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Europeanisation of the cultural space of Upper Silesia

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EUROPEANISATION OF THE CULTURAL SPACE OF UPPER SILESIA

ABSTRACT. The article presents europeanisation of Upper Silesia. It covers many aspects: historical, economic, ethnic, ecological and cultural. Historical-political context results from the border character of the region formed in result of changing national, administrative and cultural dependence of the region. The strongest European impulse reached Poland together with industrialisation and capitalist economy development and later with socialist industrial development and conditions of restructuring of the traditional region. Upper Silesia, as a border region, has its ethnic conditions, which created specific regional awareness. The problem is of great, not only European but also historic meaning, but it is also a current one due to the desire to establish “small motherlands”, especially in Upper Silesia. An ecological-economic context is also important as mining and steel industries have created a specific cultural landscape with objects of industrial culture. Hence, they have become the heritage of civilisation and technological development.

KEY WORDS: europeanisation, aspects: historical, economic, technological, ecological-cultural.

INTRODUCTION

There are many sides of Upper Silesia europeanisation. It can be studied considering historical and political, economic, ethnic, ecological as well as cultural aspects.

The history of Silesia has been firmly connected with Europe. The opinion presented by Kazimierz Kutz, a famous Polish film director (1997) said: “The old, quite recent and modern history is absolutely different here, which is difficult

to understand or compare to anything. It is such because Silesia has its own history and its own, a different type of civilization development. Silesia has followed its own, different way to Europe and to Poland". Hence, he introduced a determined thesis that the history of Silesia is closer to the history of Europe than to the history of Poland. The opinion cited above draws attention to the fact, that Silesia has always been considered European, as for ages Silesia was a part of Europe not only in geographical, but also cultural aspect. Silesia was closely related to Europe in the past – both sharing its history, and building up its own individuality.

HISTORICAL-POLITICAL ASPECT

In the 10th century, Upper Silesia was in the range of political influence of Great Moravia and the Czech dynasty of Przemyślid, later Piast dynasty. Silesia was developing parallelly to the Polish state for three centuries. It became a separate principality after the district division performed by the king of Poland Bolesław Krzywousty. Incorporation of Silesia into the Czech kingdom during Middle Ages favoured its germanisation and political isolation from Poland. Hence, Silesia participated in political and cultural development of Czech, being a part of the Great Reich and finally a part of Europe (Szajnowska-Wysocka, 2003).

During the Middle Ages, Silesia was included into the European spatial system as two trade-communication routes were crossing there. The first one in east-west direction (from Kiev and the Black Sea via Cracow, Wrocław to Prague and Nürnberg, the second one in south-north direction so called "Amber Route" (from Italy via Kotlina Kłodzka (Kłodzka Valley) or the Moravian Gate towards the Baltic Sea), (Drabina, 1994).

In the 14th century Silesia was ruled by the Habsburgs. Considering the fact that the above-mentioned dynasty ruled the major part of Europe (from Portugal through central-western part of France, Germany, Austria up to Poland), Silesia was a part of a huge European empire. Then, in 1763 after 30 years and 7 years wars, Silesia was incorporated into Prussia. The ethnic problem, which was begun then after the conflict between Roman Catholics and Protestants, has remained unsolved since then and it is still present, but due to slightly different reasons, today.

Unstable frontiers of Silesia proved the border character of the region. (Fig. 1). Silesia – called by A. Szramek (1934) "a corner region" governed by different countries and administrations, was influenced by various administrative, political and economic systems. That rich region was a place where some of the neighbouring countries were competing and people from Silesia – always mixed – had their own regional awareness independent from changing governments and their varied local policies. Therefore historical-cultural space forming there

has always been especially varied and rich, a feature characteristic for border regions, where outer inspiration influences strong local tradition, but which is able to assimilate and transform it for its own needs (Karłowska-Kamzowa, 1997).

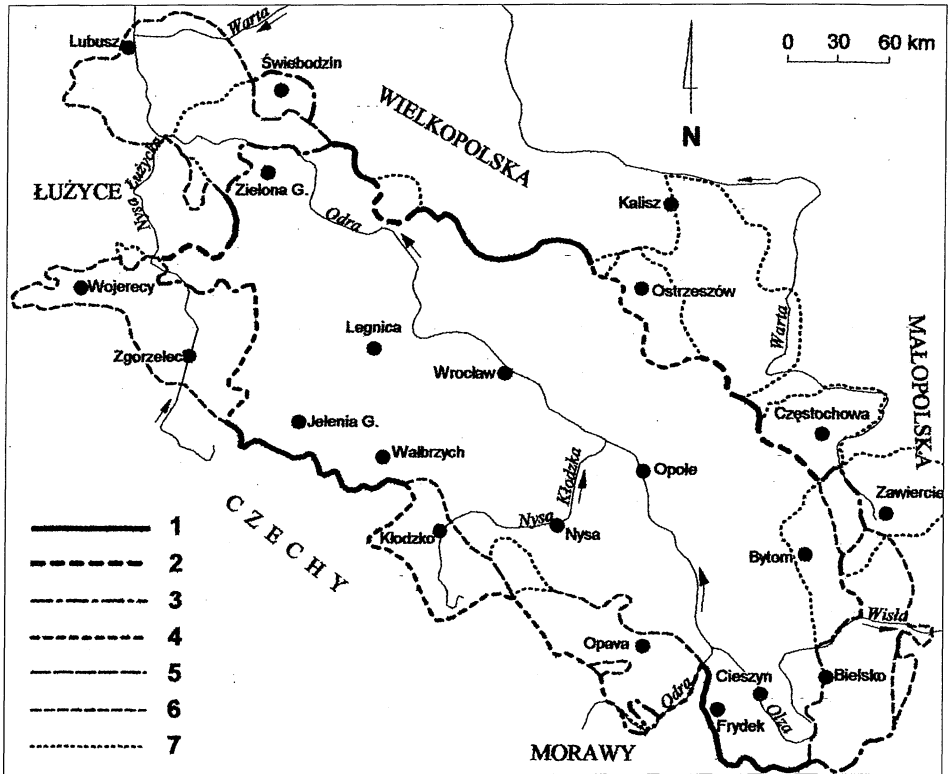


Fig. 1. Changes of Silesian borders from the 12th century till 1945

Legend: occurrence of borders in a given location during the investigated period 1. 7 times, 2. 6 times, 3. 5 times, 4. 4 times, 5. 3 times, 6. 2 times, 7. 1 time

Source: Pysiewicz-Jędrusik, R. and Pustelnik, A. and Konopiska, B. (1980).

ECONOMIC ASPECT

In the 19th century, Upper Silesia much less economically developed than other West European industrial centres was a distant peripheral region of Europe. However, it became a part of European culture and economy much faster than other Polish ethnic regions.

That specific region as a particular historical phenomenon appeared at a special moment of the civilization development. It was a result of capitalistic methods of production, development of a regional labour market and a regional

settlement system. Its capitalistic industrialization was violent, generated by several factors in the same time:

1. American revolution stopped wood import to Europe, that caused great increase of wood prices, which went seven times up, therefore wood export started to be more profitable than using it as fuel in steel production and easy accessible hard coal became a demanded fuel.
2. Military Prussia invested in development of coal mining – industry, closely connected with metallurgy.
3. Introducing coke in steel industry was continuously increasing coal production (increase by 18 times in 1806). The open labour market caused population increase in the Upper Silesia mining region, 40 thousand people immigrated there in the years of 1816-1846.

Rising and later development of industrial conurbation in the 40s of the 19th century opened a market for food products coming from neighbouring regions: Galicia, Cracow Republic, and Polish Kingdom. Upper Silesia became a dominating region. Contemporary rise of an economic importance of Upper Silesia among the Central European countries was the result of the excess of hard coal, which importance for steel industry was constantly growing (Rykiel, 1985; Szajnowska-Wysocka, 2002).

Intensification of germanisation followed industrialization and urbanization of the Upper Silesia Region. The main target of germanisation was to build a powerful management centre. Katowice obtained the town rights in 1865. Many main offices and institutions were moved to Katowice: companies managements, the post office headquarter, the district court, the Prussian Railroad management, the Rybnik coal mining management etc. Banks, newspapers and different social services institutions were also risen there.

A dwelling and trade centre grew on the northern side of the railroads and by the end of the century it spread south. Four monumental neogothic and neoroman churches were built. Development of a technical infrastructure followed expansion of the town. A gas-plant was opened in 1863, and construction of the sewage system was started 10 years later, first apartments had electricity before the end of the 19th century. Therefore, town population significantly increased from 11,000 in 1875 up to 43,000 in 1910. Before the First World War Katowice was one of the most modern towns when compared to those in the area of contemporary Poland. According to L. Szafraniec (1983) as a result of germanisation of Polish population being in majority in that area; "...a German town was created from a Polish village and it had a special task – to implant a German spirit into the Slavonic East...".

In the 19th century, Upper Silesia became a part of the European economy space developing similarly to the Ruhr Region, which it supported, but also competed with. Both Upper Silesia and the Ruhr Region had many common features, like:

1. Big amount of coking coal and limited resources of iron ores,
2. Industrial start in the 1st or the 2nd parts of the Kondratiev cycle, development in the 3rd part, followed by stagnation and recession in the 4th and the 5th parts accompanied by functional restructuring processes in the Ruhr Region,
3. Town and settlement system, despite modernization, strongly influenced by the 1st phase of industrialization,
4. Polycentric settlement structure.

On the other hand, the compared industrial regions varied significantly:

1. The amount of coal resources in both regions was different,
2. Upper Silesia was less conveniently located as far as transport was concerned. It was distant from the sea and water routes as well as the main European centres of economic activity (Jałowicki, 1998).

Convenient location of the Ruhr Region helped in its development before introduction of the railroad as water transport was used instead. The lack of alternative transport possibilities in Upper Silesia was a serious barrier restraining its development. At the late 60s of the 19th century 10 million tones of coal were mined a year in the Ruhr Region, while the same amount in Upper Silesia was reached only 20 years later in 1880, therefore industrial start of Silesia was 20 years delayed.

The structural crisis in the Ruhr Region started after the boom development at the late 50s of the 20th century. It resulted in abrupt decrease of coal and steel production. The restructuring of traditional heavy industry created new work places in chemical, car and electronic industries. However, it did not compensate reductions in traditional heavy industry labour market, therefore high unemployment and intensive emigration started at that time.

Economy in Upper Silesia was still booming in the 70s, supported by new investments, which created a vast labour market. In that time beside Donbas, Silesia was becoming the biggest coal-mining centre in Europe. There were no attempts to introduce any restructuring projects then, but traditional branches of heavy industry were strongly developed, causing continuously increasing damages to the environment. Economy of deficit and old technologies demanded larger amounts of coal and steel. In that time consumption of those products in western countries was decreasing very fast. Hence, both regional and branch industry crises were postponed for several years, which gave in consequence the recent crisis.

Political system transformation incorporating Polish economy into the global system caused faster development of the crisis, which was not the result of the country police, but had a structural character – influenced by global economy on the one hand, and on the other hand being cyclically affected by the Kondratiev cycles, which can be delayed but not ceased. Policy of artificial and expensive support of existence of the region supplying raw materials, which

took place in the socialistic economy caused serious delays in development of the Silesia Region. The share of primary branches (1st and 2nd) in its economy of 80s was equal to the level of the 50s in the Ruhr Region – where 50% of active employees already worked in services in that time (only one third in Silesia, plus a great number of miners and steel workers still employed in the heavy industry (Table 1) (Nefedova, Strelecki, Treivisz, 1992).

Table 1. Ruhr and Silesia – coal – steel regions

| FEATURES | RUHR | SILESIA |
|---|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Area in thousand of km ² | 6.0 | 5.0 |
| Part of the country (%) | 1.7* | 1.6 |
| Population (million) | 9.5 | 3.9 |
| Part of the country total population (%) | 12.2 | 10.5 |
| Date and value of the maximum coal production (million tons) | 145 (end of the 50s) | 200 (end of the 70s) |
| Date and value of the maximum steel production (millions tons) | 30 (beginning of the 70s) | 10 (end of the 70s) |
| Employed in industry per 1000 inhabitants (the 60s) | 270 | 255 |
| Employed in industry per 1000 inhabitants (the 70s) | 200 | 240 |
| Share of miners and steel workers in the total of employed in industry (%): | | |
| in 1970 | 42 | 58 |
| in 1985 | 35 | 59 |

* within the current borders

Source: Nefedova, T.G. and Strelecki, V. and Treivisz, A. 1992; Jałowicki, B. 1998.

The interregional structure despite some differences show significant similarities when comparing the regions of Silesia and Ruhr. Traditional craftsmanship and manufacturing production, being in stagnation during the industrial expansion, have started to develop dynamically. The changes have not been so much visible in the Silesia region yet, where local small and medium post-fordian businesses have only begun to appear and started to activate microregions (e.g. shoes manufacturing in Żarki and Myszków, or Christmas ornaments in Koziegłowy), also due to establishing small family enterprises tourism has been intensified in such centres as Szczyrk, Wisła and Ustroń (Zuzańska-Żyśko, 2002). The changes are much more significant in the Ruhr Region, which can be proved by the area of Münster, the place where an electronic industry has rapidly developed.

Old economically depressed mining centres are also in the state of demographic regression that has started from the Ruhr River and can be observed at present in the north and central parts of the Silesian conurbation. Many mining and steel production centres originating from different periods of the industrial development are still active in Silesia, while most of such centres have already been liquidated in the Ruhr Region. Some of the old ones have been completely reconstructed, e.g., Essen, where an important centre of mechanic industry based on high technologies and developed services has been established, and the town itself has become a centre of many important national institutions. Such a conversion has been possible thanks to entire recovery of the natural environment, the process that is hardly possible to occur in the Silesia Region in a short time.

Zones of new mining expansions connected with big power plants are in both mentioned regions. The earliest ones appeared in the northern part of the Ruhr Region and were partly reconstructed after the process of regression, why in Silesia Region they were started in the 70s when new mines were built in the southern and the western parts of the Coal Basin. At that time the steelworks "Katowice" was also built in the eastern part of the region and started to pollute the area up to Cracow. Nowadays Silesia, like the Ruhr Region before, has started to be a European centre of car industry (Tychy, Gliwice) that proves the beginning of an industrial reconstruction (Jałowicki, 1998).

Comparison of both regions shows that their economies were developing similarly to each other till 1945, and started to differ in the period of 1950-1990. During that time the Ruhr Region went through post-industrial deep restructuring and further developed in the 90s. Silesia Region for the mentioned 40 years was "developing" according to the 19th century industrial model. That caused a deep crisis at the beginning of the system transformation because the traditional region restructuring was artificially restrained, and the delay in time has increased the costs of future reconstruction (Frąckiewicz, 1994; Tkocz, 2002).

Currently at least 40-year gap separates the Ruhr Region from Silesia. The Silesia Region does not comply with European space standards. It becomes an industrial architecture museum with coal mines, steelworks, factories, waste hips, excavations, mining subsidence, workers dwelling districts, untidy and not organized technical infrastructure – landscape that can not be seen in the western part of Europe. All that is located in extremely polluted environment (soil, water, air). Therefore, it has become the most troublesome region not only in Poland but also in the whole European Community.

At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, Silesia was the economic centre of Poland; one hundred years later it lost the status of prestige and economically powerful centre. Actually, Silesia is located very far away from the centre of the new 21st century economic space, a Polish part of the Great European Development Axis of the 21st century: Paris-Berlin-Warsaw-Minsk-Moscow (Fig. 2), (Szajnowska-Wysocka, 1999).

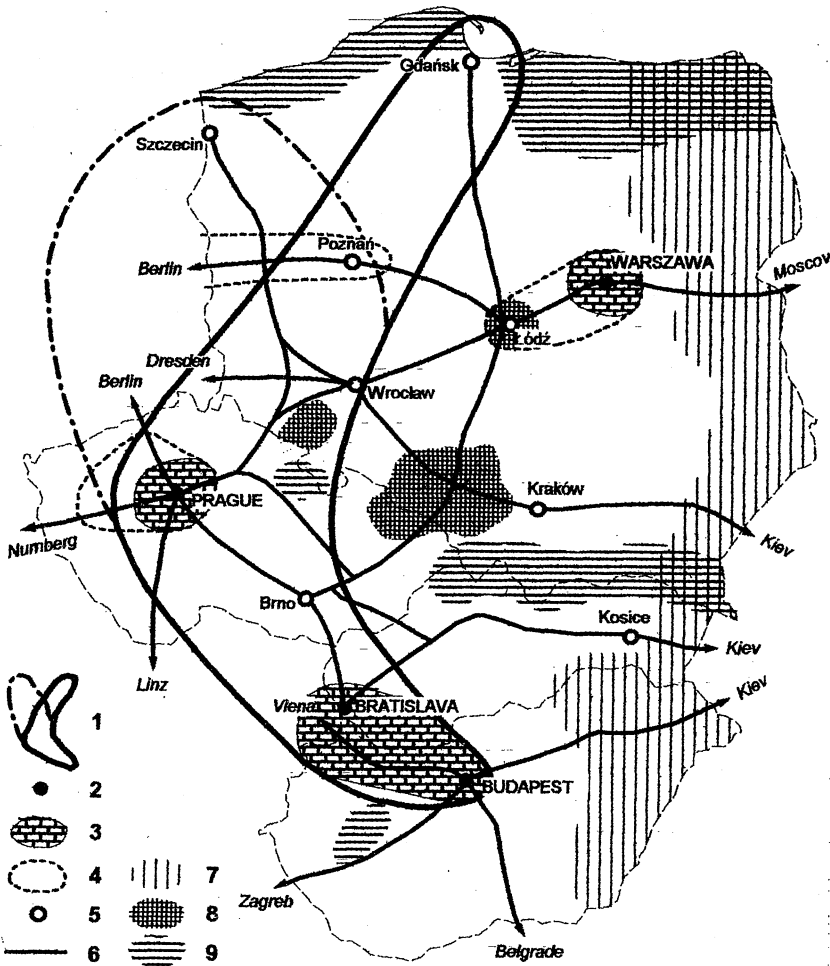


Fig. 2. Central European "boomerang", the place where transformation processes are concentrated
 Legend: 1. Current and potential Central European axis of transformation, 2. Main transformation centres, 3. The centres of especially intensive processes of transformation, 4. Potential centres of especially intensive processes of transformation, 5. Other centres of transformation processes, 6. Main motorways; existing and planned, 7. Central European "East wall", 8. Old industrial centres, 9. Regions of great touristic potential.

Source: Gorzelak, G., Jałowiecki, B., Kukliński, A., Zienkowski, L. (1995).

Unionisation of the Polish space must help to solve the problem of restructuring of a traditional region, such as Silesia. The problem is of the European range as Poland has no sufficient financial, organization and program possibilities. Restructuring of industrial regions is the most difficult task that the highly developed countries have had to face in the second part of the 20th century.

Monocultural economy, low level of human resources, negative cumulation effects cause that the change of industrial region profiles, apart from natural adjusting processes, requires very intensive public help programmes. As restructuring activities in Silesia have been forced by transformation of the political system, the task is even more difficult than in the West European countries. Also, the economic shock caused by the fact that the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) RWPG ceased to exist affected Poland much more deeply, abruptly and directly than other European countries. Apart from that, internal European economic competition is stronger and the range of possible activities of governments influencing development of regions is much more limited than in Europe 30-20 years ago. However, some West European experience can be also applied e.g., West Scotland (*Restructuring regional...*, 2003; Herbst, 2004).

According to Kukliński (Kukliński, 1997) europeanisation of the Upper Silesia cultural space – compared to the Ruhr Region and Donbas – may be a way to avoid the situation when huge financial and organisational burden accompanying restructuring of the Silesia will be a barrier to modernization of the other regions of Poland.

The regions development formed during an early industrialization stage can result in a situation that can be characterised as “trapped in a path”. The lack of complete restructuring (preserving, recreation or continuation of old economic structures, social and institutional) blocks the changes initiated by civilization progress.

In that aspect, it is interesting to analyse the situation considering local “trajectories”, not the general processes. “Path dependence” is a proper concept to explain developing processes, which, in traditional regions such as Upper Silesia, cannot be analysed by general theoretical formulae. This approach is a historical (evolutional) interpretation and draws attention to cumulation of regional features that appear currently and influence future development of the regions (Domański, 2004; Mahoney, 2000). Recognition of the “path dependence” level in regional development process has its practical dimension – allows public authorities to establish boundaries of the regional policy.

ETHNIC ASPECT

Upper Silesia is a border region, where ethnic problems occurred long time ago. Considering that aspect, the Silesia Region as a European problem was also discussed during the Peace Conference in Versailles, where a plebiscite was ordered in Upper Silesia to determine whether the territory should be part of Germany or Poland. The ethnic Polish Silesian population showed their disagreement with such decision in three Silesian Uprisings fighting for joining Silesia to Poland. Finally the area was split and only a small part of Silesia,

including Katowice, became a part of Poland. After the II World War the Silesia Region was also a European problem, and again the winning parties decided about its future.

Despite the fact that German settlers had been migrating to Silesia for few centuries, Polish speaking population had survived; 57% of inhabitants of the region declared Polish as their mother tongue in 1910 (in Opole Silesia up to 65%, (*Historia Polski...*, 1993)). Although majority of inhabitants of Silesia spoke Polish language, the population of the region was much more inclined towards regional than national awareness. Szmeja M. (1994) concluded, that national identification of Silesians could mean identification by negative connections both with the Polish and the German nation, but very strong connection with the ethnic background. Also in the 19th century a Polish ethnic movement was started, which was raising Polish national awareness. In the 1921 plebiscite, 40% of Upper Silesia citizens declared their will to belong to Poland, some of them participated in Silesian Uprisings (Wanatowicz, 1995).

Changes in functioning of the regional population brought in effect creation of the Silesian district (voivodeship). As a self-governing unit the Silesian district started to function in 1922. At that time the Silesian District, with its regional autonomy (local parliament and treasurer) covered 1.1% of the country surface 4,216 km². According to the 1931-year census 1,290,024 citizens lived in the Silesia District. That small piece of Poland gave the country 73.3% of hard coal production, 72.5% of iron production, 87.7% of zinc production and 99.7% of lead production. Over 87% of population worked in industrial, non-agricultural branches, about 55% of population were employed in mining and steel production. Peripherally situated Upper Silesia had its standards comparable only to Wielkopolska and its economy and civilization levels distinguished it from the other parts of Poland (Szczepański, 1998).

Formation of the regional autonomy resulted from three factors:

1. Significant political, cultural and ethnic individuality of the Silesia Region
2. Political and psychological activities of the Polish government to gain sympathy of Silesians and weakening attractiveness of Germany – the country also aspiring to Silesia territory
3. The role of the autonomy was to reduce separatist tendencies occurring in Katowice and Cieszyn parts of the Silesian district.

After the II World War, in the times of the Polish Peoples Republic, national awareness of Silesians was changed. They turned from the Polish population into the German minority (the Germans escaped the Red Army or they were deported during the first few years after the war). Such change was stimulated by post war repressions of Silesians and treating them as quasi – Germans, as well as lower economic level when compared to the German Federal Republic, which has been often visited since the 70s. At that time legal emigration to the GFR was also permitted and the occasion has often been taken since then. The

emigration was also stimulated by the GFR government that treated all people (and their descendants) who lived within the German borders of 1937 as Germans and offered them all possible help (Jałowiecki, 1996).

Creation of a population minority manifesting German ethnic identity and living in a closed area of the Upper and Cieszyn Silesia Region was the consequence of the process and finally resulted in formation of an ethnic region. The situation in Silesia when an ethnic region covers the relic one is unique does not occur in any other part of Poland. Kashubians – the ethnic population live in poorly historically defined area, similar situation is in case of Belorussians and Ukrainians who due to post war resettlement live in Diasporas and do not occupy a monolithic area.

Due to long lasting mixing of nations in the Silesian border region, double-nationality of inhabitants was formed, like border stones that bear a Polish sign on one side and a German one on the other. E. Szramek wrote they were not people without a character, but people with a border character (Świątkiewicz, 1993).

According to A. Kłoskowska (1997), 71.1% of population in Upper Silesia (excluding big towns) were bilingual in 1910. In 1933, being disappointed with Polish plebiscite policy only 6.3% of population declared Polish as their only language.

Old Silesians tended to Poland due to common or similar cult of saints, festivities and religious celebrations, strong connections with a local church and its parson. On the other hand – they were fascinated by a higher civilization, technical and organization level in Germany especially when compared to the situation in the regenerated Poland.

There was also a part of population of unidentified national attitude either Polish or German. Such type of a social group is not unusual in cultural border regions. For them Upper Silesia meant “Heimat” – their private home country. They supported separatist tendencies before the I World War, and they were ready to support the autonomic movements, however far away from separatist tendencies nowadays. A part of population with unstable national preferences was estimated to comprise approximately 35% in the Interwar period. Almost all members of the group voted for German lists during the commune election in 1926 (Walczak, 1997).

National autoidentification of a “border type man” is scattered and divided. The concept of a “marginal man” can be helpful when investigating the “border man” phenomenon R.E. Parka (1952). Such man belongs to several “culture worlds”; in case of Upper Silesia to: Polish, German, Czech or Moravian ones.

That type of social awareness, being called Borderland Awareness, is characteristic for Polish border regions. According to J. Chlebowczyk (1980) the following factors decided about choosing a home country: its attractiveness, advantages and disadvantages of various political and social options. There are not many very typical border inhabitants. They are mainly elderly people living

in traditional local populations of small towns and villages. They comprise special enclaves of the cultural border region.

The changing dependence of Silesia influenced formation of very complicated and difficult to define intellectual biographies of people living and working there. It is said that a unique type of a Silesian “mosaic” soul was created in that “corner” region (Szczepański, 1998).

A. Kłoskowska (1996) assumes, that such national identification can be transformed during a man’s living period and names it “national conversion”, that is a conversion of citizen loyalty. It is not expressed in a change of an individual national option, but in loyal attitude of a man towards institutions and duties assigned by particular national governments controlling the regions. In other words it is possible to feel an Upper Silesian (neither a Pole or a German) and remain a loyal German citizen and after the plebiscite and regional division a Polish one.

M. S. Szczepański (1995) defines Upper Silesia “regionalism” as a “disturbed tribalism”. The concept of ideological home country cannot be used in relation to Silesian population as far as creating symbolic universe as historical nation community development is concerned, because of many changes of that country dependence. In this case, unquestioned cases are only: a private home country, a regional home country, and local and regional communities being substitutes of an ideological home country. Autoidentification was expressed in personalized connotations to the birthplace, the place of living, work, ancestors symbolized by graveyards – but not to the nation. A Silesian remained a Silesian – a loyal citizen of the countries incorporating his/her regional and local (private) home country. The II World War was another dramatic experience, not only for Europe but also for the Silesian region population, where it brought more deportations. About 40 million people lost their “little” and “big” home countries in result of the II World War. It was equal to about 10% of Polish and 20% of German population (*Rok 1920...*, 1997).

For the second time regional tribalism was seriously damaged in the post-war years, but in the same time national homogeneity of the Republic of Poland increased and started to be more exposed. Population declaring their German nationality, living mainly in Silesia, were emigrating or leaving because of the process of joining the families. It is estimated that 1,198,222 persons emigrated to the German Federal Republic in the years of 1955 and 1989 (Szczepański, 1995).

Upper Silesia regional movement was revealed and became very active in 1991-1992 when most declarations and manifests were published. Regionalist expansion was supported by the government where part of its liberal wing tended to transform Poland, if not to a federal country, so at least to a country divided into autonomic regions. Especially favourably situation is was in the Silesia Region as the president of Silesia Voivodship was a great enthusiast of the regional autonomy. It is important to mention two minority associations being

in conflict with each other. The first one was Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Mniejszości Niemieckiej (Socio-Cultural Society of the German Minority), the second one was Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Ludności Pochodzenia Niemieckiego (Socio-Cultural Society of People of German Origin). The difference between them is that the first one distinctly determines itself as a "German Minority", while the second one states that Germans live in their own country and they are not a minority. The latter one hopes for changing the national status of Upper Silesia (Nawrocki, 1991).

The regional scenery of Upper Silesia is completed by two Silesian-Polish societies: Związek Górnośląski (Upper Silesia Association) and Ruch na Rzecz Autonomii Górnego Śląska (Silesian Autonomy Movement). The first of them gathers people connected with civilization and cultural values of Silesia Region but not necessarily having the Silesian origin. However ethnic Silesians are practically the only members of Związek Górnośląski as wide spreading xenophobic sympathies frighten potential candidates from joining the association. Ruch na Rzecz Autonomii Górnego Śląska (Silesian Autonomy Movement), plans to cover with its influence local population, regardless of their citizenship or place of residence. This society tending to autonomy of Silesia expects it to remain a region of Poland.

Związek Górnośląski (Upper Silesian Association) is the author of a concept of so called "Great Silesia", covering all historically Silesian areas, including the ones currently belonging to the Czech Republic. It was planned to be the Upper Silesia Euroregion (Szczepański, 1995) non-constitutional, territorial-administration and political-economic structure. Silesian nationalism can be understood considering discrimination policy of the Polish People's Republic directed towards local population during post II World War years. Nowadays Upper Silesia citizens do not opt for Silesia Euroregion autonomy so much, as this is not the most important problem for them.

Still 87% of Silesia population are convinced that their region is different from the others. The differentiating factors are as follows:

1. Geographical location, climate, landscape, touristic possibilities (46%),
2. Social-cultural traditions (39%),
3. Higher level of socio-economic development, compared to the other parts of Poland, personal features (36%),
4. Different economic structures (93.6%) (Dobrowolski, 1994; Jałowiecki, 1996).

Trend towards regions is emphasised by globalisation, that effects in "softening" country borders and growth of regions. The desire to identify with a "small motherland" (in historic and economic aspects) is more common among young people. The pressure towards bigger autonomy is particularly strong in Silesia as this region had already experienced it in the past. The problem of regions will become more and more visible, as national countries are too

“big” to fulfil needs of varied societies and on the other hand too “small” to solve economic problems and to cope with a geopolitical challenge.

A crisis of a country – nation is the result of historical evolution of such a form of organisation of societies. Growth of big corporations, country unions e.g.: European Community, prove that regionalism is one of the answers to a national country crisis and the way of seeking new forms of society organisation (the phenomena observed in: Spain, Italy, France, Great Britain). Therefore, even at this level Silesia becomes a European problem.

ECOLOGICAL – CULTURAL ASPECT

Mining has existed in Europe for hundreds or even thousands years. It has always been a significant factor of civilization development influencing economic development of the region and affecting other aspects of the life of societies. It was the background for diffusion of technical and technological ideas, cultural trends, life style, habits and traditions. European civilization has developed on the base of ores and coal mining that has significantly influenced economy, science and culture.

Silesia is one of the oldest and the biggest steel-mining areas in Europe. For many centuries industry has been influencing landscape transformation of this region. Everything started here from industry, but the last 200 years have left the effects which we still suffer from today. Factories, mining towns suburbs, mining excavations, specific forms of land have witnessed the changes that have affected the environment, but on the other hand they are unique objects of mining technology belonging to cultural and natural historical heritage of Poland and Europe. They make the mining regions unique, because of their historical, scientific and emotional values, but also because of values of the awareness and places.

Lots of historical objects from the industrial epoch still exist in Silesia. They certify the work of generations of miners and should be saved for future Polish and European generations. They exemplify ideas of an active man, they are the proof of a particular stage of technical and civilisation development (Konopka, 1994). Each epoch created object specific to its times; pyramids were built to show the power of a human being, Greek churches or the Middle Ages cathedrals proved the power of spirit, castles were the sign of military power. The underground labyrinths of mining excavations, buildings, miners’ housing areas and other accompanying mining infrastructure are definitely monuments of the power of economy. They claim to be “pyramids” and “cathedrals” of the industrial revolution.

Basements and underground excavations always inspired human imagination. They fascinated people by their mystery and uniqueness. Visiting the underworld

of Hades fulfils the natural need of exploration, adventure, stimulates imagination and offers unforgettable thrills. Hence, the underground world has always affected human inquisitiveness, despite an epoch, a civilisation level and a cultural zone. People have always wanted to explore those “secret places”. Such have been the beginnings of space tourism (geo-tourism), which allows people to explore, investigate, and experience the mysterious and fascinating world of old miners.

Large mining and steel plants centres have transformed into settlement-cultural ones preserving their individuality with a distinguishing cultural landscape (Lamparska-Wieland, 2003a). Hopefully such transformation will also take place in Silesia where liquidation of mines and the whole mining centres has also been accompanied by devastation of numerous Medieval objects. The necessity to save and protect industrial relicts in the Silesia region was already seen already in the thirties of last century. *The land disembowelled, its entrails torn into pieces, looks like a wealth man robbed of everything. People unaware of its value assume it is worthless and exhausted and treat it with contempt...* (Piekarczyk J., quote after Mackiewicz, 2000).

Currently, when the mining industry is in decline next parts of our cultural heritage disappear. Intensive modernisation of industry, introduction of new technologies and changes of the ownership have become a threat of irrecoverable danger. Silesia is certainly the largest agglomeration of historical, industrial objects, however, it will not last forever, as its current devastation has achieved dangerous and unparalleled dimensions. Material culture has always been a stimuli of technological and civilization development of societies, hence, such material culture heritage must be protected for future generations.

Various mineral resources, interesting geological formations, different ways of hard coal exploitation and variety of dangers in particular mining centres, as well as the methods applied to protect against them, initial treatment, linings, excavations, pits, faces and shafts, ventilation methods in different coal mines and in different time periods are only a few examples of touristic points of interest in Silesia (Lamparska-Wieland, 2003b).

Objects of underground architecture preserved from the past keep their historical, practical and aesthetic value. They are composed of natural material transformed by a man, and certify human achievements. Therefore, they have been protected for many years (Tajduś, Chmura, 2002).

Favouring atmosphere helps to protect not only architectural monuments, but also old, historic underground constructions of mining technique. The desire to protect the most precious cultural treasures has existed among many generations for a long time. The beginnings of official activities on the world heritage protection dates back to beginning of the 20th century. In 1931, the Charter of Athens was issued where basic rules concerning historical monuments protection were specified, and detailed rules concerning protection of cultural heritage, including the most valuable underground monuments were established

in following years. In 1964, the International Council on Monuments and Sites issued the Venice Charter and in 1972, during the UNESCO Conference in Paris a document concerning protection of the world cultural and natural heritage was adopted.

It should be emphasised that the first list of the world heritage of 1978 contained, among many valuable and unique underground objects, Polish Salt Mine of Wieliczka. J. Rewerski (a Pole living in France) established HADES (abbreviation containing the first letters of the words: *Historie – Architecture – Decouverte – Etude – Sanveguards*) – a scientific international society exploring and protecting underground monuments. The Polish section of HADES-POLAND prepares complex scientific and technical documentations, makes plans concerning either reclamation or protection of many historical underground objects.

In our Silesia Region, as in many other European ones, local authorities and local societies are responsible for protecting underground monumental objects. Those important local initiatives are of over-regional and even world importance. The organisation and institutions listed below are some of the examples of such activity:

1. Society of Tarnowskie Góry Lovers (Stowarzyszenie Miłośników Ziemi Tarnogórskiej) of 1957 year. (Opened a part of underground excavations in the Tarnowskie Góry Historic Mine of Silver Ore and the “Black trout” Pit),
2. Society of the Historic Mine “Ignacy” in Rybnik (museum of culture and mining tradition, of the oldest coal mine in the town which has been working there since 1792),
3. Museum of coal mining in Zabrze,
4. “Pro Futuro” Society (restoration and opening for visitors Główna Kluczowa Sztolnia Dziedziczna, re-opening of the underground museum “Quido” – the only one in Poland, and one of the very few in Europe – a historical underground complex, presenting history of coal mining at the turn of the 19th and the 20th centuries),
5. The town museum “Szttygarka” in Dąbrowa Górnicza (Training Pit – the only record of mining development in Zagłębie Dąbrowskie).

Generations of miners have formed in Silesia an underground world of unique, absolutely beautiful underground architecture elements such as altars, sculptures, reliefs, original lining supports, underground lakes and rivers. Many of those underground excavations belong to the world cultural and natural heritage, therefore, they should be protected and saved for future generations.

Unique scenery of old mining excavations and underground caverns form natural interiors where underground touristic routs, expositions of mining history, exhibitions of natural specimens, specialising exhibitions, commercial shows or casual meetings can be organised. Adapting underground objects for geotouristic needs is strictly connected with protection by keepers, as being parts of cultural landscape of our region, they are also a part of Poland and Europe.

Such high cultural rank of the Silesian underground world may suppose possibility to add them to Davies's "Golden links" presenting important historical moments when Polish history crossed European one. On the other hand the objects of the industrial epoch, as monuments of the material culture emphasise the role of the "Polish link" in a historical-cultural space of Europe (Davies, 2004).

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