

Prof. Andrzej Rączaszek (PhD)
University of Economics, Katowice
Poland

“Demographic development of cities in Poland – urbanisation
as a result of post-war industrialisation”

Summary

Poland – after over a hundred years of partitions, having regained independence in 1918 and throughout the interwar period – was an agricultural-industrial country. It was a consequence of the particular social and property structure during that time, that was rather characteristic in the 19th century. The spatial population distribution stemmed from the historical development and the earlier industrial revolution. After 1918 r, however, only in very few cases did the cities' population increase due to huge economic investments (Gdynia, Mielec, Stalowa Wola). Such transformations were triggered by the decisions of political authorities of the independent Polish state concerning economic reconstruction. Its crucial elements were the construction of great Polish marine port in Gdynia and – initiated in 1935 - the creation of the Central Industrial Region, aimed at development of strategic and defence industry. Still, until 1939 much more than 50% of Poland's population lived in the rural areas.

After the 2nd World War, the rebuilding which took place to heal the war havoc was accompanied by accelerated industrialisation. On one hand, old, post-German industrial plants were reactivated on the Regained Territories, in spite of the devastative policy of Soviet authorities, which were transporting factories' equipment out of the conquered territories. On the other hand, new industrial centres were created, mainly relying on the known as well as newly discovered natural resources (black coal, lignite, copper ores, sulphur). Political changes, which broke the historical continuity of social development that had not been disturbed even by the partitions, additionally facilitated social changes and social mobility, while the industrialisation triggered significant inner migrations. Therefore, these were favourable conditions for quick development of the cities and growth of their population. Already in the 60's (1967 – 50.2%) population distribution in Poland changed, as the percentage of citizens living in urban areas exceeded 50% and the government proudly proclaimed that the post-war, socialist Poland had become an industrial-agricultural country. This inversion of adjectives bore a symbolic significance to the authorities at that time. It resulted mainly from the government's decision to make many great industrial investments, which increased demographic development of some cities (Lodz, Cracow, the cities of the Upper Silesia Industrial Region and of Rybnik Coal Area, Legnica, Tarnobrzeg, Płock, Włocławek, Police). Therefore, a conclusion can be made that, as a result of the initiated industrialisation, Poland underwent also a quicker urbanisation. That process lasted till the end of the 80's, it was definitely politically and economically conditioned – through the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance – and was based on the cooperation of socialist European countries, under the auspices of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic. Thus – in spite of political conditions and development in the situation of limited sovereignty – that industrialisation of post-war Poland was the root cause of changes concerning Poland's population distribution. These changes, however, were particularly enabled by the conditions of centrally planned economy, which characterised the political form of that period.

The chart below presents the effects of industrialisation through the increase in urbanisation level during the period of independent Polish state after 1918, through the period

of People's Republic of Poland and development in the conditions of regained full national sovereignty in 1989 until 2008.

Chart no. 1. Urbanisation level in Poland.

no.	year	total population	cities	percentage in the
				cities
1	2	3	4	5
2	1921	26862	6608	24.6
3	1931	30019	8165	27.2
4	1939	32348	8930	27.6
5	1946	23767	7744	32.6
6	1955	27281	11875	43.5
7	1965	31496	15602	49.5
8	1975	34022	18816	55.3
9	1988	37862	23176	61.2
10	2000	38256	23691	61.9
11	2008	38116	23305	61.1

source: Statistical Yearbooks, GUS (Central Statistical Office), Warsaw.

In the period of political-economic transformation that started in 1989, such rapid changes in spatial population distribution cannot be observed. The period of great national industrial investments – mainly resource-oriented – came to an end. Only in very few cases it is still a contributing factor in the growth of city's population (Bełchatów, Płock, Lublin). There is more stress on the economic development of problem, peripheral and underdeveloped areas, through establishing Special Economic Zones. However, generally, the labour resources have shifted to the services sector and the cities are searching for other ways of attracting population. Development of administration, cultural, scientific and metropolitan functions is becoming increasingly significant (Warsaw, Cracow, Białystok). These tendencies oppose both the social behaviour and the trend to live in suburban areas, which prevails among the growing middle class, although the improving situation regarding roads and communication infrastructure allows for both these directions of agglomerations' development to co-exist. These observations are typical of countries with developed market economy, where social factors significantly affect population distribution. This process is becoming more noticeable in Poland too. In most cases, including the biggest cities, their population decreases, while the population of suburban communes ("gmina") and poviats increases. These are also consequences of the changes in natural population movement, especially of the decrease of the indices of children per family and women's fertility rate. Already mentioned economic, demographic and social transformations initially made the urbanisation index level off at around 62% and now they have even caused it to decrease slightly. Therefore, the beginning of the 21st century closed the period, during which industrialisation had a decisive impact on the urbanisation level.

The proposed study is supposed to represent the process of changes of urbanisation level in Poland during the last over 100 years, highlighting the role of the parallel industrialisation process. However, one needs to be aware that such interdependence was characteristic of the 20th century, whereas the mechanisms of spatial population distribution in the 21st century may be determined by completely different factors. It does not depict the particular situation of Poland, but the tendencies are rather characteristic of the countries with developed market economy. Poland, especially after joining the European Union, has been becoming increasingly similar to this group of countries.