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THE DYNAMICS OF POPULATION CHANGES OF SMALL TOWNS IN POLAND IN THE YEARS 1950–2002

ABSTRACT: The paper presents the dynamics of population changes in small towns in Poland. All of the 655 small towns were analysed. The special attention was drawn to the small district towns. The main aim was to show the role of the administrative function of towns for their growth in the past and to answer whether it has already appeared the important factor of growth nowadays.

KEY WORDS: small towns, districts, administrative function, population changes

The urban settlement system in Poland consists of 884 cities and towns. 3/4 of them are small settlements with less than 20 thousand inhabitants. They gather 20.5% of the whole urban population of the country. Small towns are in most provinces important elements of the settlement network as they concentrate a big part of the urban population of the given province. They play the most important role, looking that way, in the Lubuskie Voivodeship (administrative regions of the 1st order) where they make more than 83% of towns and cities and are inhabited by 40% of the urban population of that voivodeship. Their role is, however, completely different in the śląski province where they concentrate only 7.3% of the urban population in 46.5% of all cities (Table 1).

Small towns in Poland are very different not only because of the size but also for their functions (Szymańska, 2002). There are 291 towns gathering less than 5 thousand inhabitants each, among the 655 small towns. The smallest towns in Poland are not bigger than 1 thousand and agriculture is the dominating function in them. The smallest is Wyśmierzyce in the Mazowieckie Voivodeship (879 inhabitants). Over 60% of all towns in the Lubuskie, Zachodniopomorskie,

Wielkopolskie and Podlaskie Voivodeships are small towns inhabited by less than 5 thousand people. At the same time there are 85 towns with population more than 15 thousand. They are found especially in the Mazowieckie and Pomorskie Voivodeships. Some of the small towns in Poland like: Hrubieszów, Sokółka, Sierpc, Pisz, Wadowice, Trzebinia, Kęty, Krapkowice, Pułtusk, Orzesze are inhabited by even more than 19 thousand, so they are close to the limit value between small and medium sized towns. The biggest of them is Hrubieszów (19.9 thousand inhabitants), which is the service centre.

Table. 1. Small towns in Poland in 2002

VOIVODESHIPS	NUMBER OF CITIES	SMALL TOWNS		POPULATION IN TOWNS %	SMALL TOWNS INHABITED BY:					
		NUMBER	%		<5 THOUSAND		5-15 THOUSAND		>15 THOUSAND	
				TOTAL	%	TOTAL	%	TOTAL	%	
Dolnośląskie	90	69	76.7	24.3	22	32	41	59	6	9
Kujawsko-pomorskie	52	43	82.7	24.1	20	47	20	47	3	7
Lubelskie	41	28	68.3	20.2	14	50	10	36	4	14
Lubuskie	42	35	83.3	39.8	18	51	12	34	5	14
Łódzkie	42	25	59.5	11.3	11	44	10	40	4	16
Małopolskie	55	43	78.2	23.5	13	30	23	53	7	16
Mazowieckie	85	61	71.8	16.3	24	39	24	39	13	21
Opolskie	34	27	79.4	36.8	9	33	15	56	3	11
Podkarpackie	45	35	77.8	27.1	17	49	14	40	4	11
Podlaskie	36	28	77.8	23.1	17	61	8	29	3	11
Pomorskie	42	28	66.7	16.1	9	32	13	46	6	21
Śląskie	71	33	46.5	7.3	11	33	16	48	6	18
Świętokrzyskie	30	24	80.0	26.3	12	50	9	38	3	13
Warmińsko-mazurskie	49	38	77.6	33.3	16	42	16	42	6	16
Wielkopolskie	109	88	80.7	27.4	50	57	31	35	7	8
Zachodnio-pomorskie	61	50	82.0	28.0	28	56	17	34	5	10
Total	884	655	74.1	20.5	291	44	279	43	85	13

Source: author's based on: Powierzchnia i Ludność w przekroju terytorialnym w 2002 roku, Informacje i opracowania statystyczne, GUS, Warszawa.

Most of the small towns are local service and administrative centres. In January 1999 over 18% of the 655 small towns became the seat of the districts (Kwiatek-Sołtys, 2002a). Radziejów in the kujawsko-pomorski province inhabi-

ted by less than 6 thousand is the smallest of all districts towns in Poland, although according to the general guidelines of the administrative reform of 1999 such towns should not be smaller than 10 thousands inhabitants.

In the following analysis the author's aim was to show what the dynamics of population changes looks like in small district towns on the background of all small towns in Poland. Whether the period up to 1973 and again starting from 1999 when this level of administrative division was re-founded could influence the growth of the dynamics. The administrative function of towns should be the important element of their growth.

All of the 655 towns were analysed in the paper for the long period of 52 (1950–2002) years with the glance at the period 1950–1974 when a level of districts existed in Poland, 1974–1998 when the districts were abolished and the last period 1999–2002 when they came to life again. Sometimes it was impossible to compare all of the towns due to the lack of statistical data for new towns and due to the frequent changes of the area of the towns. However, there were many examples when the population number was given for the converted area of the town and for those ones all comparisons were possible. It is important to stress, however, that it is not obvious to increase the number of inhabitants according to the growth of the town's area.

Of course, during the long period of 52 years the number of inhabitants increased in most of the towns. The whole group of towns increased by 127.4%, while for district towns that was an increase of 178.8%. Some of the towns grew rapidly; this is the case of special towns which were growing on industrial base (for example: Poniatowa in the Lubelskie, Nowa Sarzyna in the Podkarpckie or Janikowo in the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship). Despite the long period, some of the small towns have been stagnating, for example, Kazimierz Dolny, Boguszów-Gorce in the neighbourhood of Wałbrzych and Lubień Kujawski. Moreover, some of the towns should be called "decreasing" ones. In this group the lowest index of population dynamics was observed in the smallest town of the Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship – Działoszyce. The number of population in all of the district towns increased what was caused by the first period till 1974.

The 24 years period between 1950 and 1974 was the time when many Polish towns and cities grew rapidly. That was the time when the city rights were given to many of the so called housing estates. Many of them grew on the base of the mentioned factories located close to the former villages or estates (Rajman, 2001). Very high rate of the population dynamics was characteristic for towns and cities in this period. The average index for all towns was 190.1 while for the district towns it was 197.2. It shows that for the centres of districts it was relatively higher. The town of Mońki in the Podlaskie Voivodeship could be an interesting example here. In 1954 the settlement became a district town before it formally received the city rights in 1965. In 1974 the population of Mońki was 5458. A fast growth was also noticed in the towns, which were rebuilt after the

World War II damage, for instance Pyrzyce, Słubice or Gołdap. In some groups of towns the number of inhabitants decreased in that period. These were the smallest towns in Poland up only to 3.7 thousand (Żelechów). The first symptoms of crisis could be seen for such towns. That was associated with the elimination of private craftsmanship and trade from the towns. The problem was widely described in the literature of the subject (*Studia geograficzne nad aktywizacją ...*, 1957). The district towns generally didn't face that problem, as the administrative function appeared strong enough to become the factor of growth.

1974–1998 is a period of the rapid growth of the centres of new provinces. These cities usurped the fastest growth for themselves rather than for other cities in their region, as they needed to create the strong position in the region very fast. Small towns were again touched by the crisis (Bagiński, 1998). Additionally, many of them lost their administrative function as district towns in those years. What's more the slowest population growth of many towns was caused by the poor condition of housing, as well. During that period the population dynamics was much more differentiated. The average index for all towns was 126.2 and it was much lower in comparison to the previous period. However, 68% of towns enlarged the number of inhabitants with the maximum of 162% (for example Praszka in the Opolskie Voivodeship). There were much more towns comparing to the previous period which lost where the number of inhabitants decreased, in most cases these were towns inhabited by less than 10 thousand people, but there were three examples of bigger towns as Pieszycy, Ząbki and Trzebinia. In the case of the last one the population loss had few reasons. Firstly, it was the bad condition of the mining industry in the town and secondly, the neighbourhood of Chrzanów caused it, as it is bigger and more developed city (Kwiatek-Sołtys, 2002b).

District towns were still in better position in that period, with the index of population dynamics of 145.9. There were no examples of decreasing the number of population among them but it could be the effect of the past administrative function, at least at the beginning of the examined period.

The unfavourable tendencies in the demographic growth of towns that have started in the 90-ties have their continuation nowadays. Towns are much more differentiated. First of all, there are more towns with decreasing of population number. The average index of population dynamics between 1999 and 2002 is 99.9 for all towns. It means that the number of inhabitants in most of the towns is stagnating. Such towns make 67.2% of all small ones in Poland. The population growth is seen in 87 towns only, with the highest increase in Borne Sulinowo. The town, which was a former Russian military garrison, has the 3.5 thousand inhabitants. Groups of dynamically growing towns can be clearly seen in the zones of the influence of Warszawa, as well as Trójmiasto and around Poznań in the Wielkopolskie Voivodeship (Fig. 1). There are many towns where the decrease of the population is significant in the years 1999-2002. They are grouped especially in the Dolnośląskie and Opolskie Voivodeships, however the lowest index of population dynamics is seen in Nałęczów in the Lubelskie Voivodeship (92.1).

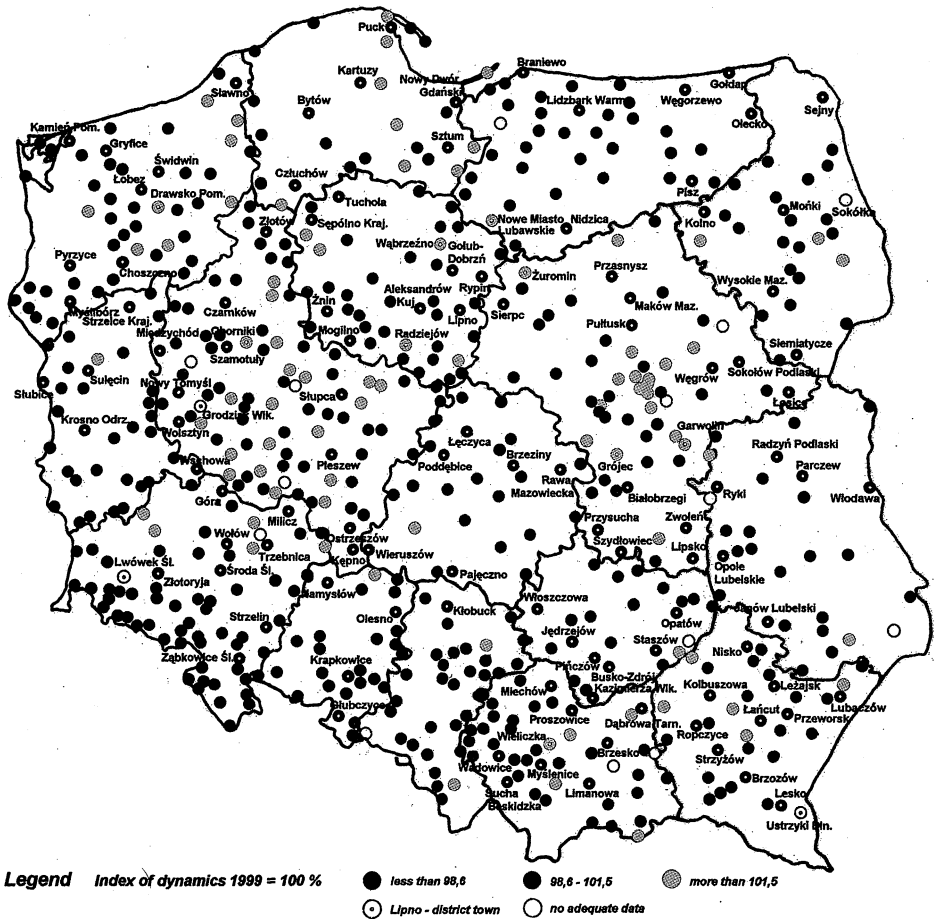


Fig. 1. Populations dynamic of small towns in 1999–2000

Small district towns do not show higher dynamics of population growth in the last period, when they have again gained the important administrative functions. Almost half of them loose population (the lowest index is registered for Proszowice in the Małopolskie Voivodeship, which is one of the smallest district town in Poland). Similarly to the situation in all of the small towns in Poland, most of district towns face the problem of stagnation. A slight increase (max. 3%) is observed in eight of them only.

The existence time districts is surely to short to draw final conclusions. The clear influence of that administrative function to the growth of Polish towns and cities can not be seen yet. Small district towns react to the present changes similarly to other small towns of the country. Reactivation of districts has not stopped the negative demographic tendencies in towns yet.

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