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The standards of living in small towns of Opole province in the light of particular indexes

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THE STANDARDS OF LIVING IN SMALL TOWNS OF OPOLE PROVINCE IN THE LIGHT OF PARTICULAR INDEXES

ABSTRACT. It has been a long time since people's life standards became a matter of scientific researches and disputes. The analysis of the phenomenon, either in time or spatial aspect, provides crucial information about the spheres of societies' activity.

The aim of this research is to diagnose the actual differentiation of population's living standards applicable to small towns of Opole district in terms of particular group of factors. Small towns, as well as the other units of settlement network, have always been submitted, to persistent transformations of demographic, functional, social and spatial structures, making the resultant of transformational processes of national economy. One of the foundations is to perceive small towns as units whose pace of transformation is definitely slower against the background of other cities. The result of the discussed issue is the information and prognosis since the systematic observation of social transformations makes the predictions of the potential threats in social life more accurate.

KEY WORDS: life standard, a town.

INTRODUCTION

It has been a long time since people's life standards became a matter of scientific researches and disputes. The analysis of the phenomenon, either in time or spatial aspect, provides crucial information about the spheres of societies' activity. The interest in the issue of life standard of a population results from disproportion in towns' development regarding their location, size and function. It also generates many difficulties, mainly with reference to small towns

being of secondary investment importance. The growing disproportion between the pace of development of particular towns results in their polarisation in terms of the inhabitants' living conditions. As a consequence, this process leads to a growing feeling of alienation of a town population, higher rate of unemployment, as well as humenous pathological phenomena (violence, alcoholism, drug – addiction) and the problem of leaving young people for cities.

This research paper aims at diagnosing the current differsification of the population's life standard regarding towns of Opole district with reference to particular group of factors.

1. THE DEFINITION OF LIVING STANDARDS

In spite of the fact, the population's living standards have been the matter of disputes for quite a long time, neither terminological nor methodological formulation of this phenomenon was established. In the following publication the subject of research is the citizen's living standards understood as "...the extent of the material and non-material satisfaction of human needs in the light of existing infrsctructure that allows the citizens to satysfy them."

It is idispensible for this publication to designate the relation or interdependen- ce between the terms: living conditions, living standards and the quality of life.

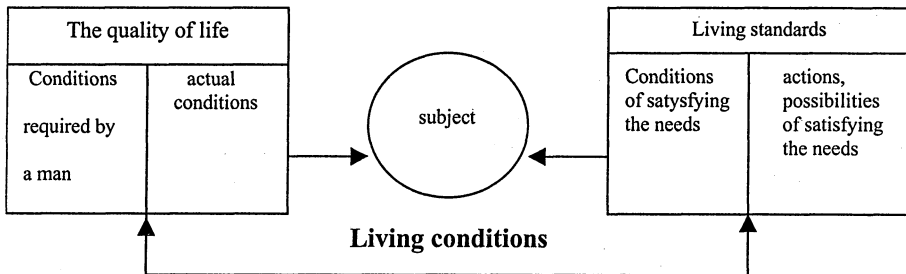


Fig. 1. The relation between living standards , thae quality of life and the living conditions of a population

Source: J. Regulski (1981)

2. THE AIM OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of this research is to diagnose the actual differentiation of popu- lation's living standards applicable to small towns of Opole district in terms

of particular group of factors (1). Small towns, as well as the other units of settlement network, have always been submitted, to persistent transformations of demographic, functional, social and spatial structures, making the resultant of transformational processes of national economy. One of the foundations is to perceive small towns as units whose pace of transformation is definitely slower against the background of other cities. The result of the discussed issue is the information and prognosis since the systematic observation of social transformations makes the predictions of the potential threats in social life more accurate.

The analysis refers to 20 municipal units (out of 34 in Opole Voivodeship), all meeting the criteria of a small town (up to 10,000 inhabitants). The choice has been determined by the intention to identify the phenomenon with reference to local areas, insufficiently examined or even left out of account in favour of regional and interregional analysis. Small towns are not frequently concerned a matter of research, even though the number of small towns dominates in Polish settlement system, and, what is more, the problems existing there are the resultant of all types of transformations in national economy.

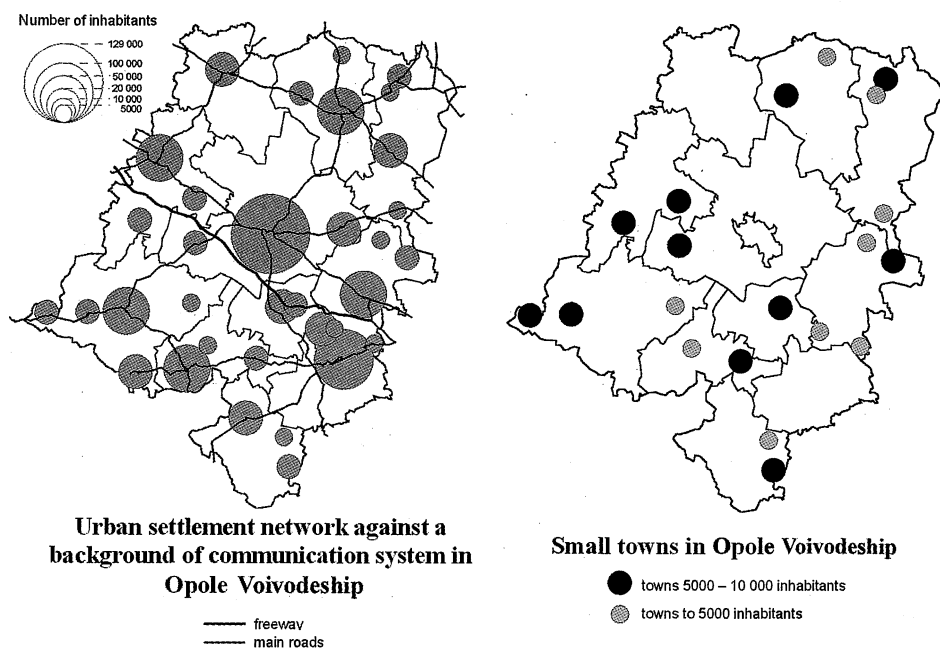


Fig. 2. Small towns of Opole Voivodeship against a background of the areat settlement system

3. THE METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

The research aims at empirical treatment of the issue. The matter of research is the living standards on the basis of the analysis of 6 categories: work market, infrastructure and living conditions, education, natural migration of the population, economic activity (each category is specified by many variables). The analysis is based on the index of social development which allows to present the measures of living standards clearly and accurately (2).

4. CHARACTERISTICS OF DIAGNOSTIC VARIABLES OF LIVING STANDARDS.

Following the GUS statistics for 2003, 6 synthetic factors were constructed, making up main, synthetic one. Particular synthetic elements were calculated on the basis of given measures and factors assuming the roles of stimulants and destimulants. The choice provides different informative value.

Table 1. The elements of living standards of the town citizens i Opole district (towns up to 10,000 inhabitants)

CATEGORY	KINDS OF FACTORS AND MEASURES	STIMULANT (S) DESTIMULANT (D)
1	2	3
I. work market	1. professional activity factor	S
	2. employment factor	S
	3. occupational encumbrance factor	D
	4. participation of the unemployed with higher education in total number of the unemployed people	D
	5. participation of the working in the services in the total number of working people	S
	6. the rate of unemployment	D
II. Infrastructure	1. living space of flats/ 1 person in m ₂	S
	2. participation of households equipped in gas in %	S
	3. the use of water in m ³	S
	4. new flats in m ₂ /1 person	S
	5. the length of water works in km/1 inhabitant	S
	6. the length of sewage system in km/1 inhabitant	S
	7. the use of energy in kWh/ 1 inhabitant	S
III. services	1. population/ 1 shop	D
	2. population/ 1 library	D
	3. population/ 1 chemist's	D
	4. population/ 1 petrol station	D
	5. population/ 1 doctor's practice	D
	6. number of TV subscribers / 1,000 inhabitants	D

THE STANDARDS OF LIVING IN SMALL TOWNS OF OPOLE PROVINCE IN THE LIGHT...

1	2	3
IV education	1. number of children/ 1 kinderkarten	D
	2. number of children in primary school/ 1 teacher	D
	3. number of children in primary school/ 1 school	D
	4. number of gymnasium students/ 1 teacher	D
	5. number of gymnasium students/ 1 school	D
	6. number of secondary school students/ 1 teacher	D
	7. number of secondary school students / 1 school	D
V. natural migration of the population	1. birth-rate / 1,000 inhabitants	S
	2. deceases/ 1,000 inhabitants	D
	3. migration balance	D
	4. births / 1,000 inhabitants	S
	5. number of marriages / 1,000 inhabitants	S
VI. economic activity	1. the community income in PLN/ 1 inhabitant	S
	2.the community expenditures in PLN/ 1 inhabitant	S
	3.investments in environment I PLN / 1 inhabitant	S
	4 bussiness units in REGON SYSTEM / 1,000 inhabit.	S
	5. private bussiness units / 1,000 inhabit.	S

In Polish conditions, the distinctive feature is the high dependency between the industrial development, urbanisation and localisation in relation to big cities, communication system and the living standards of the inhabitants. It can be assumed that in spatial aspect of a given group of cities in Opole voivodship, the conditions of life improved and worsen not at the same level. Here the thesis of this research is mainly based on the statement that *on the account of differentiation in the dynamics of the process of development and structural transformation of particular areas, the differences in spatial aspect of living conditions of small town inhabitants intensify, distinguishing towns of higher and lower living standards of their inhabitants.*

The differences in the sythetic index (Table 2, Fig. 1) reflects the outsize contrast among particular towns, differentiating the towns as better and worse in the contex of living standards. The differentiation can be discussed in various dimentions: the size of the towns (groups up to 5,000 and up to 10,000 inhab.), as well as their unctions and spatial aspect with reference to bigger cities, communication network, etc.

The data analysys (Table 2, Fig. 3) shows that towns up to 5,000 inhabitants offer better conditions of living that those of up to 10,000 inhabitants. In 7 out of 9 smaller towns demonstrate the sythetic index above the average and were placed on the list of 10 towns providing the highest living standards. It idicates that those towns made the the most of their development capabilities, i.e. their service function in relation to rural areas (Byczyna, Biała), service-industrial function or industrial-service function with allowance for agricultural operation and farm-food processing (Ujazd, Baborów) or the creation of medical-rehabilitating function (Korfantów) as well as industrial function on the basis of the Silesian Idustrial District market (Dobrodzień). The worst results belong

to Zawadzkie and Kolonowskie, being typical industrial towns, they face the crisis connected with not dynamic transformations in service-industrial centre.

Table 2. Synthetic index of living standards in towns of Opole Voivodeship (5,000–10,000 inhabitants)

TOWNS OF 5000–10000 INHABITANTS	SYNTHETIC FACTOR	POSITIVE (+) NEGATIVE (-)	FUNCTIONAL TYPE OF THE TOWN	THE POSITION IN REFERENCE TO THE LIVING STANDAI
Głogówek	0.572	+	UP	2
Praszka	0.528	+	P	5
Kietrz	0.523	+	UP	6
Niemodlin	0.469	–	UP	12
Wolczyn	0.442	–	UP	15
Otmuchów	0.467	–	PU	13
Lewin Brzeski	0.439	–	PU	16
Paczków	0.389	–	PU	17
Gogolin	0.445	–	U	14
Grodków	0.512	+	UP	8
Zawadzkie	0.369	–	P	18

TOWNS UP TO 5000 INHABITANTS	SYNTHETIC FACTOR	POSITIVE (+) NEGATIVE (-)	FUNCTIONAL TYPE OF THE TOWN	THE POSITION IN REFERENCE TO THE LIVING STANDAI
Dobrodzień	0.558	+	P	3
Gorzów Śląski	0.494	–	P	10
Leśnica	0.478	–	U	11
Kolonowskie	0.364	–	PU	19
Korfantów	0.516	+	UP	7
Baborów	0.504	+	PU	9
Biała	0.611	+	U	1
Ujazd	0.572	+	PU	2
Byczyna	0.540	+	U	4

Based on statistics.

High rates of living standards in most of the towns up to 5,000 inhabitants might be discerned in local policy which appreciated the role of agriculture and the countryside inhabitants in social and economic transformations in towns and concentrated on their service or particular industrial functions, exploiting economic activity of the inhabitants and local conditions. The function of small towns have been converted from single-function into multi-function in the time of system transformation or even developed service function which made them highly competitive for the neighbouring ones.

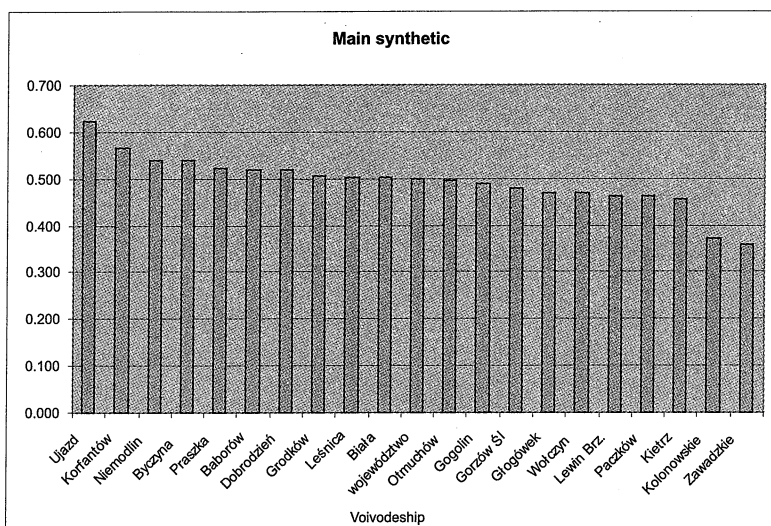


Fig. 3. The synthetic index of living standards in towns of Opole Voivodeship

Only 3 towns (up to 10,000 inhabitants) gained the synthetic index above the average which placed them on the list of 9 towns of the highest standards of living (Niemodlin, Praszka, Grodzów). The towns hold mainly service-industrial function, except for Praszka which formed particular industrial function. The remaining towns determined by their industrial and industrial-service function gained low index of standards of living in reference to towns up to 5,000 inhab. (Table 2, Fig. 3).

The low synthetic index, far from the max „1”, indicates towns' low position in the province settlement network.

The following part of the research analyses the spatial formulation of the synthetic index.

The arrangement of the index reflects the contrasts among the towns. Those ones which are located near Opole are not influenced by its positive impact in terms of the stimulation of their development (Gogolin, Lewin Brzeski, Niemodlin).

Peripheral towns, mainly of industrial-service function (Otmuchów), service (Paczków) or service-industrial function (Wołczyn, Gorzów Śl.), neither formed their character distinctly in reference to rural areas nor used the neighbourhood of other provinces, treating their location more as limits to their own development not as an advantage. The synthetic index of living standards in towns up to 5,000 inhabitants (Kolonowskie) as well as those up to 10,000 (Zawadzkie) influenced by the Upper Silesia is rather low which may indicate the economic passiveness of the population resulting from the existence of, at least, one big state undertaking. The inhabitants are provided with job in hithero place of employment and are not forced to look for any other alternative income.

It is the basic reason of the population's economic inertia which is manifested in the number of private business units registered in REGON system and, indirectly, in the community income.

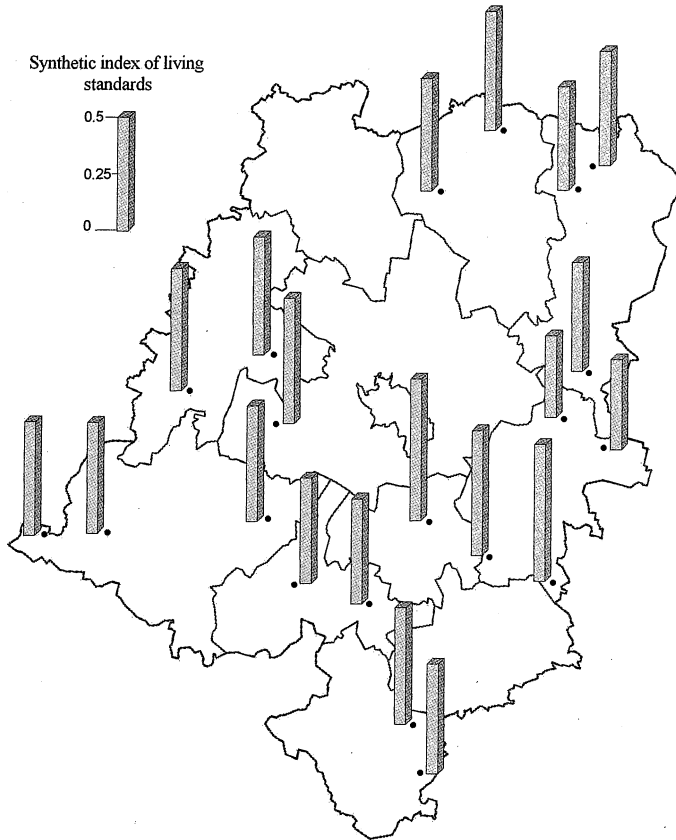


Fig. 4. Synthetic index of living standards of the town inhabitants in Opole Voivodeship

The towns in the south and in the south-east part of the province showing minus migration balance, gained low indexes of living standards which results from the insufficient social and economic activity of the population. The majority of the towns (up to 5,000 inhab.), neighbouring bigger towns (up to 10,000 inhab.) indicate higher rate of living standards than the bigger ones.

The analysis of the indexes according to particular spheres of life allowed to frame same tendencies.

The highest index for the work market was gained by Praszka, a peripheral town, affiliated to Opole province during latest administrative transformation, holding industrial function. The remaining ten towns (Biała, Grodków, Niemodlin, Korfantów, Głogówek, Lewin Brzeski) are the ones located in the central

THE STANDARDS OF LIVING IN SMALL TOWNS OF OPOLE PROVINCE IN THE LIGHT...

part of the province, having communication and cooperative connection to Opole, holding service position, or Byczyna being under influence of Praszka.

Table 3. The town ranking in the context of rates of life spheres and indexes of living standards of the population

TOWNS UP TO 10,000 INHABIT.	WORK MARKET	INFRASTRUCTURE	SERVICES	EDUCATION	MIGRATION OF THE POPULATION	ECONOMIC ACTIVITY.	LIVING STANDARDS - SYNTHETIC
Głogówek	7	11	13	7	19	18	15
Praszka	1	20	8	10	5	11	5
Kietrz	18	6	7	21	8	15	19
Niemodlin	4	12	18	18	1	4	3
Wołczyn	15	13	12	16	9	13	16
Otmuchów	17	2	10	11	11	14	12
Lewin Brzeski	8	7	15	19	20	8	17
Paczków	20	14	16	8	10	12	18
Gogolin	9	10	21	17	6	1	13
Grodków	3	8	11	15	17	6	8
Zawadzkie	19	21	17	9	18	20	21
Towns up to 5,000 inhabit.							
Dobrodzień	10	16	2	4	13	16	7
Gorzów Śląski	12	5	9	12	15	19	14
Leśnica	11	9	6	5	21	5	9
Kolonowskie	21	19	19	3	14	21	20
Korfantów	6	1	5	2	16	10	2
Baborów	13	3	14	6	12	9	6
Biała	2	18	4	14	7	17	10
Ujazd	14	15	3	1	2	2	1
Byczyna	5	17	1	13	4	7	4
province	16	4	20	20	3	3	11

In the analysis of the index for infrastructure, a particular tendency may not be distinguished. The high index for the province results from the preferences assumed in the development of Opole infrastructure in socialistic period, followed by the development of the remaining towns. The current state of infrastructure, apart from the above mentioned elements, depends on the diligence and resourcefulness of the local authorities administering limited funds and community income, being the indication of economic activity of the population.

In the services category, access to shops, medical help, petrol stations, libraries, small towns reached the highest indexes in relation to comparatively

low index for the province. 6 out of 9 towns (up to 5,000 inhabit.) gained the highest index.

The rate of education is marked by the number of schools and teachers in reference to the number of students and, simultaneously, the access to, and condition of education. According to included features, the towns up to 5,000 inhabit. have got higher index, and, what follows, better educational conditions than bigger cities, including the province.

It may seem, the biggest disproportions among the towns refer to the index of natural migration of the population and the rate of economic activity. The migration index referring to the birth-rate, deaths and births, the number of marriages per 1,000 inhabitants as well as the migration balance, the biggest is for the towns located in the south-east of province inhabited by German minority. The reduced birth-rate with simultaneously low migration balance being the result of job-seeking, migration of the young to bigger cities, decreasing number of marriages, leads to the diminishing economic activity of the population which unfavourably influences the standards of living.

FINAL CONCLUSION

Opole voivodeship, being specific in many aspects, does not provide the towns in the area in equal developmental possibilities, which transfers onto the living conditions of the towns' inhabitants.

- The spatial aspect of the standards of living in small towns of the province shows differentiation:

Between the north and the west and the south-east of the province as well as between the towns up to 5,000 inhabitants and those up to 10,000, in favour of the southern parts and the smaller towns.

- Opole, ranked in the first 10 district cities in Poland in the context of development potential (3), does not induce small towns to develop, nor the whole region.
- The agriculture is the activating factor for the small towns..
- There is a positive interrelation between the standards of living and the location of the town with reference to main communication axis of the province.
- Insufficient economic activity of the population in traditionally industrialised towns determines the low living standards of the population.
- The towns converted from monofunctional to multifunctional with dominating service function, stimulate their growth which influences their prosperity and increasing standards of living of the inhabitants.
- The process of stagnation in peripheral towns without clearly formed function, slowly continues.

NOTES

- (1) Small town is a type of a settlement which stands contemporarily between rural settlement and the city, meeting at least the basic requirements of municipal functions (after K. Dziewoński)
- (2) The assumed method consists in standarizing particular factors, where the destimulating idexes are calculated after the following model: $W = (x_{max} - x_{ij}) : R_x$; and the stimulating indexes indicating the positive aspects of the level of development after the following one: $W(x_{ij} - x_{min}) : R_x$; where: **W** – calculated index; **x_{ij}** – given factor attained by a particular town; **x_{min}**- minimal magnitude attained by a town, **x_{max}**- maxi. magnitude attained by a town, **R_x**- the interval between the min. and max. magnitude. The rates of deprivation and the level of development make the sum of the parial factors. Synthetic factor of social development can be attained by summing up the measures of deprivation and the level of social development. The magnitudes range from 0 to 1, where 1 is attained by the town which characterises the highest development and 0 by the town with the lowest level.
- (3) Surażska W., *Kontrasty w poziomie życia*, Centrum Badań Regionalnych, Warszawa, 2003 r.

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Beata Nytko-Wołoszczuk

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