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## **Urbanization in Poland: Tendencies and Transformation**

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## **Urbanization in Poland: tendencies and transformation**

### **Summary**

This paper examines urbanization in Poland after the Second World War. Particular attention is paid to urban dynamics in respect of the distribution of urban settlements, and changes in the urban population size distribution. The authors highlight the particular role of industrialization in shaping urbanization in the postwar period, and the consequences for urban economies after 1989. Urbanization has consistently lagged behind

industrialization, with significant consequences for standards of living, infrastructure provision and levels of commuting.

**Key words:** industrialization, modernization, urbanization

### **Urban system and urban population dynamics in Poland**

Urbanization in Poland after the Second World War followed an unusually dynamic course. During the last 50 years Poland has been transformed from an essentially rural to an urban country. Between 1950 and 1997, the share of urban areas has increased from 42.5 percent to 61.7 percent of total population, representing a significant qualitative change. This paper examines the urbanization process in Poland in terms of the dynamics of growth in the number of towns and the urban population.

Towns in Poland have long histories. There was a decisive process of town creation between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, so that at the end of this period there was a fully developed network of towns, and their number – 900 – was far higher than at present (Goryński, 1972). At the end of the Middle Ages, Poland was already highly urbanized, in European terms, so that the rate at which further town rights were awarded subsequently weakened. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, due to perennial wars and disasters, as well as socio-economic problems, towns began to decline. In this century, many towns experienced gradual depopulation (except for short periods of prosperity in some cases), a loss of economic functions and, consequently, secondary ruralization (Goryński, 1972).

At the time of the partition of Poland (18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> century), there were over 1,400 towns and their average size was only 800 inhabitants. Many were towns only in

name. At the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century, town rights were withdrawn from some of these settlements, but these had been partly restored by the end of the 19th century. Hence, most present-day Polish towns have medieval urban roots.

Urban population growth (126 percent) outstripped total population growth (56 percent) in Poland, 1950–98. Whereas only 10m people lived in towns in 1950, this number had increased to almost 24m in 1998, raising the urbanization index from 42.9 percent to 61.8 percent (Table 1).

Table 1. Dynamics of population change in Poland

Year	Population (millions)	population growth (1950= 100)	urban population in (millions)	urban population growth (1950= 100)	Percentage of total population in urban areas	Percentage of total population in cities > 100,000	Percentage of urban population in cities > 100,000
1950	24,824	100,0	10,5518	100%	42,5	18,2	42,83
1960	29,561	119,1	14,1703	134,3	47,9	21,6	45,14
1970	32,526	131,1	17,1400	162,4	52,7	23,8	45,20
1980	35,578	143,3	21,5153	203,9	60,1	30,5	50,46
1990	38,119	153,6	23,6554	224,2	62,1	31,1	50,07
1997	38,650	155,7	23,8164	225,7	61,7	29,9	48,52
1998	38,668	155,8	23,9311		61,8		

*Source: Authors own calculation based on the Demographic Yearbooks of the Central Statistical Office (GUS)*

In 1950 there were 748 towns in Poland, increasing to 799 in 1970, and to 858 in 1997 (in Poland, towns are settlements which have been awarded town rights by the state). In contrast, the number of small towns – with population of less than 5,000 – decreased from 409 in 1950 to only 271 in 1997. Their share of the urban population also fell during this period from 10.3 percent to 3.5 percent. The number of towns with 5,000–10,000 inhabitants remained virtually unchanged, although their share of the urban population decreased from 11.3 percent to 5.3 percent. Numbers increased in the remaining size categories (Table 2). These data have to be approached cautiously. An increase in the number of towns in a particular size category is not always related to an increase in the share of the total urban population accounted for. For example, the number of towns with 100,000–200,000 inhabitants grew from 13 to 22 in this period, but their share of the total population decreased.

The dynamics of town development are striking, both generally and in respect of town size. We have analysed the period 1950–97, when the urban population increased by 126 percent (Table 2). The population of small towns (<5,000 inhabitants) decreased during the period analysed from 1.09m to 0.83m (Table 2, Figure 1), while there was only a modest population increase in towns with 5,000–10,000 inhabitants.

Table 2. Changes in the distribution of towns and population in relation to urban size categories in Poland

		Total	less than 5000	5000-9999	10000-19999	20000-49999	50000-99999	100000-199999	200000 and more
<b>1950</b>	a	748	409	172	79	54	14	13	7
	b	10551,8	1089	1193,9	1065,9	1707,3	976,4	1839	2680,3
	c	100,0	10,3	11,3	10,1	16,2	9,3	17,4	25,4
<b>1960</b>	a	782	333	205	123	73	22	17	9
	b	14170,3	981,4	1444,4	1648,1	2298,2	1401,6	2447,1	3949,6
	c	100,0	6,9	10,2	11,6	16,2	9,9	17,3	27,9
<b>1970</b>	a	799	300	195	152	90	33	17	12
	b	17140	918,7	1396,4	2096,9	2788,6	2193,3	2534,7	5211,5
	c	100,0	5,4	8,1	12,2	16,3	12,8	14,8	30,4
<b>1980</b>	a	811	262	188	170	113	39	23	16
	b	21515,3	775	1310,9	2407,9	3520,7	2644,4	3160,6	7695,7
	c	100,0	3,6	6,1	11,2	16,4	12,3	14,7	35,8
<b>1990</b>	a	832	258	178	173	133	47	23	20
	b	23655,4	794,2	1254,2	2481,1	4090,4	3191,4	3015,8	8828,5
	c	100,0	3,4	5,3	10,5	17,3	13,5	12,7	37,3
<b>1997</b>	a	858	271	179	177	139	50	22	20
	b	23816,4	830,2	1263,7	2549,5	4259	3357,1	2858,4	8698,4
	c	100,0	3,5	5,3	10,7	17,9	14,1	12	36,5

Source: Authors calculation based on the Demographic Yearbooks of the Central Statistical Office (GUS)

Notes: a – Number of towns; b – Population (000s); c - % of urban population

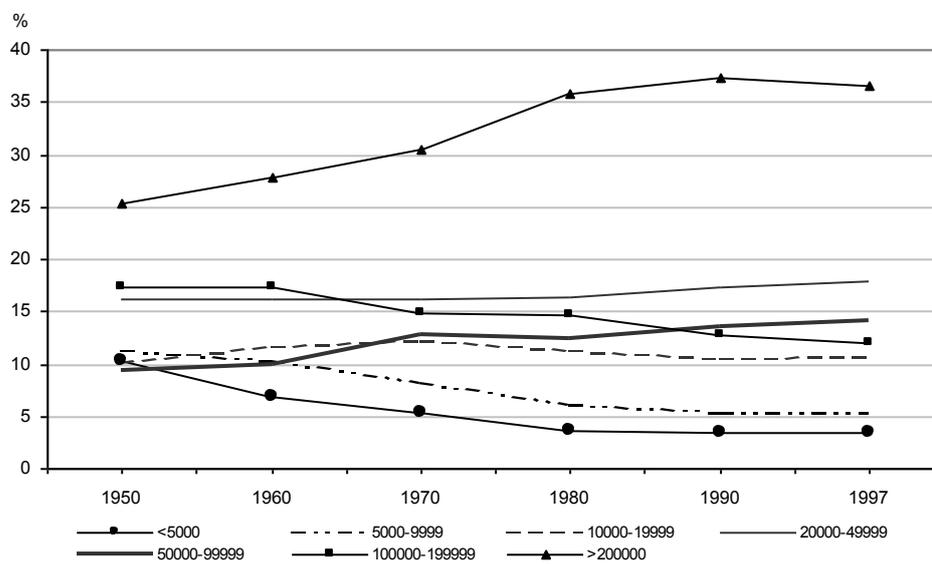


Figure 1.

In contrast, there was 139.2 percent growth in towns with 10,000–20,000 inhabitants, and a similar increase in towns with 20,000–50,000 inhabitants. The greatest dynamism was in towns with 50,000–100,000, and with 200,000 or more inhabitants: 243.8 percent and 224.5 percent, respectively (Table 3, Figure 2).

There were significant qualitative changes in urbanization in Poland in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, involving de-industrialization and tertiarization. The share of the population accounted for by large towns with 100,000–200,000 inhabitants declined. There were 19 such towns in Poland in 1950, accounting for 17.4 percent of the total urban population, while there were 22 in 1997, with only a 12 percent share (Table 2). In contrast, the share of the total population in cities with more than 200,000 inhabitants increased from 25.4 percent to 36.5 percent. In large towns, with more than 100,000 inhabitants, there was evidence of suburbanization based on urban population outflows. A number of studies have shown that this process can be observed in the majority of large towns in Poland and this entered a new phase after 1995 when, for the first time in Polish history, the rural–urban inflow lessened. This shift is connected to the general decrease in spatial mobility caused by housing problems and high unemployment levels in towns. Year on year, rural–urban flows have decreased (for example, from 146,800 in 1993 to only 118,400 in 1995), with simultaneous growth in urban–rural population outflows (from 86,900 in 1993 to 91,600 in 1995). The balance of country–town migration in 1995 was only 26,900, representing the lowest net flow since the Second World War.

Table 3. Urban population changes in Poland

		Total	<5,000	5,000-9,999	10,000-19,999	20,000-49,999	50,000-99,999	100,000-199,999	200,000 +
<b>1950</b>	a	10551,8	1089,0	1193,9	1065,9	1707,3	976,4	1839,0	2680,3
	b	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0
<b>1960</b>	a	14170,3	981,4	1444,4	1648,1	2298,2	1401,6	2447,1	3949,6
	b	134,3	90,1	121,0	154,6	134,6	143,5	133,1	147,4
<b>1970</b>	a	17140,0	918,7	1396,4	2096,9	2788,6	2193,3	2534,7	5211,5
	b	162,4	84,4	117,0	196,7	163,3	224,6	137,8	194,4
	1960= 100%	121,0	93,6	96,7	127,2	121,3	156,5	103,6	132,0
<b>1980</b>	a	21515,3	775,0	1310,9	2407,9	3520,7	2644,4	3160,6	7695,7
	b	203,9	71,2	109,8	225,9	206,2	270,8	171,9	287,1
	1970= 100%	125,5	84,4	93,9	114,8	126,3	120,6	124,7	147,7
<b>1990</b>	a	23655,4	794,2	1254,2	2481,1	4090,4	3191,4	3015,8	8828,5
	b	224,2	72,9	105,1	232,8	239,6	326,9	164,0	329,4
	1980= 100%	109,9	102,5	95,7	103,0	116,2	120,7	95,4	114,7
<b>1997</b>	a	23816,4	830,2	1263,7	2549,5	4259,0	3357,1	2858,4	8698,4
	b	225,7	76,2	105,8	239,2	249,5	343,8	155,4	324,5
	1990= 100%	100,7	104,5	100,8	102,8	104,1	105,2	94,8	98,5

Notes: a – Population (000s); b – population compared to 1950 (100%); c - population (%) over the last decade

Source: Authors calculation based on the Demographic Yearbooks of the Central Statistical Office (GUS)

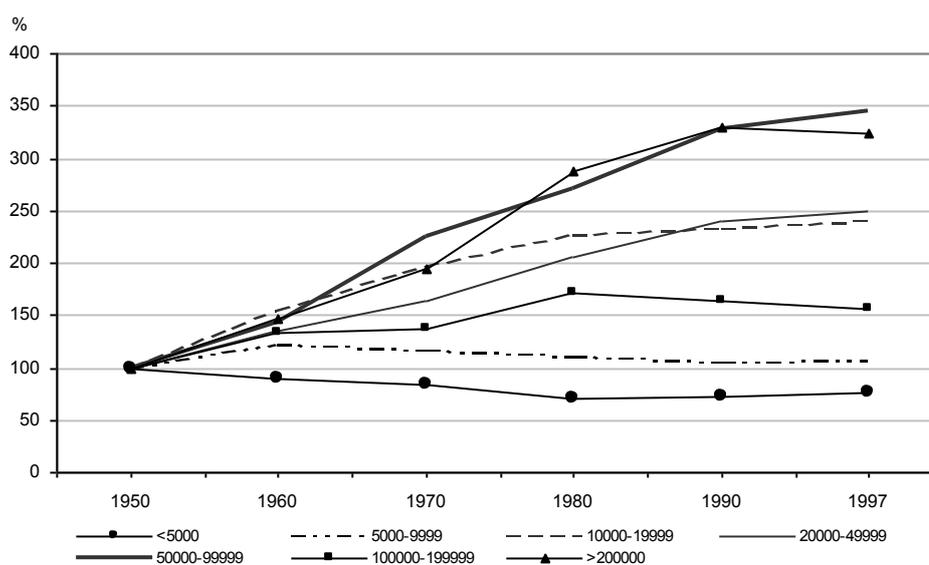


Figure 2

### Urbanization and industrialization

The postwar period in Poland was characterized by accelerated urbanization as a result of industrialization and socio-economic changes. Over the 50 years after the Second World War, Poland was transformed from a country where the majority of the population lived in rural areas to one with a distinctly urban character. Between 1950 and 1998 the share of the urban population increased from 42.5 to 61.8 percent. The rapid growth of urban population and urbanization were not, of course, an exclusively Polish phenomenon, as most countries were subject to strong urbanization after the Second World War. The specific character of Polish urbanization lies in the factors that conditioned its course, and shaped its social consequences. This poses the question of whether the processes of urban population concentration in Poland are connected to simultaneous 'in-depth', intensive transformations in the towns; that is, to vertical changes, such as modernization, the diffusion of innovation, and the spread of urban life styles. Modernization is not discussed here because it has a broad and varied meaning in different spheres. It is sufficient to mention that in the sphere of social organization, for example, S. Eisenstadt considers that the level of urbanization – that is, the extent of population concentration in large cities – is the most important modernization indicator. According to Eisenstadt, this is because of its direct connection to other significant processes of transformation (Węgleński, 1992). Especially important are the relations

between: urbanization and the increase in social scale; urbanization and social differentiation; urbanization and transformations in social and professional structures, and the growth of social and spatial mobility; and transformations in the broad socio-economic infrastructure of towns, and its modernization.

Although we cannot explore all these issues in this paper, we do draw attention to the social and professional transformations that condition, as well as being consequences of, modernization processes, and to the question of social and spatial mobility. Most research has usually identified two distinct processes. In the earlier phase of urbanization, a mass shift from employment in agriculture to industry and building (from Sector I to Sector II) is considered to be a measure of modernization. This is of course connected to strong rural–urban migration. The next phase is characterized by rapid increases in service employment (Sector III), with decline in Sectors I and II.

The growth of social and spatial mobility is one of the most characteristic features of modern communities. Urbanization processes – according to Węgleński, after Einsenstadt – are strongly connected with a distinct reduction in the importance of social ascription which, until recently, was decisive in filling privileged public positions. In urbanizing communities, education becomes the prevalent channel of social mobility. The demand for highly qualified manpower in the modern economy provides the means for upward social mobility of millions of people. Social mobility on a mass scale causes deep changes in the community structure, which relatively quickly adapts to new conditions (Ravenstein, 1889; Węgleński, 1992: 8). There are similar reasons for high levels of spatial mobility: in highly developed countries, frequent residential changes are considered to be an inherent and inseparable component of modern life styles (Węgleński, 1992: 8).

In the postwar years, the development of Polish towns strongly depended on the increase in industrial employment, which was also the basis for the creation of new towns. This dependence is of course characteristic of countries with strong industrialization, but in Poland it was the outcome of weak service-sector development. The localization of industry was an instrument for raising the economic level in a region but, at the same time, it was a condition of the development and formation of towns. Those towns with no or little industrial investment – especially small towns – developed weakly (Wróbel, 1978). Industry entirely, or almost entirely, became the basis for the existence of many towns. This was, of course, a reflection of the priority allocated to industrialization in the development strategy adopted in postwar Poland. The significance imputed to industrialization in economic politics is witnessed by the fact that, in the postwar period as a whole, industry accounted for more than 40 percent of the national investment-fund, and in some years in the 1950s this figure approached 50 percent. Therefore, as stated earlier, the specific characteristics of Polish urbanization are, first and foremost, consequences of the industrialization model. Politics ‘... was, of its kind, an accidental factor benefiting the concentration of industrial production and aiming for more uniform development of all regions’ (Dziewoński and Malisz, 1978: 33).

The investments in heavy industry were at the cost of light industry and deep neglect of technical and social infrastructure. The most painful effects of these disproportionate resource allocations are the severe housing situation, permanent market disequilibrium and underdevelopment of many institutions supplying elementary social needs. The development of very large-scale industrial plants caused, on the one hand, over-industrialization in many towns where industry was concentrated, and, on the other hand, the decline of many smaller localities devoid of such investment (Węgleński, 1992).

The assertion that industry was the main exogenous factor in postwar Poland does not mean that the reciprocal relations between urbanization and industrialization were harmonious. On the contrary, as stressed by Węgleński (1992), after Dziewoński et al. (1977), ‘On the scale of the country as a whole, the period 1950–1970 was characterised by

considerable differences in the intensification of industrialisation and urbanisation, although during the entire period both processes proceeded extremely rapidly.’ At the same time, Dziewoński et al. argue that ‘... the all-Polish index of the intensification of urbanisation related to industrialisation in fact continuously decreased and is still decreasing’ (Dziewoński et al., 1977: 269–71). This indicates the domination of industrialization over urbanization.

Similar observations can be found in many research publications. For example, B. Jałowiecki states that ‘during the entire post-war period, except for the first intensive restoration period, there was a strong discrepancy between rapid industrialization and considerably slower urbanisation’ (Jałowiecki, 1982: 11; see also Węgleński, 1992: 21). Furthermore, Regulski states that:

*... insufficiency of funds in the restoration period and, acknowledging industrialisation, investment preferences caused a reduction of funds for unproductive investment. This had a major influence on the development of towns. If we measure the degree of urbanisation by the size of the urban population and level of industrial investments, we can state that industrialisation outstripped urbanisation. (Regulski, 1980: see also Węgleński, 1992: 21)*

Such statements, as Węgleński (1992) notes, reveal that the relationship between industrialization and urbanization was reversed, compared to the prewar situation in Poland. ‘In the years 1910–1939 the percentage of urban population on the present Polish territory increased from 28.7 to 39.4, while the percentage of population employed in industry and crafts increased only from 8.1 to 8.5 percent’ (Węgleński, 1992: 22). This means that urbanization outstripped industrialization at that time, while in postwar Poland – at least until the mid-1980s – changes in settlement structure have been slower and have lagged behind industrialization (Kuciński, 1984).

In this context, Jerczyński’s research is noteworthy. Taking into account the number of workers in 1973, according to three basic sectors of the national economy (agriculture and forestry – Sector I; industry and construction – Sector II; services – Sector III), he distinguishes nine types of towns: agricultural, industrial, service, industrial-servicing, servicing-industrial, agro-industrial, industrialagricultural, agro-servicing, and no dominant type. Three town types, industrial, industrial-servicing and servicing-industrial, accounted for 67.4 percent of the towns and 93.3 percent of the total urban population (Jerczyński, 1977; Węgleński, 1992).

The types distinguished by Jerczyński (1977) are different not only in terms of the level of industrialization, but also in respect of other factors, including size. As Węgleński (1992) observes, there is an inverse relationship between the degree of industrialization and the number of the smallest towns, with populations of less than 5,000, in this typology. These small towns account for 27.2 percent of the localities with high industrialization levels, 40.1 percent of those with medium industrialization levels, and 60.4 percent of those with low industrialization levels. The proportion of towns with 10,000–20,000 inhabitants is smallest in the lowest industrialization category. There is also a notable relationship with industrialization among the largest cities. The most industrialized towns are those with 100,000–200,000 inhabitants, while towns with 200,000 or more inhabitants dominate the less industrialized towns (Table 4) (Węgleński, 1992).

Table 4. Urban size and industrialisation

	< 5,000	5,000- 10,000	10,000 - 20,000	20,000 -50,00	50,000 - 100,00 0	100,00 0- 200,00 0	200,000 +
Towns < 20,000	<b>42,3</b>	<b>30,6</b>	<b>27,1</b>				
High industrialisation	27,2	40,3	32,5				
Medium industrialisation	40,1	25,6	34,3				
Low industrialisation	60,4	25,9	13,7				
Towns 20,000- 100,000				<b>74,8</b>	<b>25,2</b>		
High industrialisation				76,1	23,9		
Medium industrialisation				65,0	35,0		
Low industrialisation				83,9	16,1		
Cities > 100,000						<b>53,8</b>	<b>46,2</b>
High industrialisation						70,8	29,2
Low industrialisation						26,7	73,3

Source: Węgleński (1992:p. 26)

Industry was undoubtedly the main development force in Polish towns in the postwar period until the mid-1980s, so that the most highly industrialized towns had the strongest development dynamics. In fact, as Węgleński notes, these relationships are more complex than appears at first sight. The relationship between high levels of industrialization and dynamic urban population growth is found only among small towns. In larger towns, with over 100,000 inhabitants, this relationship is much weaker and their development dynamics depend mainly on size rather than the degree of industrialization (Węgleński, 1992).

Changes in urban commuting between the 1960s and the 1980s should also be noted. In some towns, daily commuters (those crossing a municipal boundary for employment) constituted as much as one half of the total workforce (Szymańska, 1988), indicating that urbanization lagged behind industrialization. As a result, strong growth in industrial employment was not accompanied by similar population growth in many industrialized towns. The consequences of urbanization lagging behind industrialization were especially evident in the more industrialized towns. They differed from other towns in respect of the

unusually large number of commuters, which in turn emphasizes the dominance of productive functions over housing (Węgleński, 1992).

### Conclusions

This paper has demonstrated that industrialization was not the only factor which automatically assured rapid urban population growth, creating advantageous conditions for modernization; urban population size was also significant.

The economic organization of Poland after the Second World War was shaped by the development of industry, so that urbanization had an industrial character. However, many of these monofunctional industrial centres have declined under free-market economic conditions since 1989. Experience has shown that dependence on industry carries particular dangers in respect of employment. The reliance on industry, and undervaluation of services, reflected the traditional philosophy of political economy in Central and Eastern Europe whereby industrial development was prioritized. There were often low standards of living and of infrastructure in urban areas, with only minimal provision of facilities in domestic housing and a minimum service base. Moreover, this form of economic organization in Poland meant that towns with homogeneous industrial structures were particularly at risk from unemployment. Therefore, the majority of towns in Central and Eastern Europe – including Poland – have faced serious crises in the transition to market economies (Szymańska, 1996). For this reason, urbanization in Poland until the mid-1980s is sometimes referred to as ‘infirm’, or partial and incomplete, and its course is clearly unstable (Zagożdżon, 1983; Węgleński, 1992).

It can be noted that, in the last decade of the 20th century, urbanization in Poland has assumed a different qualitative character: the de-industrialization of towns has begun alongside the growing importance of the service sector, so that a strong tendency for the tertiarization of Polish towns can be observed.

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