



# Political and administrative processes behind street (re-)naming in Poland

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# Agency in the LL

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“Linguistic landscape by whom?  
Linguistic landscape for whom?”

[Backhaus 2007: 2]

“The first is to deal with a fundamental problem, the common failure to provide evidence of the agents who commissioned or who produced the signs being discussed.”

[Spolsky 2020: 6]

“Local authorities, regional governments and whole countries differ in (i) the transparency of the official street naming process (ii) the influence allocated to different stakeholders by the legal frameworks in which street naming takes place and (iii) the amount and type of participation afforded to private citizens, special interest groups and commercial interests.”

[Buchstaller 2021: 1]

# Data sources

- 1) parliamentary acts concerning local governance in Poland
- 2) city council resolutions concerning the prerogatives about street renaming
- 3) ethnographic interviews with the representatives of the city council and city hall
- 4) focus groups with various social agents (teachers, regional activists, representatives of cultural institutions)
- 5) local newspapers 1916-2018



**GŁOS**  
**WIELKOPOLSKI**

## Scope of research

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Poznań	534,000 inhabitants 2700 streets
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Zbąszyń	7,300 inhabitants 112 streets
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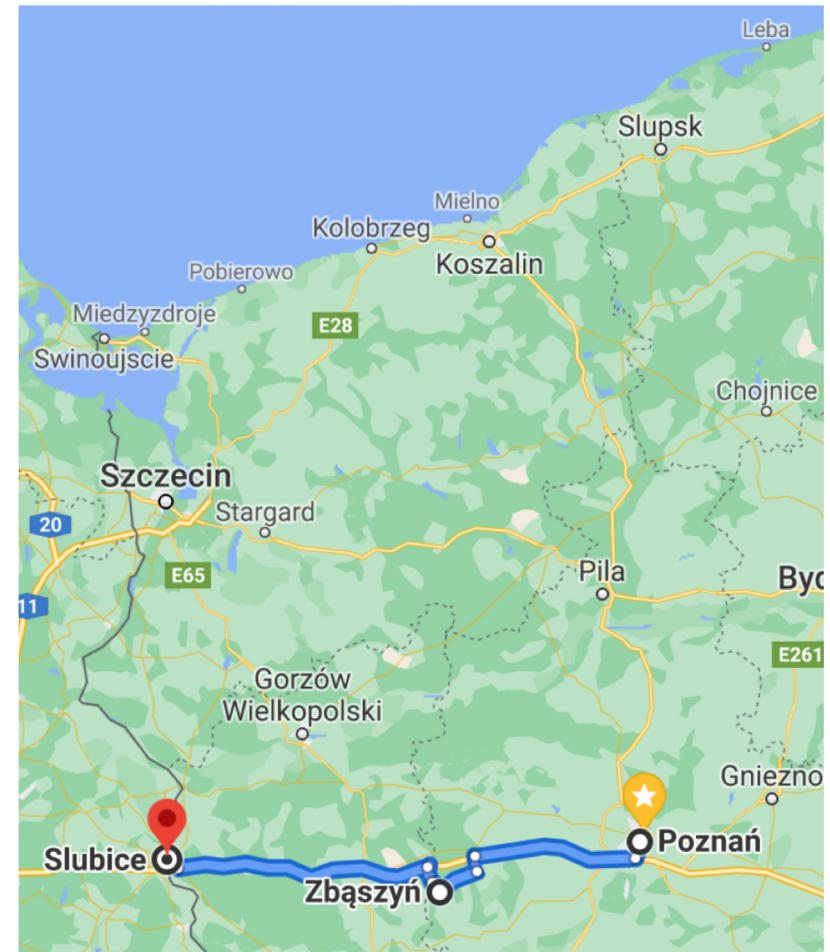
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Słubice	16,700 inhabitants 152 streets
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After WWI **Poznań** and **Zbąszyń** were in Poland.

**Słubice** was the outskirts of Frankfurt(Oder) till 1945, when it was incorporated into Poland.





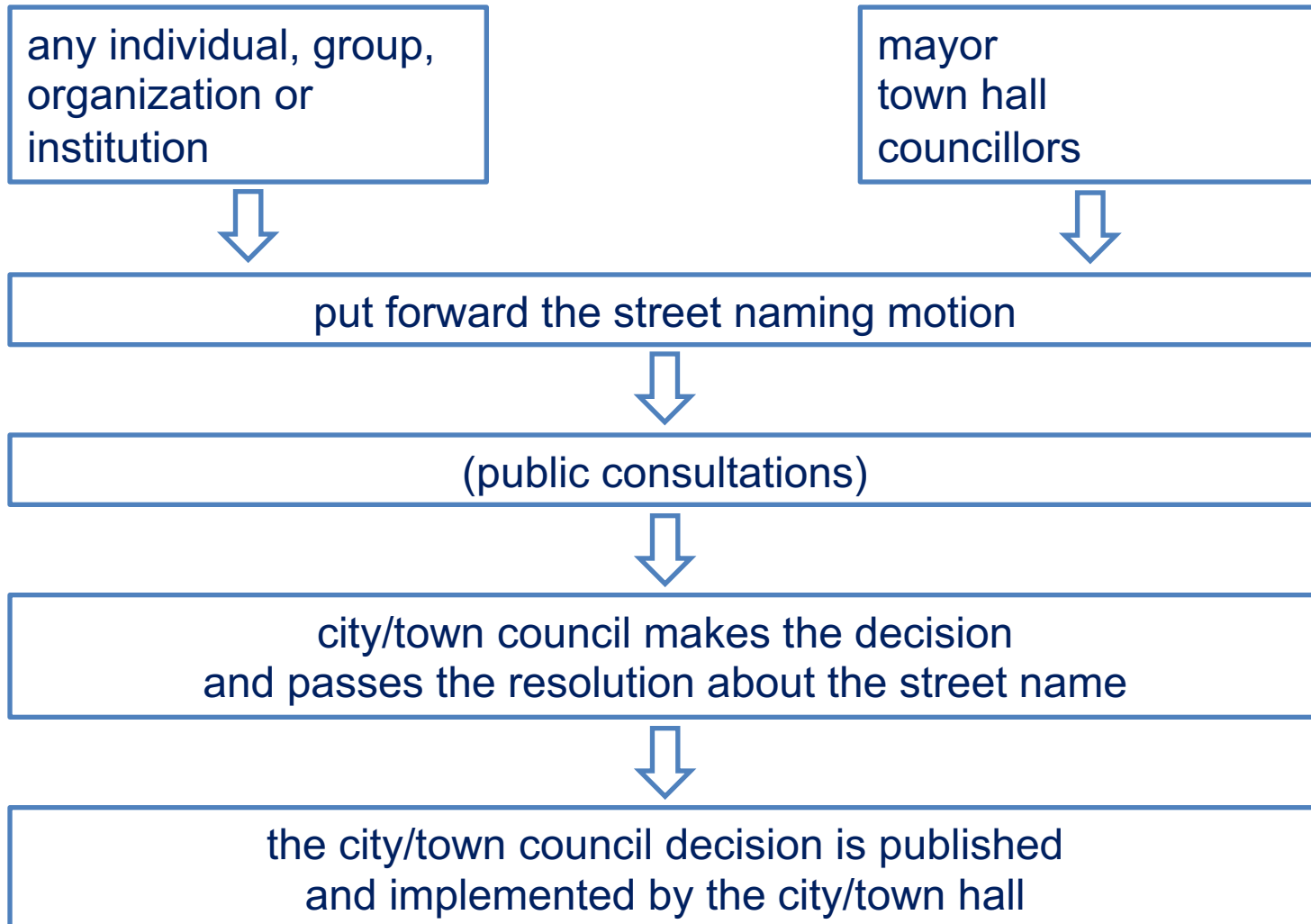
# Research questions

- 1) how the renaming procedures differ between cities of different sizes? (Poznań vs. Zbąszyń and Słubice)
- 2) how the renaming procedures differ over time?

The first question will be answered on the basis of the analysis of government documents and interviews, the second question will be answered on the basis of government documents and newspaper analysis.

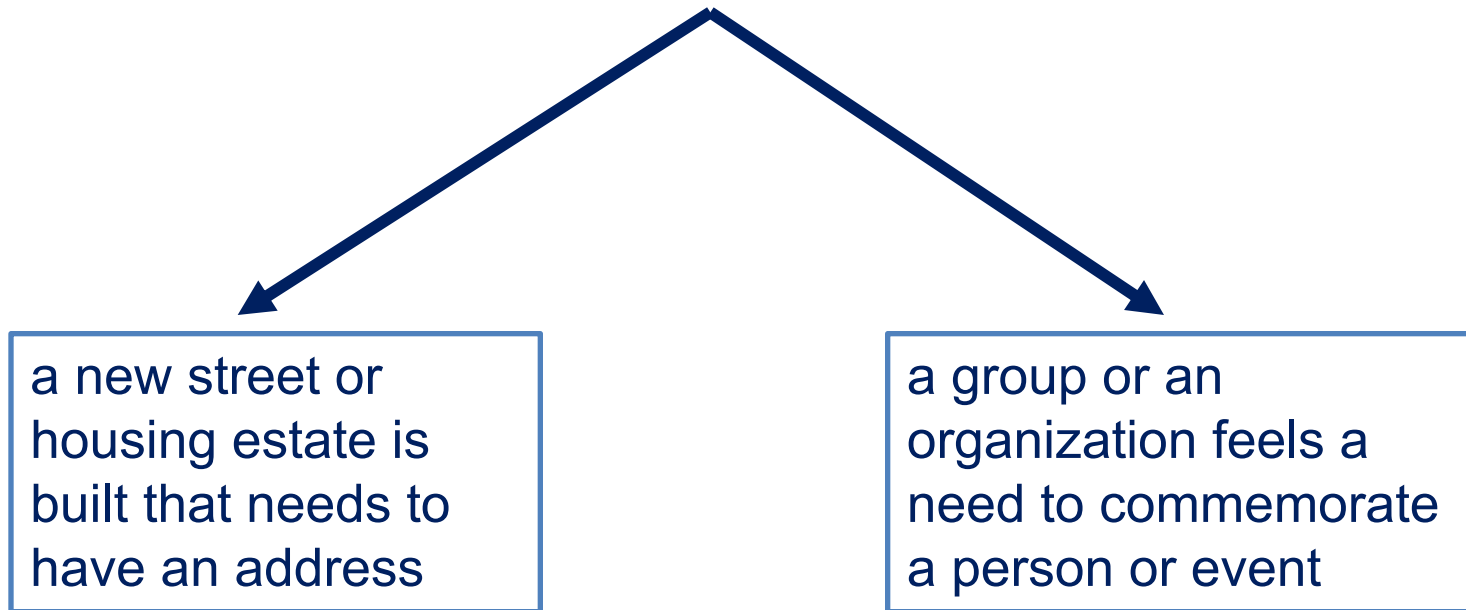


# official street naming procedure in Poland



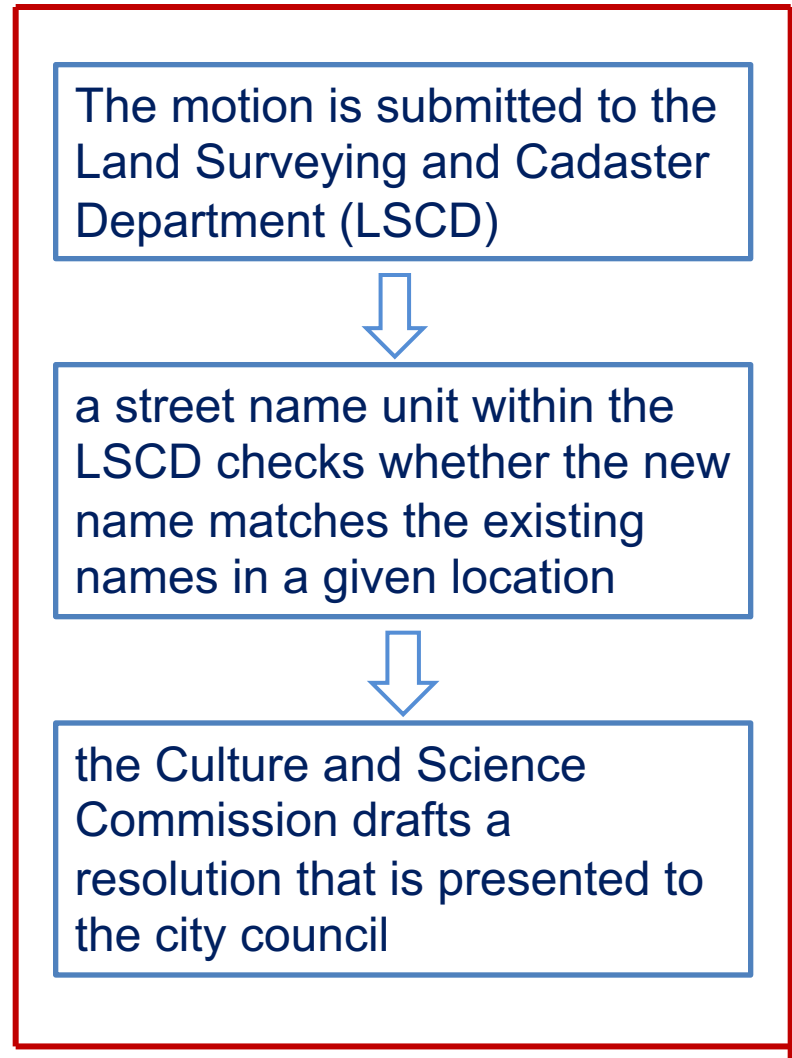
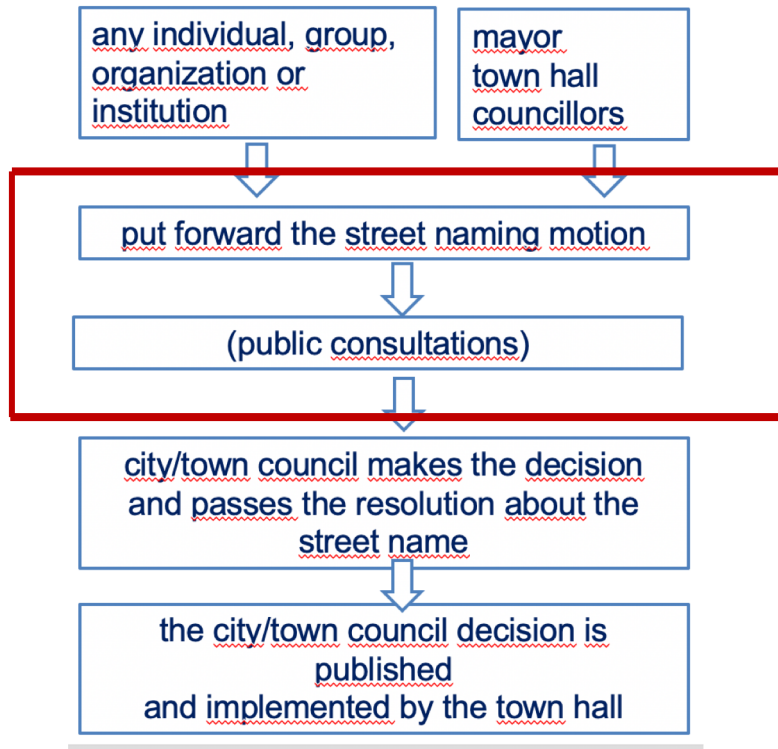


## Poznań: the need for new names





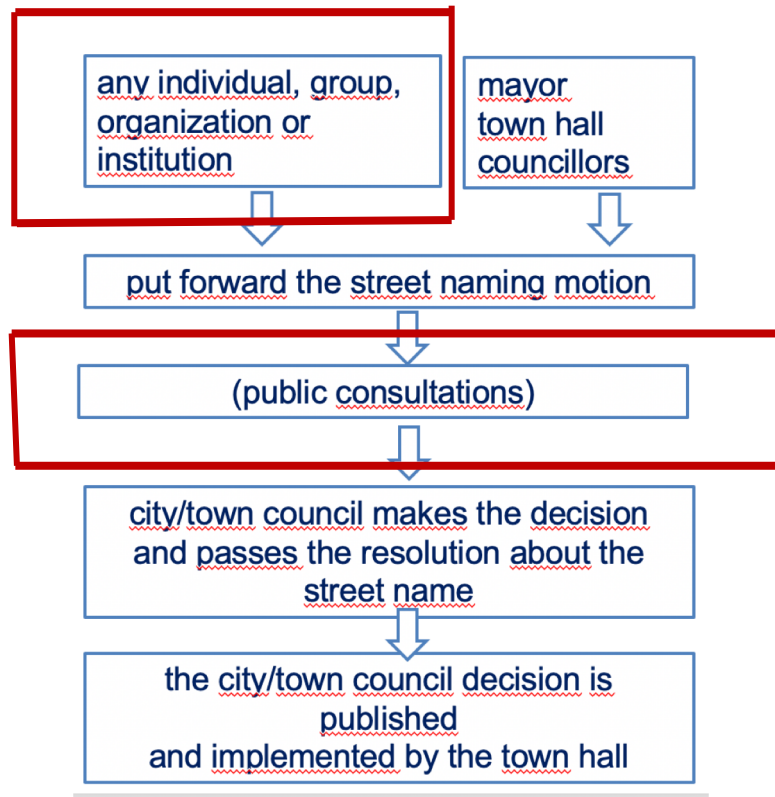
# Poznań: local implementation of the official street naming procedure







# Zbąszyń and Słubice: local implementation of the official street naming procedure





# Historical politics behind the naming

Poznań	Zbąszyń	Słubice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Wielkopolska Uprising 1919-1920</li><li>• June 1956 protest</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Wielkopolska Uprising 1919-1920</li><li>• people connected with Zbąszyń</li><li>• local folk musicians</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• nature and topography</li><li>• people connected with the post 1945 history of Słubice*</li><li>• names connected with the Polish national history</li></ul>
regional identity local identity	regional identity local identity	local identity * national identity

\*there are few such people ☹️



2) how the renaming procedures differ over time?



# Central government interference with the street naming process

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1956	the resolution of the 8th General Meeting of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party to erase the personality cult of the Stalinist era
2007	letters from the President of the Institute of National Remembrance encouraging local governments to decommunize the street names
2016	Decommunization Bill

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## The inhabitants reactions to late cleansing: Poznań – Świerczewo 2000-2002

Hanna Gadzińska from [Julian] Brun street says that the public consultations were held definitely too late. It would have been enough to change these names 10 years ago – says H. Gadzińska – Nobody would have protested then. Now people have other problems. Everyone counts money. But from a human perspective you can't commemorate communists. ... [Głos Wlkp 2002/05/21]

One of the participants of the debate in Świerczewo said: “But we all wanted democracy. And this system means, that if the majority does not accept what seems to be the state of historical necessity, this voice should be respected. (...) And it is paradoxical that now, when we live in a free country, what appears to be an obvious change meets with resistance.

It is striking that 11 years after the historical events in Poland of 1989, the battle for consciousness continues. (...) The further away it is from the fall of communism, the more the memory is blurred. (...) Today any attempt to reckon with the dark past encounters similar obstacles. [Głos Wlkp, 2000/10/13]



## Conclusion - 1

- 1) how the renaming procedures differ between cities of different sizes? (Poznań vs. Zbąszyń and Słubice)
  - In a big city there are dedicated units of the town hall (the Land Surveying and Cadaster Department, the Culture and Science Commission) vetting and overseeing the process; in small towns there is one commission for all the administrative issues at hand
  - in small cities the public consultations are informal, they do not leave a trace in the documents or the town council minutes.
  - commemorative street renaming in a big city is usually instigated by civic activists, while mundane street naming in the outskirts is done by the city hall; in small towns most street (re-)naming is done by the town hall.
- 2) how the renaming procedures differ over time?

## Conclusion

- 1) how the renaming procedures differ between cities of different sizes? (Poznań vs. Zbąszyń and Słubice)
- 2) how the renaming procedures differ over time?
  - the street naming prerogative has always rested with the local government
  - at three points in history there was interference from the central government in this prerogative (1956, 2007, 2016)
  - the inhabitants, years after the major political upheavals are satisfied with the status quo and see further street scape cleansing actions as unnecessary and costly.

