Built-up area is a particularly important element of the content of topographic maps. Its presentation changes significantly when map scales are reduced, due to both conceptual and graphic generalization. What is more, historically, changes in the depiction of built-up area were consequences of changes in the intended use of topographic maps, development of technology and changes in the cultural landscape, of which the built-up area is an important component.1

The authors describe the method of presentation of built-up areas on six Polish topographic maps or series of maps. The above-mentioned maps include the following:

- Topograficzna Karta Królestwa Polskiego (Topographic Map of the Polish Kingdom) at the scale of 1:126,000 developed in 1822-1843;

- topographic maps of the Polish Military Geographical Institute (MGI) at the scales of 1:25,000 and 1:100,000, published in 1930s;

- a series of military maps (or military-civilian maps) at the scales of 1:10,000, 1:25,000, 1:50,000 and 1:100,000, developed in 1956-1989, in accordance with the instruction for developing Soviet maps;

- a series of civilian maps at the scales of 1:10,000, 1:25,000, 1:50,000 and 1:100,000 developed after 1995.

The basis for a quantitative comparison of the content of the maps was the number of categories of objects (identifications) which constitute part of built-up area and are presented on individual maps as symbols, as well as the number of characteristics represented by these symbols. These characteristics are divided into two basic types: functional characteristics and physiognomic characteristics.
The analysis shows that military maps issued after the Second World War differ from the civilian maps, as they contain a much larger share of physiognomic characteristics, which is caused mainly from the fact that the vast majority of military maps distinguish between wooden and brick buildings. This difference was to large extent already noticeable among the oldest of the analysed maps – the Quartermaster's Map and nineteenth-century Russian maps, which were partly modelled on the Quartermaster's Map, and later also Soviet maps. Due to political reasons, the model of these Soviet maps was later adopted for the development of post-war Polish military maps. Out of all maps drawn up by military services, the inter-war MGI map serves special attention, as it was modelled on German maps. The main difference between military and civilian maps is foremost the fact that civilian maps include more functional characteristics of buildings and take into consideration new physiognomic characteristics related to residential development (compact, dense, multifamily dwellings, single family dwellings).

The analysed maps include not only the characteristics of buildings and built-up area, but also information on the features of the town – population size, number of village houses and the administrative function.

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