and in the media. The average journalist thinks they will be more creative if they use a “round” historical name instead of a dry administrative term. And thus “a team from Wrocław will play an away match in Silesia – in Częstochowa”; “the S61 road has finally reached Łomża in Podlasie”, and “the longest tunnel in Silesia – in Milówka – has been dug on the S1 road under construction”. Milówka is located in “Żywiec Silesia”, as if anyone didn’t know. And as if someone didn’t know, “Mazovia” near Radom was already in the geological

period of the Jurassic. A recent sensation is the “Dinosaurs of Mazovia”, whose great abundance was discovered in Borkowice near Przysucha.

That is, we are changing history. History does not match the new division into voivodeships, which enlightened MPs deigned to adopt by law as long as two decades ago. This is terribly stupid on the part of history. It should be ashamed of itself. And obediently change.

### **Defence stickers on striker boards - the uneven fight continues**

Or is this another substitute problem? Lesser Poland or Mazovia – it’s one Poland, what’s the difference? Does it really bother anyone? It turns out that it does. Very much so. For some, homeland – including the “lesser” one – is not an empty word. Some are “local patriots”, although in fact there is no “non-local” patriotism. True patriotism begins in one’s own village, in one’s own city neighbourhood. It is important to know who you are, to be aware of your heritage. “Identity is the mother of community”, instructs Master Wincenty Kadłubek.

The “Beskidzki Dom” association operates in the Żywiec region. Żywiec regionalists are defending themselves against the remaking of their land as “Silesia”. They are not happy that the “Wallachian Culture Route in Silesia” has been extended to the Żywiec Beskids. They asked for the boards to be corrected – to no avail. They had to complete them with stickers with appropriate explanations. A voivodeship councillor from Żywiec asked the Silesian voivodeship government to set up boards along voivodeship roads to indicate the borders of historical regions – as is done in Europe to educate and promote cultural heritage. However, Marshal Chełstowski does not approve of this idea – it would destroy the cohesion of the region as “Green Silesia”. What to do. For a good few years now, a project to change the name of the voivodeship to “Silesian-Lesser Poland” has been popular online.

But it must be admitted that, at least in official documents, the local government of the Silesian voivodeship consistently distinguishes between the terms: “Silesian voivodeship” (abbreviated to “Silesia”) and “Silesia”. The same is written in official promotional materials. And this is fair, although not enough to protect the Lesser Polish part of the voivodeship from “Silesianisation”.

But it could be worse. A few years ago, a dispute heated up over the Kajoki microregion in the Radom Lands – crucial to the observed revival of Polish traditional music. To their own surprise, in the programme of a well-known festival,

folk artists from near Przysucha were included as representatives of “Mazovia”. A similar “mistake” with the description on the disc ended with the manual stickering of an addendum on the entire print run. However, such courtesy is only in the circle of tradition lovers.

Marshal Struzik and his dependent institutions have less restraint. The local government is conducting increased promotion of the term “Mazovia” in relation to the entire voivodeship. It is used in official documents headed by the “Development Strategy of the Mazovian Voivodeship 2030+ ‘Innovative Mazovia’”. In the media and on Facebook lavishly budgeted campaigns: “The flag of Mazovia is available to all”, as “We are all Mazovians”; “Fashion for Mazovia”, “Discover Mazovia”, “Rest in Mazovia” – under these slogans the qualities of Radom and southern Podlasie are also presented. Employees of the marshal’s “cultural” institutions eagerly join in the “Mazovian” propaganda. In this way, even museums – by law established to look after cultural heritage – contribute to its hypocrisy. To unfavourable comments – a learned response: “we know that the Radom Territory is historically in Lesser Poland, but now there is an “administrative Mazovia”. The media are reluctant to invite regionalists who have a dissenting opinion about “Mazovianisation”. One has to live on something – the marshal pays sparingly, but regularly. In Radom they speak of “the Mazovian partition”.

### **Clerks and crooks - who is right**

Does it have to be this way? Is there any reasonable way out of this situation? It always starts with goodwill. First, voivodeship government authorities and elites from their main centres must stop seeing disgruntled regionalists “from the provinces” as freaks or “haters”. Sitting in Katowice or Warsaw – that is, really in Silesia or Mazovia – they themselves do not have to feel the problem of a different regional identity. But they can try to understand it. If something is a tertiary issue for me personally, I will listen to those who spend their free time and their own money to fight for it. They probably have something relevant to say about it.

So, do the authorities of a given voivodeship have to impose one common “historical narrative” on everyone? In the Silesian voivodeship, does every activity supported by the regional government have to be labelled with the adjective “Silesian”? Must the slogan “Mazovia. The Heart of Poland” appear on every placard about funding from the Mazovian authorities? Does this follow from the law? On the contrary. The Law on Voivodeship Local Government stipulates that its development strategy is to take into account, first, “the cultivation of Polishness and the

development and shaping of the national, civic and cultural consciousness of residents, as well as the cultivation and development of local identity” (Article 11.1.1). Does the misrepresentation of tradition, the arbitrary use of historical terms “in a new sense” – have anything to do with the formation of cultural consciousness? Does imposing a centralist narrative of “one big region” mean nurturing and developing local identity?

### **Solution I: only renaming**

Assuming the current territorial and institutional arrangement – is it technically possible to solve this? The answer is the internal regionalisation of the voivodeships for the purpose of educational, cultural and promotional activities. This solution is very simple and within the same budget. We are not creating new institutions; we are carrying out the same activities as before. The regionalisation mainly concerns naming. “Silesian flavours” are presented in Silesia. In Zagłębie or the Żywiec Lands, the same campaign is called “Flavours of Zagłębie” or “Flavours of the Żywiec Region”. Of course, in each region we simply promote local dishes – and finally, we don’t have to do any gymnastics to justify serving Silesian roulade with noodles and red cabbage in Częstochowa. Likewise, any promotional materials: we create them separately for each of the highlighted regions, respectively, under their own regional brand. This also has a pragmatic advantage: it is much easier to create a meaningful narrative for a smaller region with consistent historical and cultural, and often natural, characteristics. An impossible thing for the entire Silesian or Mazovian voivodeship. The condition for implementing such a solution is – only and as much as – the goodwill of voivodeship governments and their subordinate institutions.

Complementing the above treatment could be (though not necessarily) an appropriate correction of the naming of voivodeships. No one will lose, and some will gain much, if we fulfil the public demand to rename “Silesian” to “Silesian-Lesser Polish.” Less obvious is the case with Mazovia. “Central Polish”? The name is artificial, but, after all, no more so than “Subcarpathian”, which no one is surprised by today.

### **Solution II: polycentric institutions**

Step two – if we also wanted to institutionally guarantee the sustainability of the regionalisation described. Here, statutory changes are needed, albeit simple and risk-free. This is because we are talking about solutions that are already in place,

just not in the voivodeships we most often talk about here. The matter concerns public institutions that have a significant impact on the issue of cultural identity – these are the regional editorial offices of Polish Radio and Polish Television, voivodeship libraries, voivodeship cultural centres, and regional tourist organisations.

In some voivodeships, the bands of public broadcasters are being split so that each smaller region has its own programmes in part of the timetable. This is done by Polskie Radio Koszalin and Polskie Radio Zielona Góra. Their “deglomerated” editorial offices broadcast as Radio Słupsk and Radio Gorzów, respectively. It is significant that this solution (presumably involving some additional costs) was applied to radio stations operating in some of the smallest territorial and population areas. Among the smallest is the Lubuskie voivodeship, while Polskie Radio Koszalin is the only public “non-voivodeship” station, operating in the peripheral borderland of the West Pomeranian, Pomeranian and Greater Poland voivodeships. In contrast, a new “subdivision” of Polish Television is just being established in another small voivodeship – the Warmian-Masurian region. The editorial office in Elbląg will have its own broadcast studio and programme band separate from the local regional branch in Olsztyn.

From the point of view of the cultural heritage of the regions, voivodeship libraries have an important function. They not only contain regional book collections, but also create regional bibliographies for the voivodeship’s area. Two voivodeships are regionalised in this regard as well – in the Kujawy-Pomerania and Lubuskie voivodeships there are two voivodeship libraries each, in Bydgoszcz and Toruń, and in Gorzów and Zielona Góra, respectively. In turn, regional tourism organisations established by law are of great importance in promoting the voivodeships. In their case, the voivodeship has not yet been divided between two such entities.

Which is not to say that it can’t be done. If the solutions described above were allowed in small or at most medium-sized voivodeships, why not introduce them in the largest? Mazovia has a population of more than 5 million, Silesia has a population of more than 4 million, and Lubuskie barely has a million. Why is it that one million residents of the Republic can each have two public radio stations and voivodeship libraries, while much larger regional communities have to fight for influence in large centralised voivodeships? In the name of simple justice – equal treatment of citizens – the Mazovian and Silesian provinces should receive at least a double set of selected voivodeship institutions. In this way, their parts with different regional identities would gain lasting tools to care for their cultural heritage.



## **“Identity is the mother of community”**

The solution presented seeks to restore the subjectivity of medium-sized regions, deprived of the privilege of having a separate local government. Its introduction will probably loosen somewhat the ties created inside the large voivodeships. This will only benefit the cohesion of the country as a whole. After all, the observed marginalisation of areas on the borders of voivodeships, the disruption of the continuity of the national territory, if only by the lack of transportation links, is also the result of the centralist policy of regional governments.

Above all, the benefit of the proposed regionalisation will be to halt the process of obliteration, and sometimes even active destruction, of the identity of regions that found themselves in the “historically wrong” voivodeship. Rebirth of identity is a way to increase rootedness, which in turn translates into motivation for the local community. Regional identity, moreover, is a value in itself. Historical naming of regions is a part of cultural heritage that should be legally protected on a par with material monuments.

It turns out that it is not only monuments that are suffering. The proposed internal regionalisation of large voivodeships is an alternative, at least temporarily, to the expected revision of the territorial division. Since history can't be changed, and the local government in the current arrangement can't respect it, there is nothing left to do but to change the harmful arrangement.

