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**Item 16 of the provisional agenda**

**Activities relating to the Working Group on the Promotion of the Recording and Use of  
Indigenous, Minority and Regional Language Group Geographical Names**

**Minority place names in Poland**

Submitted by Poland\*

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## **Minority place names in Poland (Summary)**

*Act on national and ethnic minorities and on the regional languages* was passed in Poland six years ago (in 2005). The act recognizes nine national minorities (Belarusians, Czechs, Lithuanians, Germans, Armenians, Russians, Slovaks, Ukrainians and Jews), four ethnic minorities (Karaims, Lemkos, Roma and Tartars) and one minority using a regional language (Kashubian).

On areas inhabited densely by these minorities, minority languages may be introduced as supporting languages. On these areas geographical names in minority language may be introduced alongside names established in the Polish language. By 20 February 2011 supporting languages (Belarusian, Kashubian, Lithuanian or German) were introduced in 30 communes in three voivodships (Opolskie, Podlaskie and Pomorskie). By that time 740 geographical names for localities and their parts in minority languages (374 Kashubian names, 310 German names, 30 Lithuanian names, 25 Belarusian names, and 1 Lemko name) were introduced in 39 communes in five voivodships (list of these names is accessible on page [http://ksng.gugik.gov.pl/english/files/list\\_of\\_minority\\_names.pdf](http://ksng.gugik.gov.pl/english/files/list_of_minority_names.pdf)).

## Minority place names in Poland

On 6 January 2005 the Polish Parliament passed an *Act on national and ethnic minorities and on the regional languages*<sup>1</sup>. The act became valid on 1 May 2005. It is the first comprehensive Act in Poland's post-war history to regulate issues of national, ethnic and language minorities. The act defines minorities – national and ethnic, as well as the regional language.

A national minority is a group of Polish citizens that meets all of the following requirements:

- is numerically smaller than the rest of the population of Poland
- differs substantially from other citizens by means of language, culture or tradition
- strives to preserve its language, culture or tradition
- is aware of its own historical and national bonds, and aims to express and preserve it
- its ancestors have inhabited the today's territory of Poland for at least the past 100 years.
- identifies itself with a nation organized in its own state.

An ethnic minority is a group of Polish citizens that meets all of the following requirements:

- is numerically smaller than the rest of the population of Poland
- differs substantially from other citizens by means of language, culture or tradition
- strives to preserve its language, culture or tradition
- is aware of its own historical and national bonds, and aims to express and preserve it
- its ancestors have inhabited the today's territory of Poland for at least the past 100 years.
- does not identify itself with a nation organized in its own state.

Therefore, the only difference between a national and ethnic minority is the fact that a national minority currently has its own independent state and an ethnic minority does not have one.

The act mentions national and ethnic minorities that meet the above requirements. There are 9 national minorities: Belorussian, Czech, Lithuanian, German, Armenian, Russian, Slovak, Ukrainian and Jewish; and 4 ethnic minorities – Karait, Lemko (Rusyn), Roma and Tartar.

According to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, a regional language is a language traditionally used within a given territory of a state by nationals of that state who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the state's population; and it is different from the dialects of official language of that state and from the migrants' languages. The act defines one regional language – the Kashubian language.

As far as geographical naming is concerned, two regulations of the Act are significant. The first one concerns the use of language of minorities, the second – the use of geographical names in these languages.

In Poland, there are no limitations on the use of any language in both private and public life. In contacts with public administration offices, only the Polish language has been allowed so far, though. The Act allows to use a minority language as a “supporting language” before the commune authorities, that is a third-order administrative unit. A minority language, as a supporting language, might be used only in these communes where the number of minority residents, whose language is going to be used as a supporting language, is no less

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<sup>1</sup> *Ustawa o mniejszościach narodowych i etnicznych, oraz o języku regionalnym* Dz.U. 2005 nr 17 poz. 141 (*Act on national and ethnic minorities and on the regional languages*, Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland 2005 No 17 item 141). The English-language version of this Act is available on the website of the Ministry of Internal and Administration: [www.mswia.gov.pl/download.php?s=1&id=2327](http://www.mswia.gov.pl/download.php?s=1&id=2327).

than 20 per cent of the commune residents and who have been entered into the “Official Register of Communes, where a supporting language is used”<sup>2</sup>. Entry in the “Official Register” is made only upon a motion of the commune council where a minority language is going to be binding. That is why, not in all communes which satisfy the criterion of residents belonging to a minority, a supporting language has been introduced. Also upon a motion of the commune council, a supporting language may be withdrawn from use in the communes where such a supporting language is binding.

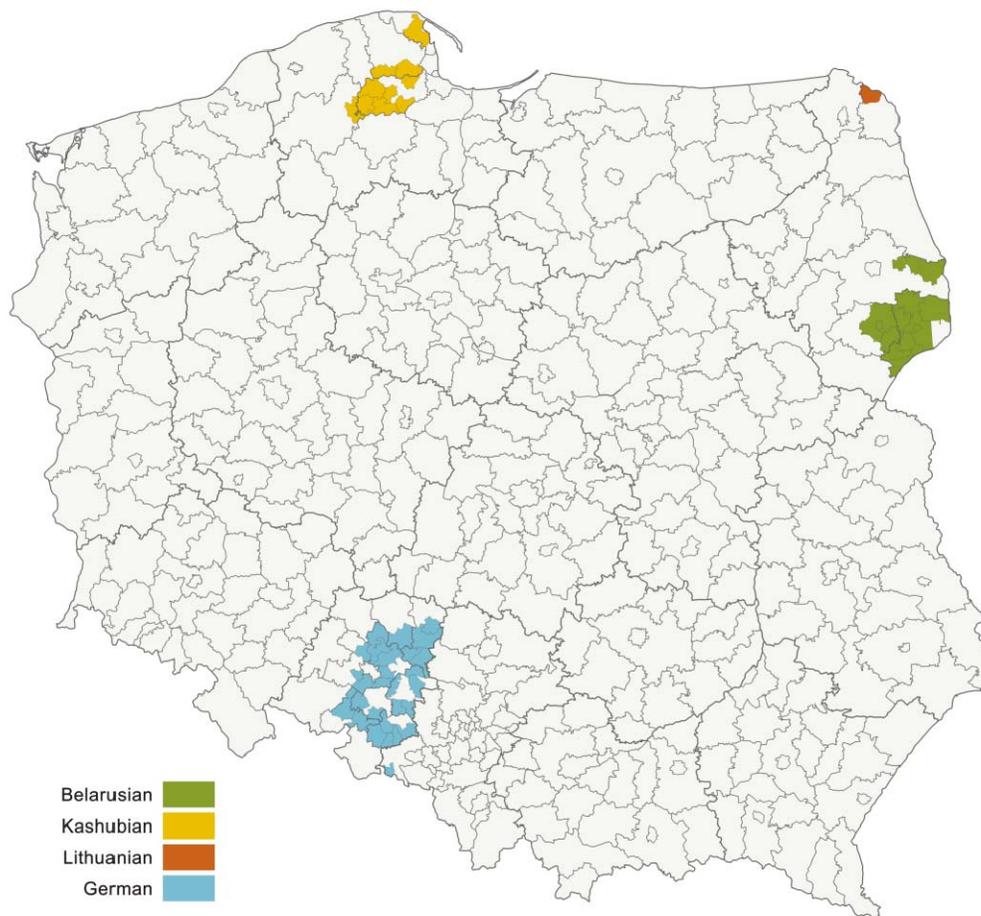


Fig. 1. Communes where persons belonging to a national, ethnic minority or using a regional language constitute at least 20% of the inhabitants

At present only four minorities (Belarusians, Kashubians, Lithuanians and Germans) account for at least 20% of the inhabitants of 51 communes, among which 30 introduced supporting languages by 20 February 2011<sup>3</sup>:

<sup>2</sup> Rozporządzenie Ministra Spraw Wewnętrznych i Administracji z dnia 30 maja 2005 r. w sprawie Urzędowego Rejestru Gmin, w których jest używany język pomocniczy (Regulation of the Minister of the Interior and Administration of 30 May 2005 on the Official Register of Communes in which a supporting language is used), see English translation: [http://ksng.gugik.gov.pl/english/files/regulation\\_official\\_register\\_of\\_communes\\_in\\_which\\_supporting\\_language\\_is\\_used.pdf](http://ksng.gugik.gov.pl/english/files/regulation_official_register_of_communes_in_which_supporting_language_is_used.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> According to “Urzędowy Rejestr Gmin, w których jest używany język pomocniczy” (“Official Register of the Communes where a supporting language is used”) provided by Ministry of Internal and Administration: <http://www.mswia.gov.pl/download.php?s=1&id=12604>.

- Belarusian in 5 communes of Podlaskie Voivodship: Czyże, Hajnówka (urban commune), Hajnówka (rural Commune), Narewka, Orla
- Kashubian in Parchowo and Sierakowice communes in Pomorskie Voivodship
- Lithuanian in Puńsk commune in Podlaskie Voivodship
- German in 22 communes of Opolskie Voivodship: Biała, Bierawa, Chrzastowice, Dobrodzień, Dobrzeń Wielki, Głogówek, Izbicko, Jemielnica, Kolonowskie, Komprachcice, Lasowice Wielkie, Leśnica, Murów, Prószków, Radłów, Reńska Wieś, Strzeleczyki, Tarnów Opolski, Turawa, Ujazd, Walce, Zębowice.

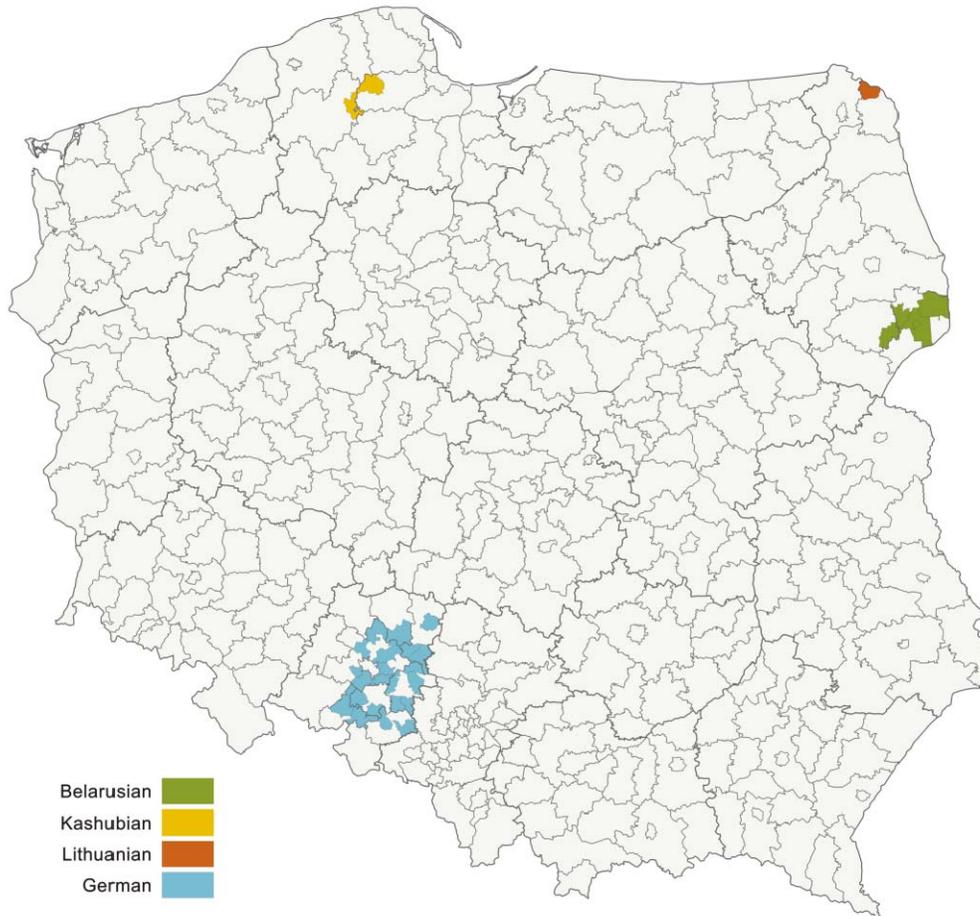


Fig. 2. Communes where supporting languages were introduced

The Act also lays down, that traditional names in a minority language for localities, physiographic objects and streets may be used as “additional names” alongside geographic names established in the Polish language. The names of uninhabited localities, physiographic objects as well as streets, squares etc. in minority languages may be established only for communes in which the minority constitutes at least 20% of the inhabitants. In the case of inhabited localities, minority names may be set also for communes that do not satisfy the quantitative requirement of minorities residing therein (20%). For such places an additional name in the minority language may be introduced if in consultations more than a half of its residents were in favor of the establishment of an additional name. Names of localities and physiographic objects in minority languages may be introduced throughout a whole commune or for parts of it.

Names in minority languages may not be used independently and must also appear following the official name in Polish. Contradictory to names in Polish, names in minority languages are not official names but only “additional names” (“auxiliary names”). Names in minority languages may not refer to names between 1933 and 1945 granted by the Third German Reich or the Soviet Union. The aim of this limitation is to avoid the return to names introduced during the Second World War by German and Soviet occupying authorities, and to avoid the return to names introduced by Germans after 1933 when in what was then Germany’s eastern territory, the geographic names of non-Germanic origin were Germanized.

All names proposed by Commune Councils must receive the approval of the Commission on Names of Localities and Physiographic Objects. Minority names are officially established only after entering the name into the “Register of communes in which names in minority language are used”<sup>4</sup>.

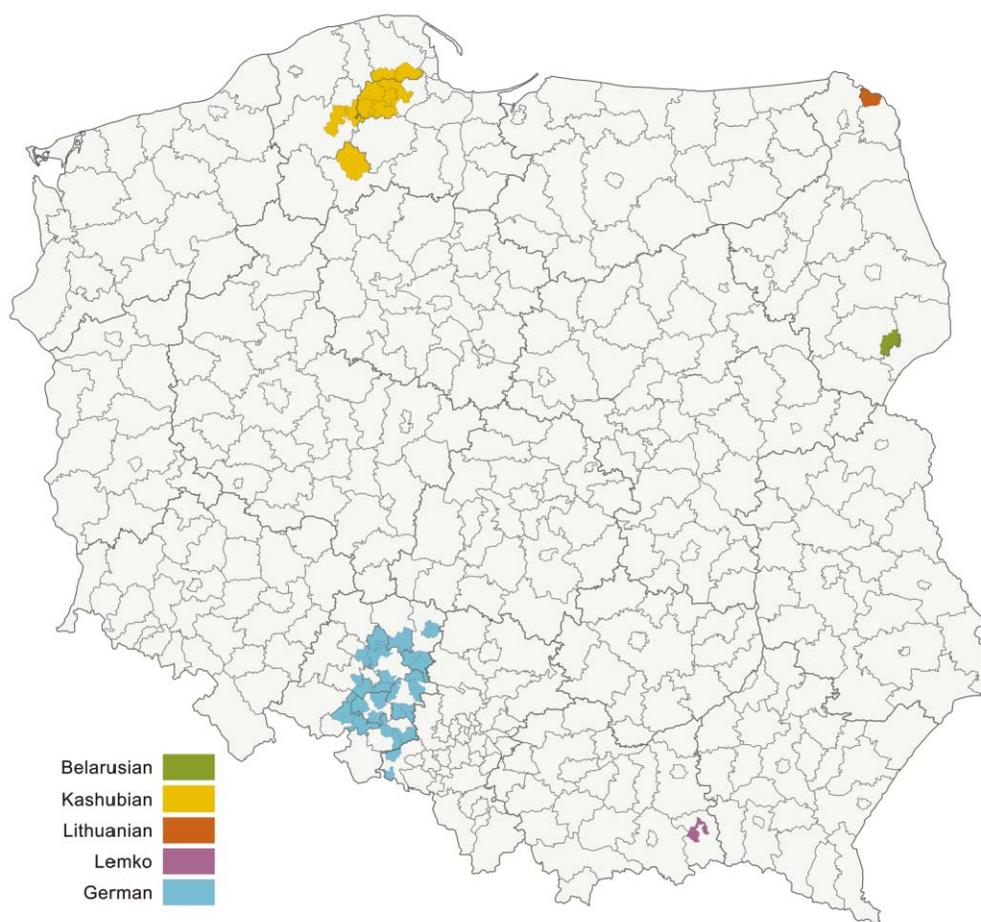


Fig. 3. Communes where additional names were introduced

<sup>4</sup> *Rozporządzenie Ministra Spraw Wewnętrznych i Administracji z dnia 30 maja 2005 r. w sprawie Rejestru gmin, na których obszarze są używane nazwy w języku mniejszości, wzorów wniosków o wpisanie do tego Rejestru oraz o ustalenie dodatkowej nazwy miejscowości lub obiektu fizjograficznego w języku mniejszości narodowej lub etnicznej albo w języku regionalnym (Regulation of the Minister of the Interior and Administration of 30 May 2005 on the Register of communes in which names in minority language are used, specimen of the motion on entering into the Register and on establishing an additional name of a locality or physiographic object in national and ethnic minority language or in regional language), see English translation: [http://ksng.gugik.gov.pl/english/files/regulation\\_register\\_of\\_communes\\_in\\_which\\_names\\_in\\_minority\\_language\\_are\\_used.pdf](http://ksng.gugik.gov.pl/english/files/regulation_register_of_communes_in_which_names_in_minority_language_are_used.pdf).*

To date (as of 20 February 2011), additional names have been introduced in 740 localities and parts of them, located in 39 communes<sup>5</sup>:

- 374 Kashubian names for localities and their parts in 10 communes in Pomorskie Voivodship (Brusy, Bytów, Chmielno, Kartuzy, Linia, Parchowo, Sierakowice, Stężycza, Sulęczyń, and Szemud)
- 310 German names for localities and their parts in 24 communes of Opolskie Voivodship (Biała, Bierawa, Chrzastowice, Cisek, Dobrodzień, Dobrzeń Wielki, Głogówek, Gogolin, Izbicko, Jemielnica, Kolonowskie, Komprachcice, Lasowice Wielkie, Leśnica, Łubniany, Murów, Prószków, Radłów, Reńska Wieś, Strzeleczyki, Tarnów Opolski, Ujazd, Walce, and Zębowice) as well as in two communes of Śląskie Voivodship (Krzanowice and Rudnik)
- 30 Lithuanian names for localities in Puńsk commune in Podlaskie Voivodship
- 25 Belarusian names for localities in Orla commune in Podlaskie Voivodship
- 1 Lemko name in Gorlice commune in Małopolskie Voivodship.

Several other communes also intend to introduce names in a minority language, with administration procedures currently under way to introduce these names. Additional names for physiographic objects and streets have not been introduced so far.

Additional names in minority languages also appear on road signs<sup>6</sup>, due to multilevel and complicated procedures however the introduction of these signs is a long process. The first road signs (with German names) were placed in August 2008 in Radłów commune. Approved place names are also starting to appear on maps published by private companies. At present they are not shown on topographic maps in Poland.



Fig. 4. Bilingual road signs in: Leśnica commune (with German name), Sierakowice commune (with Kashubian names), and Gorlice commune (with Lemko name)

Full, consistently updated, list of the additional names in minority languages is available on the website of the Commission on Standardization of Geographical Names Outside the Republic of Poland: [http://ksng.gugik.gov.pl/english/files/list\\_of\\_minority\\_names.pdf](http://ksng.gugik.gov.pl/english/files/list_of_minority_names.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> According to “Rejestr gmin na których obszarze używane są nazwy w języku mniejszości” (“Register of communes in which names in minority language are used”) provided by Ministry of Internal and Administration: <http://www.mswia.gov.pl/download.php?s=1&id=12642>.

<sup>6</sup> See: *Rozporządzenie Ministra Infrastruktury z dnia 10 sierpnia 2005 r. w sprawie umieszczania na znakach i tablicach dodatkowych nazw w językach mniejszości narodowych i etnicznych oraz w języku regionalnym* (Regulation of the Minister of Infrastructure of 10 August 2005 on placing additional names on signs and boards in languages of national and ethnic minorities or in regional language), English translation: [http://ksng.gugik.gov.pl/english/files/regulation\\_additional\\_names\\_on\\_signs\\_and\\_boards.pdf](http://ksng.gugik.gov.pl/english/files/regulation_additional_names_on_signs_and_boards.pdf).

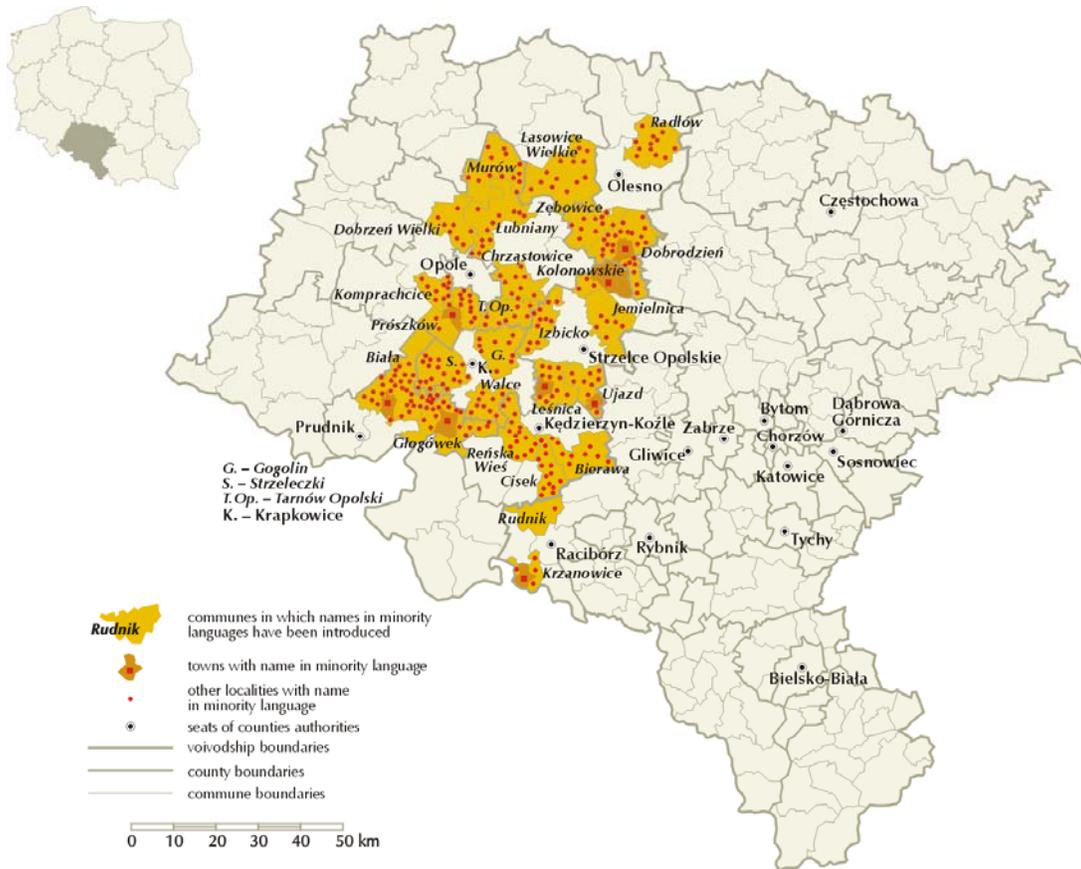


Fig. 5. Localities for which the additional German names were introduced

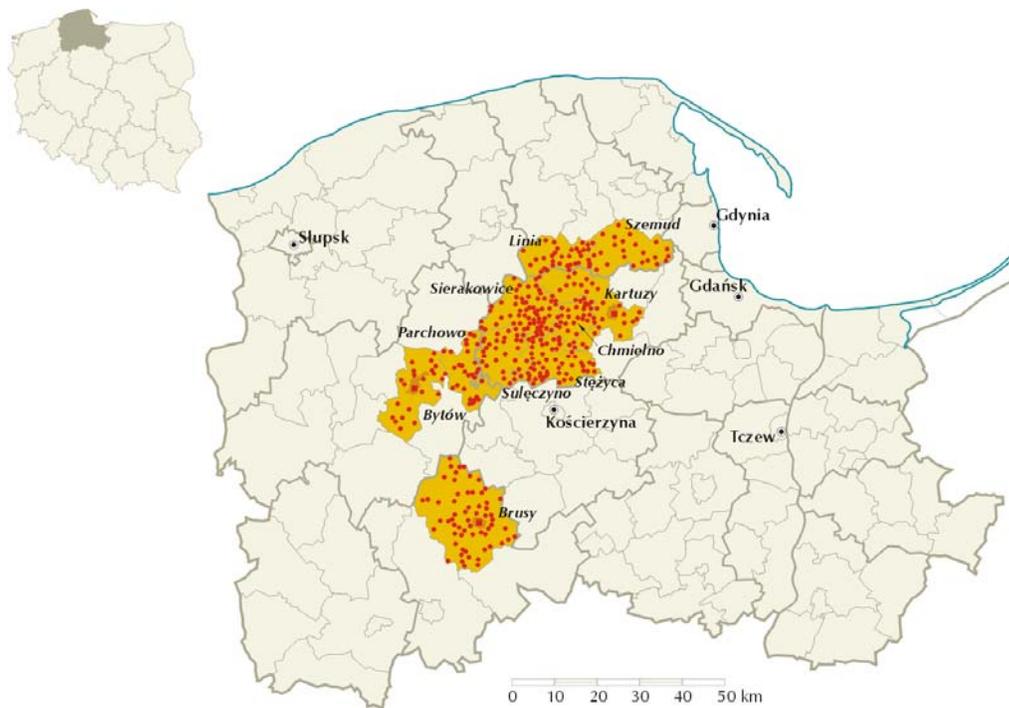


Fig. 6. Localities for which the additional Kashubian names were introduced

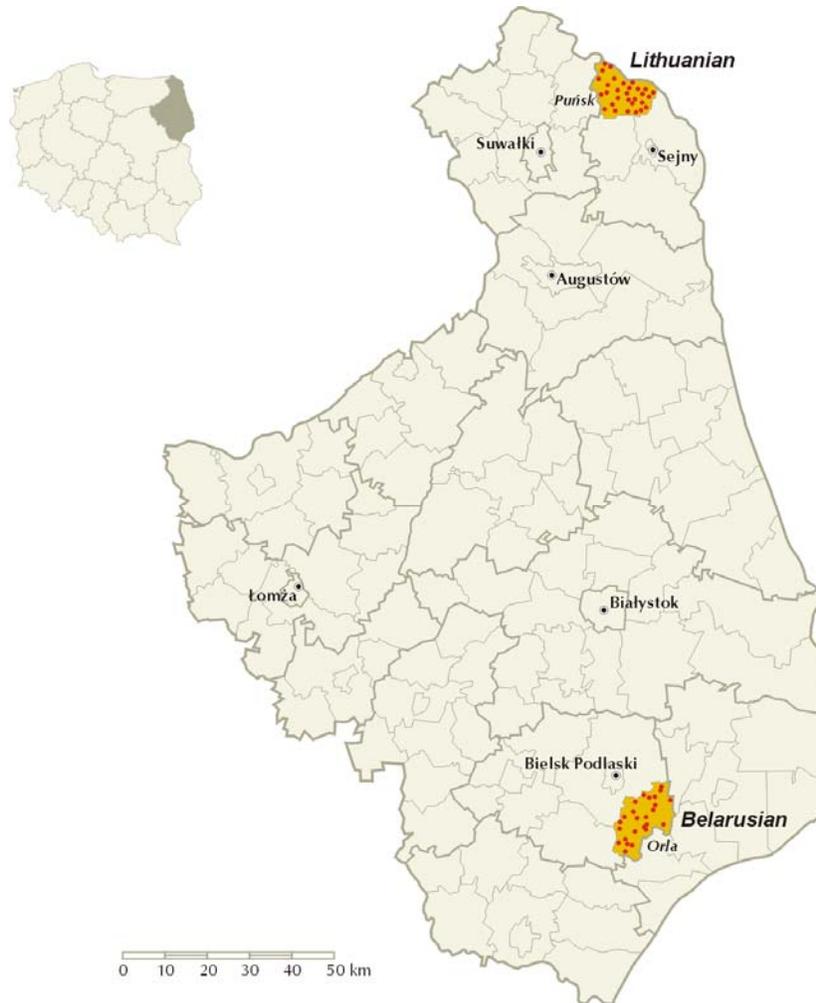


Fig. 7. Localities for which the additional Belarusian or Lithuanian names were introduced



Fig. 8. Localities for which the additional Lemko names were introduced