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## Small towns in Śląskie voivodeship

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## SMALL TOWNS IN ŚLĄSKIE VOIVODESHIP

**ABSTRACT.** The paper shows small towns in the extremely urbanised and industrialised Śląskie Voivodeship (called Upper Silesia Region). The towns were divided into two groups: central towns surrounded by rural districts and specialised towns, which developed on the basis of industry and tourism. Economic activity and size structure of enterprises, of which the smallest enterprises, so important in the process of transformation were investigated. The regionally differentiated labour market was characterised by a number of employed persons in small and big enterprises.

**KEY WORDS:** small towns, economic transformation, Śląskie voivodeship.

### SMALL TOWNS IN POLAND

The number of towns in Poland is relatively large. The town net comprised 887 in 2005 and their number increased by 57 when compared to the data of 1990. The growth was caused by restitution, re-granting of municipal rights. Usually boroughs or city sections which had already been towns became independent small towns again. There were 8 such cases in Upper Silesia Region. There were also towns which originated from rural communes.

Considering the size structure of Polish towns we may say that small towns, up to 20 thousand inhabitants dominate in all regions in Poland – 75% of the total number of towns. Among them, towns with up to 5 thousand inhabitants comprise 1/3 of the total number of towns. Most of them are in Wielkopolska – 89, Dolnośląskie voivodeship – 70 and in Mazowsze – 62. Upper Silesia Region is an exception as there, due to the existence of the largest municipal-industrial centre in Poland, Katowice agglomeration, most of the towns are medium or large. There were 35 small towns in the area in 2005. The amount of inhabitants of small towns in Upper Silesia Region equals only to 8.3%

of the total number of the region inhabitants, while the average for the whole country is equal to 20.8%. There are such regions where even 43% of people live in small towns (e.g. Lubuskie Region).

In the 1990's problems of small towns were not in the centre of attention of European research workers. Research works from the Czech Republic (Vaishar and Zapletova, 1998; Vaishar *et al.* 2001, Vaishar, 2004; Prokop, 1993), Hungary (Rudl, 1998) and France (Bessey and Sicamois, 1998) are only a few exceptions. In Poland of the 1990's, where a radical constitutional and economic transformation had been initiated, the interest in small towns revived. On one hand, a revival of local initiative and economy had occurred as a result of transformation. On the other hand, a number of small towns found themselves in a critical situation being unable to cope with new economic conditions (e.g. competitiveness of big towns, reduction of subsidies for industrial establishments) and as a consequence, losing economic basis of existence and population. Therefore, research works on small towns in different regions of the country were undertaken already at the beginning of 1990's and have been continued since then (Szymańska, 1992, 2002; Sokołowski 1992, 1999; Zdrojewski, 1993; Matczak, Szymańska, 1997; Bagiński, 1998; Matczak, 1999; Heffner, 2000, 2003; Heffner, Marszał 2005, 2005/2006; Szymańska, Grzelak-Kostulska, 2005a, 2005b). Research works covering the regional aspects are also interesting. Here, research papers on small towns in Lower Silesia (Łoboda, 1992) and Upper Silesia (Zuzańska-Żyśko, 2005, 2006; Szajnowska-Wysocka, Zuzańska-Żyśko, 2004), Małopolska (Kwiatek-Sołtys, 2002, 2004), Wielkopolska (Konecka-Szydłowska, 2003) and Pomorze (Rydz, Jażewicz, 1999, 2001, Jażewicz, 2001) should be mentioned.

The aim of the article is to present economic changes in small (not more than 20,000 inhabitants) towns of Upper Silesia Region in the period of 1995–2005. In 2005, 35 towns (49% of the total number of towns in the voivodeship) fulfilled the criteria of municipality and size (Demographic Yearbook 2006). Some aspects of municipal economy (size of enterprises, employment) have been taken into account. The elaboration is based on analysis of statistical data (published and unpublished).

## CHARACTER OF SMALL TOWNS OF SILESIAN REGION

The Upper Silesia Region is located in the southern part of Poland, bordering Slovakia and the Czech Republic. It is one of 16 regions in our country. It belongs to small regions, as far as the area is concerned, on the other hand its urbanization and industrialization levels are very high. Population density in the region is also high. 10% of the Polish population lives there.

The last 16 years of transformation have caused significant changes in economy and social life in the area. Heavy industry; hard coal mining, coke,

steel and lead production still play an important role, but also car production (69% of the country production) and beer (30%) have started to play a great role. The Upper Silesia Region is a huge labour market, the second after the Mazowiecki Region, with Warsaw as its capital. The fact that Upper Silesia is a transformation region may be proved by the fact that 722 state companies were privatised in the period from 1990 till 2001, including 104 completely liquidated companies and 124 being under liquidation. In the same period, 420,000 new companies were raised, including 400 thousand small enterprises employing up to 9 people, which had had no chance to exist in the centralised economy system before 1990.

The existence of mineral resources (hard coal (mainly), iron, zinc and lead ores, marl and limestone) and industry developing on the basis of these resources influenced decisively the formation of the modern urban network of the Silesian Voivodship. Not all towns of this region expanded (taking into consideration population) in the period of dynamic industrialization. Some of them remained as small centres. They preserved their local character and do not perform (except one) the function of a powiat in the new territorial organization of the country. These functions were reserved for bigger towns (of more than 20,000 population), which network is exceptionally well developed in the surveyed region.

### LOCATION IN SUB-REGIONS

The towns are located in 3 different sub-regions. Most of them are in the Central Silesian sub-region. They either belong to Katowice agglomeration, for example: Wojkowice, Radzionków or they are located in its vicinity. The towns are mostly above 10 thousand inhabitants.

9 towns are located in the northern part, in the Częstochowa sub-region. All of them are connected with rural areas, municipal-rural communities and they are administration and service centres with influence zones. As you can see they are small towns. Kłobuck is the biggest and it is the only small town which is also an administration district (powiat).

There are 6 towns in the south, in the Bielsko sub-region. It is a mountain and foreland area and environmental conditions there are different than in other discussed regions. There are large towns, as well as small and very small ones there.

Historical development is another element differentiating the group of small towns in Upper Silesia Region. The towns may be divided into 2 groups: old historical centres, which were founded in 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> centuries and small towns, established in the fifties and sixties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

A group of small towns has been divided applying the Christaller's theory of central places. The first group has been called functional centres. It comprises towns of historical origin, the ones settled in the 13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> century, with an influence

zone and playing a central role in rural areas. They are mostly towns located far from the centre of the region and the area of the agglomeration. In 1990 they had a known number of factories working in the field of agriculture, providing services for farmers and agriculture production. Larger service-production firms, collective or state owned were connected with agriculture. However, some centres specialised in manufacture of toys, Christmas-tree ornaments, straw hats, wood chips clothes and artificial flowers. Basket weaving skills and other handicrafts still exist there.

The second group has been called “specialised towns” as they originated from industry. Their main economic activity is based on raw material resources: hard coal, iron ores, fireproof clay, limestone, marl and sand (Zuzńska-Żyśko, 2001). The centres which have developed due to their touristic qualities are the only exception to the rule. A significant stage in development of the towns from that group was the construction of one or two state owned enterprises, factories, mines, cement or steel plants. Their internal structure is also quite characteristic. They have no natural centre as the main, central towns; therefore, they have developed chaotically, usually along one street or in the vicinity of a factory.

#### CHANGES IN THE SIZE OF ENTERPRISES AND ON THE LABOUR MARKET

Nation-wide political and economic transformations after 1990 influenced the structure of the ownership and the size of enterprises in the surveyed region. Mainly private enterprises were formed: 13,400 enterprises were registered in 1995 and this number increased to 21,500 in the end of 1999 (about 54%). The rate of growth of the number of firms in small towns was differentiated depending on the character of the economy: it was weaker in specialized towns (from 8% in mining towns to 52% in towns of a strong tourist function) and stronger in towns servicing agricultural areas (from 22% to 103%). Such activity may result from the lack of other employment possibility than the work in the self-owned firm (Zuzńska-Żyśko, 2005). Large production factories have been either closed or reduced employment. The distance from Katowice agglomeration is also important as such rural towns are usually located close to the border of the province or in agricultural areas. Their inhabitants cannot afford to commute dozens of kilometres for example due to communication problems or simply the lack of a passenger car. Obviously that obstacle is not so strong in West Europe as it is in Poland.

The weakest initiative (as it results from the analysis of the gathered data) was observed in these towns where one big, state-owned establishment was located, employing more than 249 people. In all towns with industry dominating in the structure of economy (more than 50% employed in industry) the rate of initiative was the lowest in the total set. The presence of big enterprises of

a traditional heavy industry in these towns counteracted the diversification of economic structures and impeded changes of the production profile and organization of work. As long as these establishments had functioned, assuring stable work and resulting from it privileges, there was no necessity of finding a new place of work. Increase in the rate of initiative was spatially differentiated from 43 to 182 in 1999 and from 47 to 193 in 2005 (with the lowest values in the central part of the region and the highest in the northern part), (Table 1). In 1995–1999 the greatest increase in the number of enterprises was observed in small towns of the Bielsko sub-region, about 330 entities per one town, in the Częstochowa sub-region only 169, and in the Katowice sub-region 123. In 2005 the number of new enterprises increased by 3,000, average per town 88, when compared to the amount of 1999. In fact, the activity was 3 times lower than in the previous period, but it was still positive. The number of enterprises increased in all small towns except 3 ones. Still, the Bielsko sub-region was the most active, where the average increase was 145 enterprises per town. The level of activity in Katowice sub-region was similar to the one in the previous years, 106 companies per town on the average. The most alarming situation was in the Częstochowa sub-region, where formation of new enterprise had been practically stopped and the average increase per town was only 30. It may prove either saturation of the area with small enterprises or collapse of the product market (e.g. shoes) due to competition of cheaper products from other markets e.g. Chinese.

High economic activity can be observed among “specialized towns” only in tourist centres. It is obvious as a tourist function usually concentrates a lot of different services beginning from weekend recreation to highly specialized ones like skiing for example.

Economic leaders can be found among small towns throughout the whole transformation period.

There are 6 such towns: three of them are central towns – Kozięgłowy, Żarki and Siewierz and 3 others are tourist centres – Szczyrk Ustroń and Wisła. A model of flexible organization of production (post-Fordian), which already existed in the eighties, have become active in small towns since 1990 (Zuzanska-Żyśko, 2002). There are many small firms producing goods in small series for the same final market. Specialisation in one particular product can be observed. For example, Kozięgłowy is a leader, among small Silesian towns, in production of artificial Christmas trees. They are mostly produced in Kozięgłowy and in the surrounding villages. The other town Żarki specialized in shoe production. Small firms produce different models of shoes in short series. They are mostly very small firms employing up to five people and located in small workshops near private houses of their owners. Such small development centres appear also in other regions of Poland, for example in Małopolska where furniture, wicker weaved goods or metal elements such as forged gates, fences are produced.

Table 1. Chosen data for small towns in Upper Silesia Region

SUB-REGION	TOWN	BUSINESS FIRMS PER 1,000 INHABITANT				EMPLOYED PERSONS IN 2005	
		1995	1999	2005	DYNAMICS IN 2005 1995=100	TOTAL	INCREASE / DECREASE 1999=100
Bielsko Biała	Skoczów	68	98	119	175	6,621	-
	Strumień	44	88	98	223	1,476	-
	Szczyrk	86	129	158	184	2,116	+
	Ustroń	89	125	148	167	9,202	+
	Wilamowice	52	88	87	167	1,142	+
	Wisła	84	118	135	161	4,175	+
Częstochowa	Błachownia	62	77	73	118	2,308	-
	Kłobuck	73	94	100	137	5,635	-
	Koniecpol	51	74	78	153	2,114	-
	Koziegłowy	107	182	193	180	1,314	+
	Krzepice	72	98	105	146	2,260	+
	Szczekociny	72	91	122	169	1,927	+
	Zarki	101	143	158	156	2,121	+
Centralny Śląski	Bieruń	41	56	83	174	5,812	.
	Imielin	67	79	92	137	1,937	+
	Kalety	36	58	62	172	1,643	+
	Lędziny	35	51	64	183	7,687	-
	Łazy	60	82	112	187	1,675	-
	Miasteczko Śl.	39	51	48	123	2,300	-
	Ogrodzieniec	67	87	108	161	1,261	+
	Orzesze	53	69	82	155	5,034	+
	Pilica	74	95	112	151	1,294	+
	Poręba	54	60	68	126	2,171	-
	Pyskowice	41	57	71	152	5,091	.
	Radzionków	--	73	90	--	6,256	+
	Siewierz	98	121	136	139	2,423	+
	Sławków	61	74	89	156	2,141	.
	Sośnicowice	--	79	96	--	824	+
Toszek	31	43	62	200	1,442	+	
Wojkowice	57	72	99	174	2,521	-	
Woźniki	32	61	69	216	1,601	+	
Rybnicko-jastrzębski	Krzanowice	--	--	48	--	448	.
	Kuźnia Raciborska	37	48	60	162	1,767	+
	Pszów	40	43	50	125	5,044	-
	Radlin	--	53	64	--	7,880	+

Source: The author's own data analysis. The towns are arranged according to the value of economic activity coefficient in each region in 2005. "+" Increase employed persons, "--" decrease employed persons. "." Data not available. "--", magnitude zero.

The size of companies is another important result of transformation. Large state owned companies obviously dominated till 1990. Currently self-employment or small firms employing 1–2 people are the most common. The problem is that the Main Statistic Office does not offer scientists access to the data free of charge, which is a serious obstacle hindering thorough investigation of the phenomena. However, 29 thousand people worked in small firms employing up to 5 people already in 1999. The number had risen by 1.5 thousand since 1998. The firms are mostly registered as retail shops (37.8% of enterprises in small towns), production enterprises 15.2%, building firms 7.5 %, and transport services 7.3%. Production is a very important aspect for development of small towns in the region.

The number of people employed in the smallest enterprises has been growing systematically in consecutive years. In 2003(1), there were 44,200 people in companies employing up to 9 persons, including in the number of 37,900 employed in companies up to 5 employees (86%). This means the labour market in micro-enterprises in small towns has been constantly increasing. It is due to necessity to start a private enterprise because of the lack of any other employment alternative. The analysed small towns mostly belong to peripheral areas, distant from large municipal centres, they are also poorer in high level services and institutions. Each new enterprise started within small towns creates at least one new place of employment, in fact usually more.

Comparing the percentage of people working in small enterprises in 1999 and 2003, a general increase can be observed in most of the analysed towns. A decrease was observed only in two centres among 35 analysed ones, i.e. Blachownia and Miasteczko Śląskie. 115,400 people were in small towns in Śląsk voivodship in 2003, which was an average of 3,300 per one town. The biggest labour markets were Skoczów (8,900), Ustroń (8,800), Radlin (8,100) and Lędziny (7,800). Most of the employees in the centres worked in the public sector. Newly formed rural communes: Sośnicowice (800) and Krzanowice (600) had the lowest number of employed people.

In 2005, the labour market in small towns reached the level of 110,600 and decreased by almost 5,000 compared to 2003. The number of new enterprises increased but the number of employees decreased especially in old state-owned companies. The decrease of employees was observed almost in all towns where such companies still existed, especially in towns with the mining industry. The number of people employed in enterprises up to 9 employees reached the level of 44,300.

## CONCLUSIONS

Varied labour markets in small towns in the Śląsk Voivodeship, their economic activity and size structure of enterprises in them lead to certain conclusions:



Economic activity of small towns varied through the whole transformation process.

More significant changes can be observed in central places surrounded by rural centres. Changes were difficult or very slow in industrial or post-industrial centres. Decrease of the labour market in such towns can be observed and economic activity is low there. Generally, new enterprises are still being opened in small towns. However, the increase in tempo has been much lower, especially in the period of 1999–2003.

The trend is the most visible in Częřtuchowa sub-region. It is important to note that small enterprises generate new work places. People employed in small enterprises play the most significant role in small towns with touristic function, located peripherally but having the zone of influence i.e. the towns with a central character with no big company, but also the towns where a state-owned company, which was the main employer for the inhabitants of the town and surrounding communes, has been restructured or closed.

Micro-enterprises (0–5 employees) play a more important role in the economic development of small towns. The number of centres where the labour market is dominated by small enterprises has been still increasing.

## NOTES

(1) In 2003 and 2004, the group of small towns of 1999 was increased by 4 new ones: Pyskowice and Bieruń, where the number of inhabitants decreased and it was below 20,000 in 2003, Sławków, which had previously belonged to Małopolska voivodeship and Krzanowice, which had separated from a rural commune.

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