
Evaluating a Decade of Landscape Resolutions in Poland: Progress, Challenges, and Effectiveness in Public Space Management

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Abstract:

Purpose: The study examines how municipalities in Poland have addressed the challenge of preparing landscape resolutions over nearly a decade. These resolutions serve as tools enabling the regulation of outdoor advertising and signage. The objective of the study is to identify progress in the adoption of these resolutions and to evaluate their effectiveness in organizing and improving public spaces.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The study utilizes a mixed-methods approach, combining an analysis of municipal activities, and case studies of selected cities that have implemented landscape resolutions. Data is drawn from legal documents, reports, and online sources, analyzed to assess trends, regional disparities, and barriers in applying the law. The effectiveness of legal regulations was evaluated using a SWOT analysis.

Findings: The study reveals that, despite providing municipalities with tools to regulate urban aesthetics, the act's adoption is limited, with only a small percentage of municipalities enacting landscape resolutions. Key barriers include resource constraints, procedural complexity, and resistance from stakeholders in the advertising sector. Definitional ambiguities in the act lead to inconsistent interpretations and enforcement, hindering its full potential. However, cities that have effectively utilized the act demonstrate noticeable improvements in public space aesthetics.

Practical Implications: The findings offer actionable insights for policymakers, suggesting the need for clearer legal definitions, increased financial and technical support for municipalities, and public awareness campaigns to foster community engagement in urban aesthetic management.

Originality/Value: The study contributes to the niche topic of urban aesthetics in post-socialist countries and includes practical recommendations that could positively influence urban landscape management and the aesthetics of public spaces.

Keywords: Post-socialist urban planning, outdoor advertising, public space management, cultural landscape.

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1. Introduction

Urban aesthetics plays a vital role in shaping the quality of public spaces, influencing not only the visual harmony of cities but also their functionality and livability (Nasution and Zahrah, 2012). In post-socialist countries like Poland, urban environments have undergone profound transformations over the past decades, reflecting a dynamic interplay between historical legacy, modernization, and globalization. (Węclawowicz, 2016; Sýkora and Bouzarovski, 2012)

However, this rapid change has often resulted in spatial disarray, particularly due to the unregulated proliferation of outdoor advertising and inconsistent urban planning practices. Chmielewski *et al.* (2016) highlight that "the commercialization of public space by outdoor advertising has a possible negative impact on local quality. "Recognizing these challenges, Poland introduced the "landscape act" in 2015, a legislative effort to empower municipalities to regulate public space aesthetics through the adoption of local landscape resolutions. (Fogel *et al.*, 2016)

Figure 1. An example of an aesthetically arranged storefront located on Jagiellońska Street in Szczecin



Source: Own study.

Figure 2. An example of visually overloaded signage on Obrońców Stalingradu Street in Szczecin



Source: Own study.

The landscape act enables municipalities to establish rules for outdoor advertising, signage, and small architectural elements, aiming to mitigate visual clutter and promote sustainable spatial development (Hadel, 2018). While the law has provided local governments with tools to address urban disarray, its adoption and implementation have varied significantly across the country. As of mid-2024, only a fraction of municipalities has adopted such resolutions, revealing significant disparities in engagement and effectiveness (Ostaszewska and Ostaszewski 2015; Ministry of Development, 2024). This paper explores the progress made by Polish municipalities in adopting and implementing landscape resolutions nearly a decade after the act's introduction. By analyzing legal documents, municipal activities, and case studies of selected cities, the study evaluates the act's effectiveness in organizing public spaces and identifies barriers to its implementation.

Using a SWOT analysis framework, this research offers insights into regional differences and provides practical recommendations for improving urban landscape management. The findings contribute to the niche field of urban aesthetics in post-socialist countries, offering both theoretical and practical implications for policymakers and urban planners (Kaczmarek, 2020).

2. Literature Review

The United States was the first to implement nationwide regulations on outdoor advertising in the early 20th century. A key milestone was the Highway Beautification Act (HBA) of 1965, led by First Lady Lady Bird Johnson, which aimed to reduce visual clutter and protect scenic beauty along federal highways. Japan quickly recognized the need to address landscape impacts of advertisements.

Cities like Kyoto incorporate traditional design codes into regulations to preserve cultural heritage. The Outdoor Advertising Act (1949) enforces strict placement and design rules, prioritizing public safety and landscape conservation, especially in heritage and high-value areas (Yamada, 2020). In Europe, notable examples include France and Germany. France's Grenelle II law (2010) regulates outdoor advertising, focusing on cultural landscape preservation and billboard limits. Local charters align national goals with regional needs (Lacroix, 2014). In Germany, municipal building codes ensure advertisements complement architecture, especially in historic zones, with strict enforcement enhancing aesthetic coherence (Müller, 2018).

The Landscape Act in Poland, implemented on 24 April 2015, amended existing laws to equip municipalities with tools for regulating outdoor advertising, protecting landscapes, and improving urban aesthetics. The first step is for the Municipal Council to adopt an intent resolution, outlining the act's direction and designating responsible authorities like the mayor or municipal president (Ostrowska, 2015).

Municipalities then conduct landscape analyses, public consultations, and identify issues like visual clutter and penalty-eligible advertisements. Key focuses include defining landscape boundaries and visually burdened areas, with provisions to address these challenges. Public consultations with residents and businesses are essential for balancing economic interests with visual harmony. Participatory planning fosters community support but faces challenges in aligning regulations with economic needs (Kaczmarek, 2020; Nowak, 2022). The act introduces "advertising fees," including a fixed amount (up to 2.5 PLN/day) and a variable fee based on ad size (up to 0.2 PLN/m²), promoting compliance while balancing public space use.

Staniewska (2016) highlights the need for precise definitions and effective enforcement mechanisms in the Landscape Act, noting that terms like "advertisement" and "advertising device" remain ambiguous. Hadel (2018) similarly critiques the act, arguing that unclear terminology causes enforcement inconsistencies and legal disputes. The act does not differentiate between

commercial and non-commercial advertising or internal and external advertisements, creating uncertainty about whether non-commercial content, like cultural posters, is restricted.

The boundary between advertising and decoration is also unclear, as some installations may serve both purposes. Similarly, the act lacks specifications for advertising mediums, such as LED screens. An advertising board is defined as a flat surface for displaying visual content (Polish Parliament, 2003), yet there are no size limitations, complicating classification. Signboards, intended to mark business locations, may also function as advertisements, but the act does not specify size limits or placement requirements, leading to potential misuse. The Supreme Audit Office (NIK, 2024) found limited adoption of landscape resolutions, weak enforcement, and low public awareness. Municipalities often lack resources to monitor compliance, and stakeholder resistance hinders progress. While the Landscape Act provides a framework for improving urban aesthetics, its success depends on resolving ambiguities, strengthening enforcement, and involving communities and businesses.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to evaluate the progress, challenges, and effectiveness of Poland's "landscape act" nearly a decade after its implementation. The research integrates both qualitative and quantitative methods, providing a comprehensive assessment of the adoption and impact of landscape resolutions by Polish municipalities. The primary data sources include legal documents, municipal resolutions, and reports from local government websites, which were analyzed to assess the scope and content of the resolutions.

Case studies of selected municipalities were conducted to explore best practices and identify challenges in the implementation process. These case studies were chosen based on geographic diversity, population size, and the presence of significant landscape resolutions, ensuring a representative sample of municipal experiences. In addition, secondary data were collected from academic literature, government publications, and relevant online sources to contextualize the findings within broader urban planning and aesthetic management frameworks. A comparative analysis was conducted to identify regional disparities and barriers, focusing on factors such as resource availability, administrative capacity, and stakeholder resistance.

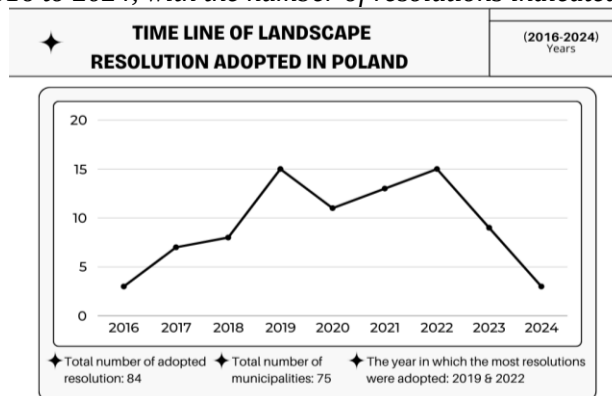
The study also incorporates a SWOT analysis (Glaister and Falshaw 1999) to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with the landscape act's implementation. This methodological tool provides a structured framework for assessing both the internal and external factors influencing the act's effectiveness. Overall, the mixed-methods approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the landscape act's application and impact. The findings offer

actionable insights into improving urban aesthetics and provide practical recommendations for policymakers, urban planners, and local governments.

4. Results

By February 2021, 44 municipalities (1.76% of all) had implemented resolutions, rising to 72 (2,88% of all) by January 2023. By June 30, 2024, only 75 (3,00%) of nearly 2,500 Polish municipalities had adopted landscape resolutions, including six provincial cities: Łódź, Kraków, Opole, Gdańsk, Kielce, and Poznań. Municipal adoption of these resolutions, aimed at regulating public aesthetics and reducing advertising clutter, remains low.

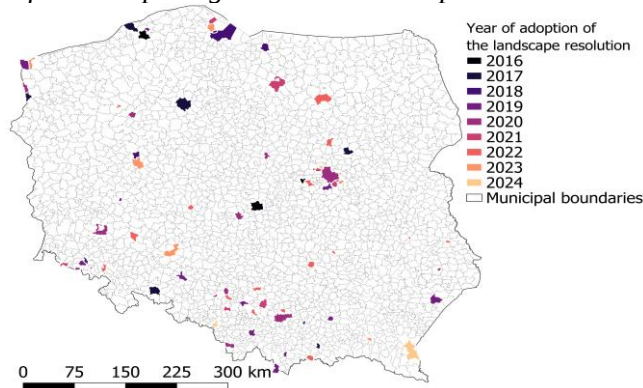
Figure 3. A timeline showing the number of landscape resolutions adopted in Poland from 2016 to 2024, with the number of resolutions indicated for each year



Source: Own study.

As observed on the timeline, there was a rising trend in adopting documents until 2022. The highest number of landscape resolutions was adopted in 2019 and 2022. Currently, a total of 75 municipalities have such resolutions in place. However, the total number of documents amounts to 84, as some have been amended or repealed over the past decade. Examples of municipalities that have adopted tools to protect the landscape and are now observing positive effects in public spaces include Gdańsk, Łódź, and Kraków. Łódź, a pioneer among provincial cities, began working on advertising regulations just days after the passage of the Landscape Act by the Polish Parliament.

This effort culminated in a resolution referred to as the "Advertising Code," or alternatively, the "Landscape Code," which was developed in conjunction with initiatives to establish the Piotrkowska Street Cultural Park. The introduction of these regulations significantly contributed to the organization and aesthetic enhancement of urban spaces. The code also included detailed guidelines on fences and urban furniture.

Figure 4. Map of Landscape Regulations In Municipalities

Source: Own study.

Gdańsk initiated its urban space management regulations in 2018 (Figure 4). Clear rules regarding the location and form of advertisements and signage were introduced. A dedicated City Aesthetics Department was established, which primarily developed concepts such as „KREM” – Urban Aesthetics Regulation Concepts. The department also prepared materials covering façade and roof color schemes, fencing, paving in public spaces, and structural designs of these areas. As a result, the city reduced the number of illegal and visually unappealing advertising installations, positively impacting the public space's overall aesthetics.

In 2020, Kraków adopted a landscape resolution imposing strict rules on the placement of advertisements and signage. These measures significantly reduced the number of illegal advertisements and improved the aesthetics of public spaces, particularly within the UNESCO heritage zone. The organized space now attracts more tourists and supports the development of the creative sector.

To compare how municipalities addressed the issue of creating provisions to protect cities from visual clutter, data on resolutions were compiled into a table. Municipalities for analysis were selected subjectively, focusing on those that offered the most interesting approaches to implementing the act's provisions. One resolution was chosen for each voivodeship that undertook work on the document. Interestingly, there are voivodeships where not a single municipality has yet adopted a landscape resolution (Figure 5; Table 1).

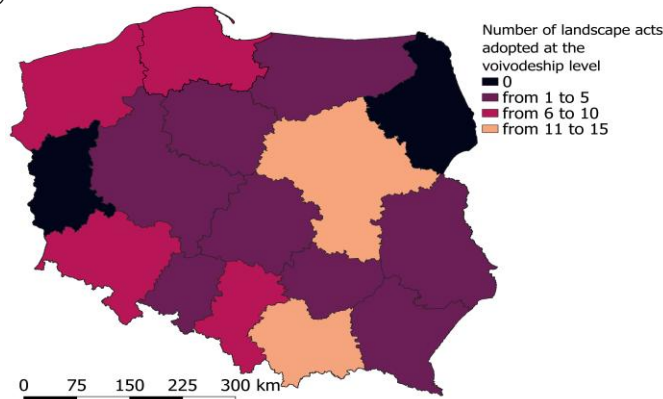
The assessment of restriction levels is based on an analysis of the resolutions content and their impact on public spaces, provisions and the degree of restrictions on advertisements, such as bans, guidelines, or protective zones.

1. **Low:** basic regulations regarding the location and form of advertisements, with minimal restrictions.
2. **Moderate:** detailed guidelines concerning the size, materials, and number of

advertisements, with moderate restrictions.

3. **High:** strict limitations on all aspects of advertising, including complete bans in specific zones.

Figure 5. Map shows number of landscape acts adopted in every voivodeship in whole country



Source: Own study.

Table 1. The solutions used in landscape resolutions across various voivodeships in the country.

Municipality name	Region	Year of adoption	Level of restriction	Types of regulations	Advertising standards
Łódź	Łódzkie	2016	high	Prohibitions on large-format advertisements, protective zones	Compliance with historical architecture
Kraków	Małopolskie	2020	high	Restrictions on size and number of ads, rules in historical areas	Alignment with historical and cultural preservation
Gdańsk	Pomorskie	2018	high	Zoning for ad placement, prohibition of neon signs	Minimalism and visual harmony
Wrocław	Dolnośląskie	2020	moderate	Ad placement restrictions near main roads	Urban aesthetic coherence
Poznań	Wielkopolskie	2023	high	Prohibition of ads on public buildings	Integration with urban design
Zamość	Lubelskie	2020	high	Prohibition of ads in UNESCO zones	Preservation of historical landscapes
Rzeszów	Podkarpackie	2021	moderate	Ad size limits in the city center	Harmonization with modern architecture
Koszalin	Zachodniopomorskie	2021	moderate	Restrictions on ads along tourist roads	Landscape aesthetics
Opole	Opolskie	2022	moderate	Ad regulations in industrial zones	Reduction of visual clutter
Bielsko-Biała	Śląskie	2023	moderate	Ad size limits along main roads	Minimalism and cohesion
Starachowice	Świętokrzyskie	2020	moderate	Restrictions on	Urban space

wice	krzyskie			advertisements in the city center	revitalization
Ostróda	Warmińsko-Mazurskie	2021	moderate	Ad placement restrictions in urban zones	Consistency with historical and natural landscapes
Toruń	Kujawsko-Pomorskie	2021	moderate	Restrictions on advertisements in historical districts	Preservation of cultural and historical character
Białystok	Podlaskie	2022	moderate	Ad placement restrictions near historical monuments	Alignment with historical and cultural preservation

Source: Own study.

The table highlights diverse approaches to landscape resolutions across Poland's voivodeships, illustrating varying levels of commitment to addressing visual clutter and public space aesthetics. Notably, municipalities such as Łódź and Kraków exemplify high-restriction frameworks, including the prohibition of large-format ads and alignment with historical architecture, emphasizing cultural heritage preservation.

Conversely, moderate-restriction cities like Wrocław and Koszalin focus on spatial coherence and tourism-related landscape aesthetics. These differences reflect regional priorities and resource disparities, showcasing the act's flexibility in addressing localized challenges. Notably, none of the municipalities selected for analysis applied low restrictions on advertisements; instead, efforts were made to balance aesthetic protection with public interest.

Table 2. SWOT analysis of landscape acts

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Legal framework established for landscape protection.	Ambiguous definitions of key terms like 'advertising device'.
Municipalities empowered to regulate advertising.	Lack of standardized enforcement across municipalities.
Supports harmonization of public spaces.	Resistance from businesses to advertising regulations.
Encourages community involvement in spatial planning.	Insufficient penalties for violations.
Facilitates removal of unauthorized advertisements.	Limited monitoring and evaluation frameworks.
Promotes cultural and historical heritage protection.	Public unawareness of the law's objectives.
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Development of clear guidelines and best practices.	Resistance from large advertising companies.
Worldwide promotion of eco-friendly advertising methods.	High costs of implementing and monitoring regulations.
Strengthening cultural and historical tourism appeal.	Slow adaptation of local governments to the law.
Access to EU funding for urban landscape projects.	Negative public perception of advertising fees.

Improved international reputation for urban aesthetics.	Unregulated advertising on private property.
Creation of new industries focused on sustainable advertising.	Competition with digital advertising platforms.
Creation of a national project to raise residents' awareness of landscape protection.	Potential politicization of enforcement.

Source: *Own study.*

The SWOT analysis reveals that the Landscape Act has numerous strengths, such as the potential to enhance the aesthetics of public spaces and protect landscapes, but it also faces significant weaknesses, including challenges in implementation and enforcement. There are multiple opportunities, such as growing public awareness and access to additional funding sources, but also threats, such as resistance from the advertising industry and a lack of regulatory consistency at the national level. The SWOT analysis highlights the broad range of potential benefits offered by the Landscape Act, including improved public space aesthetics and support for tourism development.

At the same time, it exposes significant weaknesses, particularly in the enforcement of regulations and support for local governments, as well as threats posed by lobbying from the advertising sector and a lack of public acceptance. Efforts in education and financial support are crucial to maximizing the benefits of the act.

5. Conclusions

The implementation of Poland's "landscape act" marks a significant legislative step toward improving urban aesthetics and regulating public space management. Despite high expectations, nearly a decade has brought little progress in implementing measures to protect the aesthetics of the cultural landscape.

Only low percentage of municipalities have effectively utilized the act to reduce visual clutter and enhance the quality of public spaces, others face substantial barriers, such as resource constraints, procedural complexity, and resistance from stakeholders in the advertising sector. Working on a functional resolution poses a challenge for local governments due to the complexity of defining customized regulations and the dilemma of potentially exposing businesses to losses or interfering with property rights.

This study reveals that the act has not provided a legal framework for managing outdoor advertising. The main barriers to implementing landscape resolutions in Poland are financial constraints, a lack of human resources, imprecise regulations, and low public acceptance. Adequate support from central institutions, increased public awareness, and simplification of legislative procedures could significantly improve the situation.

Municipalities that have successfully implemented resolutions, such as Gdańsk and Kraków, can serve as examples of best practices for other local governments. Beyond legislative measures, alternative strategies such as community-driven initiatives, urban design guidelines, and the role of municipal urban designers have proven valuable in enhancing urban aesthetics. These complementary approaches offer practical solutions for municipalities struggling with resource limitations or public resistance to regulation.

The example of France exemplifies the adaptation of national legislation to local needs, ensuring alignment with community priorities. Poland could draw valuable lessons from these examples by refining its "Landscape Act" to include stronger enforcement mechanisms, more precise guidelines for municipalities, and greater public involvement in the planning process.

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