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The Socio-Economic Life of Small Towns in Northern Mazovia from 1815 to 1869/1870

(Summary)

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The issue of the history of small towns in the Polish lands in the 19th century is a matter of significant importance both for social and economic history. While larger and medium-sized centers such as Warsaw, Płock, or Radom have been relatively well described in the literature, smaller towns—particularly those located in peripheral areas—remained for a long time on the margins of historical research. It was only in the second half of the 20th century that their specificity began to be studied more intensively, with the realization that they constituted the basic settlement fabric of the Kingdom of Poland and, at the same time, the living environment of a large part of its inhabitants. In this context, northern Mazovia, a region marked by a less developed urban network and a diverse ownership structure, deserves particular attention.

The choice of subject matter for this dissertation is justified by several factors. First, the small towns of northern Mazovia, operating under conditions of frequent administrative reorganizations and unfavorable economic circumstances, represent centers where local mechanisms intertwined with decisions made by the central administration of the partitioning state. Second, the specific character of the region—marked by dispersed settlement patterns, relatively limited urbanization dynamics, and a significant proportion of Jewish population—makes it possible to capture social and economic phenomena different from those observed in the more urbanized parts of the Kingdom of Poland. Third, a key point of reference is the reform of 1869–1870, as a result of which many of these centers were downgraded to the status of settlements, a change that had long-term consequences for their development.

The state of research on the small towns of northern Mazovia is relatively limited. Historical literature is dominated by studies devoted to the history of individual centers, often monographic in nature, and only rarely encompassing comprehensive comparative analyses. In the field of urban history and architecture, the works of Józef Barański hold an important place, as do studies on elementary education and the material culture of the region. Social and economic issues appear in the literature concerning the history of the Kingdom of Poland, but usually in reference to larger towns. What is lacking, however, are in-depth studies of the

mechanisms of everyday life and the functioning of the economy in small centers, which in the 19th century constituted the fundamental element of the settlement landscape of Mazovia. This dissertation seeks to address that gap.

The aim of this dissertation is to present and analyze the socio-economic life of the small towns of northern Mazovia in the years 1815–1869/1870, with particular emphasis on the factors determining their development as well as the causes and consequences of their degradation to the status of settlements. The main research questions focus on several issues: what were the administrative and legal frameworks of these towns' functioning within the Kingdom of Poland? What did their spatial layout, buildings, and infrastructure look like? How were municipal finances shaped, as well as the occupational and social structure of the inhabitants? What role did schools, religious institutions, and cultural life play for local communities? And finally—why did the tsarist authorities decide to downgrade numerous centers in the years 1869–1870, and what were the consequences of this process?

The research hypothesis adopted in this dissertation assumes that the primary cause of the degradation of the small towns of northern Mazovia was not political repression after the January Uprising, but rather the difficult economic situation and the authorities' pursuit of rationalizing the administrative structures of the Russian Empire. The tsarist authorities were guided by economic and administrative considerations, although in the perception of the inhabitants this reform was seen as an act of repression. The consequences of the degradation—loss of status, reduction of revenues and privileges, as well as economic marginalization—were, however, extremely severe for local communities.

The dissertation is divided into seven chapters. The first presents the situation of the towns of northern Mazovia under Prussian rule and in the Duchy of Warsaw. A part of the northern Mazovian towns came under Prussian rule already as a result of the Second Partition of Poland, when they were incorporated into the province of South Prussia. After the Third Partition and the fall of the Kościuszko Uprising, in December 1795 the remaining towns of the region were included in the newly created province of New East Prussia. This province encompassed the lands situated on the right bank of the Vistula, annexed in the Second Partition, as well as the territories between the Bug, the Vistula, and the Neman, taken in the Third Partition. The patent of June 1, 1797, introduced its administrative division into two departments: Płock and Białystok. The Płock Department comprised six districts: Lipno, Mława, Ostrołęka, Płock, Przasnysz, and Pułtusk.

Within the Płock Department there were 43 towns, of which 26 were royal property and 17 belonged to private owners. In the 1860s as many as 23 of them were downgraded to the status of settlements—and it is these that constitute the main subject of the present study.

In the initial period of Prussian rule, the municipal organization from the pre-partition era was maintained.

At the beginning of 1797, the Prussian authorities attempted to introduce in the towns the office of the police mayor, responsible, among other things, for supplying the garrisons. The edict of March 20, 1800, regulated the staffing of municipal councils: in royal towns the right to elect the authorities was left to the inhabitants, while in private towns it belonged to the owners, with the stipulation that candidates had to possess the appropriate qualifications. The first appointments, however, were to be made by the chamber authorities.

The Prussian authorities, as earlier in South Prussia, sought to examine the condition of the towns in the new province. To this end, an Order Commission (Ordnungs-Kommission) was established, tasked with determining the methods of governance, the financial situation, and the level of obligations and taxes. Its work was completed in 1805 with the preparation of a declaration regulating relations between the owners and the townspeople. All the towns under discussion were open towns, meaning they had no fortifications. These towns had few paved streets, and wooden buildings predominated.

During the Prussian period, the main change in the demographic structure of the towns was the influx of Jewish population. This was regulated by the patent of April 17, 1797 ("General Regulation of the Jews in the Provinces of South and New East Prussia"), which required Jews engaged in trade to move from villages to towns. However, the privilege of *de non tolerandis Judaeis*, prohibiting settlement in certain centers—such as Pułtusk, Mława, and Racią̇ż—remained in force. In the other towns, settlement required the approval of the departmental authorities. It was only the decree of February 6, 1802, that abolished this and other feudal municipal and guild privileges.

Another factor influencing the demographic changes in the towns was German colonization, deliberately carried out by the Prussian authorities between 1795 and 1806 as the first stage of Protestant settlement on Polish lands.

The main source of livelihood for the inhabitants of Mazovian towns at that time was agriculture, supplemented by crafts, which, however, did not always provide sufficient income. The Jewish population played a key role in trade.

In the winter of 1806–1807, the territories of northern Mazovia were occupied by French troops, bringing an end to Prussian rule.

The functioning of municipal authorities in the Duchy of Warsaw was regulated by the decree of February 23, 1809, which introduced a mayor appointed by the king and subordinated to the district prefect, and provided for the existence of city and municipal councils.

During the period of the Duchy of Warsaw, most of the towns under discussion experienced population growth, with an average of 7 inhabitants per household. However, there were considerable differences between individual towns. In Dobrzyń nad Drwęcą, the average number of people per household was 14, while in Janów and Bielsk it was only 5.

Among the population of the Płock Department, the Jewish community held a significant position, as it constituted a substantial percentage of the population.

In the Duchy of Warsaw, the economic condition of the towns in the Płock Department was varied, and the low and irregular revenues of the municipal treasuries often indicated stagnation or decline. Smaller towns sustained themselves mainly through taxes, trade and craft fees, rents, and markets; however, limited trade, poor infrastructure, and the poverty of the inhabitants meant that revenues were modest and unstable.

As in the Prussian period, especially in the smaller towns, a considerable part of the urban population derived their livelihood from agriculture.

Chapter Two concerns the legal status and administration of towns in the Kingdom of Poland. After the fall of the Duchy of Warsaw and a brief Russian occupation, Mazovia became part of the Kingdom of Poland. In 1815, Tsar Alexander I granted a constitution, and a year later a new administrative division was introduced—departments were replaced by eight voivodeships, named in reference to pre-partition traditions, although differing in territorial scope. The former Płock Department was almost entirely transformed into the Płock Voivodeship, except for a part of the Lipno district, which was incorporated into Prussia.

In 1819, the Płock Voivodeship had 42 towns with 6,409 houses and 50,671 inhabitants, including 31 government-owned towns and 12 private towns.

In the 19th century, towns of the Kingdom of Poland were subject to three classifications. In 1834, a division into five ranks was introduced based on population size and administrative functions. In 1837, a tax classification (*kanon*) was added, based solely on population size. In 1852, a division was established according to the annual revenues of towns, distinguishing six ranks—from over 10,000 rubles to below 150 rubles.

The status of townspeople depended on whether they lived in government-owned or private towns. Dominial relations persisted in the Kingdom of Poland until the 1860s, and the differences were mainly due to forms of ownership. In private towns, inhabitants were obliged to pay individual fees (rent, labor, levies, and occupational dues) as well as collective

contributions to the landowner, who benefited, among other things, from the excise monopoly. For example, in Dobrzyń between 1853 and 1856, the owner earned 2,400 rubles annually from the excise monopoly, while the town's revenues amounted to 750 rubles. In government-owned towns, rents predominated, often symbolic or waived, and the main burden was the state excise monopoly. Differences in obligations were determined by the history of the town—former ecclesiastical and private towns had significantly higher burdens.

During the period under discussion, in most private towns disputes arose between the inhabitants and the town owners regarding the enforcement of rights and the collection of revenues for the municipal treasury.

The constitution of the Kingdom provided for the creation of municipal offices responsible, among other things, for finance, security, and order. In 1818, these offices replaced municipal councils, and their composition included the mayor or president, councilors, aldermen, and a municipal treasurer. In 1842, these offices were transformed into magistrates with paid positions for the president (mayor), treasurer, and secretary, as well as honorary councilors.

Between 1819 and 1840, the salaries of municipal officials increased significantly, particularly those of mayors, whose remuneration doubled in many towns. In larger centers, such as Chorzele or Serock, they reached 1,200 złp, and the treasurer in Chorzele earned as much as 900 złp. In smaller towns, for example Radzanów or Andrzejewo, wages remained low (mayor 600 złp, servant 90 złp). The general trend indicates a rise in salaries associated with the development of administration, although the remuneration was often insufficient and paid with delays.

Chapter Three focuses on urban space, economy, and infrastructure. In the 19th century, the entire urban territory was divided into two parts. The first included built-up areas occupied by streets and squares, while the second comprised all other lands, i.e., arable fields, gardens, meadows, pastures, forests, wastelands, etc. The average built-up area in the towns of the Płock Governorate was 106 mórgs. As many as 16 towns had less than 50 mórgs of built-up area (including 14 of the towns under discussion), and only Czyżew and Krasnosielc exceeded 500 mórgs. For comparison, in the Radom Governorate, several similar towns existed out of 63.

In the towns of the Płock Governorate, the development of built-up areas was weak, similar to the Lublin and Radom Governorates. Small towns of up to 200 houses predominated. The number of houses remained almost constant, while the population grew—more than doubling in some towns, and increasing by several tens of percent in most.

In the first half of the 19th century, the development of residential construction in the small towns of the Kingdom of Poland was restricted by the administrative regulations of 1817 and

1820, which did not support the building or renovation of wooden houses. Due to a lack of funds and materials, inhabitants often applied for permits to construct houses despite the existing prohibition. Over time, it became clear that the ban on building wooden houses was too strict, and local conditions made compliance impossible. As a result, in the 1840s these regulations were relaxed, allowing residents a more flexible approach to construction and revitalizing building activity in the towns.

As early as the 18th century, efforts were made to organize urban development in Poland, notably through the Commissions of Good Order, which prepared site plans for selected towns. During the Four-Year Sejm and the Police Commission of the Two Nations, important urban regulations were introduced, governing, among other things, the roles of surveyors and builders. After the Third Partition, new partitioning regulations significantly influenced architecture and urban planning.

The turn of the 18th and 19th centuries was crucial for modern urban policy—most of the preserved maps of towns in Mazovia and the Dobrzyń Land during the Prussian period (1793–1806) were situational and regulatory plans used to organize property, space, and fiscal matters. In the Kingdom of Poland, regulatory activities intensified in the early 1820s, when around 140 regulatory plans were prepared in 1819–1820 for 482 towns. A key development was the establishment of the Commission of Towns within the structure of the KRSWiP on January 4, 1820, overseeing surveying and cartography.

Instructions issued in 1820 and 1823 required the creation of two maps for each town: at a scale of 1:1500 for buildings, plots, streets, and squares, and at a scale of 1:5000 for town lands, gardens, fields, and pastures. The recommendations of the 1823 instructions were not always implemented—in some towns, older pre-partition or Prussian maps were used, as in Bobrowniki in 1823. The outbreak of the November Uprising interrupted urban planning activities, and after its defeat the operations of cartographic institutions were limited. By the late 1840s, 156 towns had regulatory plans, while the remaining 306 did not, reflecting the uneven pace of urbanization in the Kingdom of Poland.

Financial management was crucial for the functioning of towns and encompassed revenues and expenditures reflecting the economic condition of the centers. Voivodeship commissions approved budgets up to 3,000 zlp, while higher amounts required approval from the KRSWiP, which in 1822 issued instructions for mayors and treasurers. It should be noted that the 1820 instruction specified the sources of municipal treasury revenues, including rents from perpetual and temporary leases, manors, houses, mills, sawmills, the excise monopoly, market and fair fees, paving fees, and others, as well as contributions from inhabitants.

Expenditures of the towns in the Płock Governorate depended on revenues and were divided into several main groups. The first group included salaries of officials and the costs of maintaining offices. The second concerned the upkeep of properties and infrastructure, public order, lighting, and one-time investments in streets, wells, or parks. The third encompassed state-wide, charitable, health, and educational purposes, as well as support for municipal institutions and administration. The fourth group involved the repayment of interest on loans, while remaining expenditures covered minor current and extraordinary costs.

Among natural disasters during the period under discussion, the most dangerous for the generally wooden construction of the towns were fires, which claimed many towns in northern Mazovia.

Chapter Four analyzes the demographic and occupational structure of the inhabitants. Population changes in the first half of the 19th century showed a clear upward trend, resulting from numerous factors favorable to demographic growth. A key role was played by significant advances in agriculture, which allowed for increased food production and improved living conditions. The most substantial demographic changes were observed in the group of medium and large towns, which in 1819 had populations ranging from 2,001 to 3,000 inhabitants.

Alongside the overall population growth, changes occurred in the social structure of the towns, including a significant increase in the share of the Jewish population. During the Kingdom of Poland, the proportion of Jewish inhabitants in towns increased markedly—from 35.3% in 1827 to 46.5% in 1865. In the towns of the Płock Governorate, the increase was even faster: on average from 42.5% in 1827 to 52.4% in 1858, with some districts, such as Pułtusk, exceeding 60%. Only in the Mława district was a slight decrease recorded, which did not alter the overall upward trend.

The economic development of the Kingdom of Poland in the years 1815–1830 was the result of protectionist and interventionist policies. It is worth emphasizing the importance of the customs agreement with Russia in 1822. Initially, the Płock Voivodeship did not participate in industrialization, although its president, Florian Kobyliński, sought between 1816 and 1834 to develop linen production and attract foreign craftsmen. After the fall of the November Uprising, high Russian tariffs limited exports and led to the decline of the wool industry in the 1830s–1840s. It was only with the removal of customs barriers in 1850 that access to the Russian market was restored; however, the industry shifted toward cotton products, and the initial growth in exports remained limited.

In the Płock Voivodeship, production was mainly limited to linen goods made on domestic looms and a few industrial establishments such as cloth factories, sugar refineries, distilleries,

and oil mills. In the towns, the number of craftsmen and workshops was small—often only a few clothiers, tanners, shoemakers, or blacksmiths operated—though an exception was Dobrzyń nad Drwęcą, which had a developed craft sector and small-scale industry. In the following years, a gradual increase in the number of craftsmen and workshops was observed, indicating the slow economic development of the small urban centers.

The most widely represented crafts in the towns under discussion were shoemaking, tailoring, baking, cloth making, and tanning. A significant role in the development of crafts and small-scale industry in these towns was played not only by Poles but also by members of the Jewish community and those of German origin.

In the first half of the 19th century, retail trade in the Kingdom of Poland, as well as in Eastern Europe in general, was relatively underdeveloped. Trade in the Kingdom of Poland at that time was primarily small-scale and relied on markets, fairs, shops, stalls, and butcheries. Inns and taverns also played an important role as meeting places and centers for the exchange of information. Trade was a privilege of towns and a source of their economic and administrative significance, but its scale was limited, and market development was slow. Only urbanization and industrial growth in the second half of the 19th century facilitated the modernization of trade.

In 1827, the highest number of fairs among small towns was held in Kikół and Dobrzyń nad Drwęcą (12). Other towns organized between three and eleven fairs annually. Fairs not only stimulated trade but also represented an important source of revenue for municipal treasuries, prompting some towns to increase their number. On December 12 (24), 1850, the central authorities approved a new schedule of fairs and markets for the Płock Governorate, eliminating some of the previous fairs that exceeded the annual limit of six.

In the towns under discussion, especially during the inter-uprising period, trade generally did not develop in a stable manner. This was evidenced, among other things, by the declining number of participants at fairs and markets, which affected both demand and supply. Northern Mazovia played an important role in the foreign trade of the Kingdom of Poland, primarily exporting grain, timber, wool, and livestock, while importing luxury goods and colonial products. The centers of exchange were towns where markets and fairs were regularly held, trading in goods such as linen, cloth, cattle, and agricultural tools.

The region attracted Jewish and German merchants despite communication difficulties and limited infrastructure, giving Mazovia a significant share in 19th-century international trade. In northern Mazovia, trade—dominated by Jews—was an important sector of the economy and had earlier been freed from feudal restrictions. From 1830 onward, traders were divided into

three groups: merchants conducting larger transactions (e.g., cattle, timber, grain), stallholders engaged in retail trade, and traders of leather and flour.

In the first decades of the Kingdom of Poland, agriculture constituted the main source of livelihood for the vast majority of its inhabitants—over 80% of the population derived their income from this sector. Agriculture was also of great importance to towns in the Kingdom of Poland—half of the 451 towns before the January Uprising relied on it for their main revenues. Townspeople cultivated approximately 500,000 mórgs of land, comprising over 60,000 agricultural settlements. In private towns, rents and labor obligations imposed by the owners often caused social conflicts.

By the 1860s, the towns of the Płock Governorate were primarily agricultural in character—townspeople managed 7,845 settlements on 77,326 mórgs of land, and in private towns, the lack of industrial and infrastructural investments kept the population largely dependent on agriculture. In many cases, such as in Radzanów or Bieżuń, most farms were located outside the administrative boundaries of the town. This reflects a phenomenon typical of small towns in the Kingdom of Poland, where urban functions were intertwined with rural ones.

The structure of agricultural crops in Mazovian towns was varied, but cereals predominated, especially rye, wheat, and so-called spring grains (barley, oats). Animal husbandry was an important supplement to agricultural activity, though not the primary sector. In the Kingdom of Poland, the boundary between town and countryside was fluid—many townspeople engaged in agricultural work outside the administrative limits of the town, sustaining themselves through their own labor and farms, a practice typical of the region until the end of the 19th century.

Chapter Five characterizes education and cultural life in the towns of Northern Mazovia. Elementary education in the Kingdom of Poland, developing on the foundations and principles established during the Duchy of Warsaw, underwent significant changes in the first half of the 19th century. The initial development of elementary schooling proceeded dynamically, particularly visible in the Płock diocese.

Elementary schools in the Congress Kingdom were secular and generally accessible, serving children of various faiths and social classes. In practice, however, Jewish children were mainly educated in private religious schools (*cheders*), where they were taught religion, liturgy, and Jewish history. Evangelical schools, especially in German colonies in rural areas, operated independently from the Prussian period onward. The authorities of the Kingdom attempted to reorganize these schools and integrate them into the general educational system.

In the vast majority of the towns under discussion, elementary schools were in operation. Their intensive development occurred particularly in the early 1820s, when Stanisław Kostka

Potocki served as Minister of Religious Denominations and Public Enlightenment. Elementary schools in small towns faced considerable challenges. The most pressing problems were poor facilities and low, irregular teacher salaries. Due to a lack of funds, some schools in certain towns had to suspend their activities temporarily.

The number of students fluctuated significantly—drastic drops in attendance were recorded during periods of intensive fieldwork. Education was mainly attended by children of townspeople, although it is worth noting that, despite the formally Catholic character of the schools, children of Jewish and Evangelical faiths also attended. The Jewish community also maintained its own educational system—*cheders*, traditional religious schools exclusively for boys. Evangelicals, in towns where their numbers were larger, organized separate educational institutions; one such school was the Evangelical school in Bobrowniki.

In the towns under discussion, secondary-level schools operated only in Żuromin and Skępe. They were run by the religious orders of the Reformators and the Bernardines. The Żuromin school functioned until the early 1830s, after which it was moved to Mława, while the school in Skępe remained in operation until the suppression of the Bernardine order in 1864.

Cultural and social life in small towns revolved primarily around the local parish and church celebrations. The daily lives of residents were centered in inns, during church feasts and holidays, and at fairs, which served social, commercial, and integrative functions.

Chapter Six presents religious life and ethnic relations in the towns under discussion. After the church reorganization in 1818, the Płock diocese was limited to the Płock Voivodeship, comprising 17 deaneries and 339 parishes with approximately 365,000 inhabitants; most of the towns under study were parish seats, with the exceptions of Dobrzyń nad Drwęcą and Żuromin. During this period, the religiosity of the faithful in the Płock diocese was marked by both intensity and the widespread practice of sacraments. Catholics predominated in the parishes, but in many towns there was a significant Jewish community, which in some places (e.g., Drobin, Nowe Miasto, Czyżew) equaled or even exceeded the number of other inhabitants, playing an important role in the social and economic life of the region.

The organization of the Jewish population was based on the religious commune (*gmina*). Where a formal *gmina* did not exist, Jews were subject to the *kahal* of a nearby locality. The *kahal*, as the governing body of the community, was abolished in 1821 and replaced by synagogue boards composed of three elected members. Initially, elections were universal among Jews, but from 1830 the right to vote was restricted to wealthier members, excluding the poorest. In 1830, a plan was developed for a network of Jewish communes in the Płock Voivodeship, providing for the establishment of 25 communes.

The largest concentrations of Jewish inhabitants were in Maków (4,507 people), Płock (3,218), Wyszogród (2,686), Płońsk (2,683), and Czyżew (2,294). Smaller communes, such as in Janów (439), Kikół (361), or Kuczbork (279), had fewer than 500 people. The plan reflected the varied distribution of the Jewish community in the region. In later periods, Jewish communities in other towns sought to separate from their current commune and establish independent ones.

In addition to Catholics and Jews, the towns were also home to an Evangelical community, primarily composed of craftsmen.

The final, seventh chapter concerns the transformation of the towns under discussion into settlements. The process of revoking town rights from small, economically weak centers began even before the fall of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth and continued in the Duchy of Warsaw and the Kingdom of Poland. The 1811 decree and the 1818 regulation stipulated that a town would lose its status if its annual revenues were insufficient to support a mayor (minimum 600 złp / 90 rubles). Most often, the initiators of degradation were the owners, and less frequently the residents themselves.

In the first half of the 19th century, 22 settlements in the Kingdom of Poland lost their town rights (mainly in the Lublin, Podlasie, and Augustów regions), while 14 new settlements, mainly in Mazovia, were granted town rights. In the Płock Voivodeship (later governorate), no formal town degradations took place, although administrative preparations were carried out. In 1844, on the orders of Tsar Nicholas I, data were collected on small centers, resulting in a list of 225 towns at risk of losing their rights (income below 450 rubles), including 117 private and 48 government-owned towns.

After the fall of the January Uprising, several high-ranking Russian officials proposed administrative reforms. In 1867, the Organizing Committee began a reform aimed at reducing the number of towns. As part of this process, in line with the Tsarist policy, many of the Kingdom's distinct privileges were abolished, new regulations for municipal and communal authorities were introduced, and in 1868 a decree eliminated consumption fees and municipal trade monopolies.

The final decision to convert towns into settlements was confirmed by the ukaz of Tsar Alexander II on June 1 (13), 1869. Based on this decree, in 1869–1870, a total of 336 towns and small towns in the Kingdom of Poland were downgraded to settlements. Decisions regarding town degradation were based on Trubnikov's three criteria: a population below 3,000, municipal revenues under 1,500 rubles annually, and a majority of townspeople being farmers

exceeding 50%. However, exceptions were possible due to economic, living, or administrative conditions, and the final decision rested with the governor.

The degradation of towns was not automatic—decisions depended on local circumstances, though they consistently targeted small, economically weak centers without administrative functions. In better-developed towns, additional conditions were required, with the governor's opinion playing a key role. Before the reform, there were 452 towns in the Kingdom of Poland, of which 232 were dominated by townspeople-farmers, and in another 97 they formed a significant portion of the population; their farms often extended beyond town boundaries.

In northern Mazovia, the conversion of small towns into settlements, carried out under the 1869 Tsarist ukaz, had significant administrative and social consequences. Most of the localities affected by the reform no longer met the criteria for town status—they lacked administrative functions, a strong economic base, or developed infrastructure. The loss of town rights entailed, among other things, reduced local self-government, diminished prestige, and changes to the tax and organizational systems.

In some cases, the transformation was justified—these were economically weakened towns, ill-adapted to changing socio-economic conditions. However, the reform did not take into account the development potential of some of these localities. As a result, town status was also lost by centers that could have developed, which slowed their further growth. In the communes that incorporated former towns, tensions often arose between the rural population and the former townspeople, particularly regarding the allocation of funds and investment priorities. The 1869 Tsarist ukaz, although partially repressive in the aftermath of the January Uprising, also had an economic dimension—many small towns were converted into settlements because they did not meet town criteria and could not keep pace with the development of new capitalist conditions.

One of the main objectives of this dissertation was to confirm or refute the research hypothesis, according to which the reasons for the conversion of small towns into settlements in 1869–1870 should be primarily sought in their economic situation, rather than—in contrast to frequent claims—in the political revenge of the partitioning authorities for the participation of these towns' inhabitants in the January Uprising.

The analysis conducted in this study, encompassing a broad socio-economic, administrative, and political context, allowed for a multifaceted examination of the phenomenon. In light of the collected data and numerous examples cited during the research, this hypothesis is supported by the evidence and can be considered reliable.

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