Functional and Spatial Transformations of Small Towns in Malopolska - Selected Examples

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Abstract. Economic and social changes in Poland since the end of XX century had influenced significantly to the outlook and functioning of small towns. Towns of Malopolska Voivodeship in number of 61 are characterized by a significant diversity in size and level of development. Small towns which make up over 77% of the total number differ considerably both in the aspect of the ongoing demographic processes and the results of the contemporary economic transformation. The vast majority of cities in Malopolska in number 43 towns are quite small with population below 20 thousand inhabitants. The smallest towns barely exceed 2 thousand people. There are approximately 30 thousand various business operating at present in all small towns of Malopolska Voivodeship. Their number varies from area to area depending on economic and social factors as well as on the geographic location transport accessibility. Social and spatial growth of small towns is affected by the globalization and metropolisation processes. The process of current transportation of the country economic system is reflected in spatial changes of the towns in the Malopolska. Prospect of development of small towns are differently due to changes of their economic functions and influenced by the geographic position, communal and technical infrastructure. Another parallel subject of consideration are revitalization activities undertaken within local revitalization programmes which are a basis for obtaining EU assistance funds allotted for this purpose. Author presents the planned spatial activities closed in revitalization programmes for the purpose of softening the conflicts in spatial sphere, improvement of living conditions and increasing of attractiveness for investors and tourists. Centres of small towns have symbolic significance for the sense of identity of their inhabitants. These are the areas where there are religions and historic buildings as well as public spaces promoting integration of residents such as market squares. In present social-economic conditions landmark squares in small towns due to preserved values despite of various degradations should be and can be remarkable and significant element of town attractiveness. Small towns have culture related assets and a special identity which may attract numerous tourists and investors on the condition that they have formulated a precise strategy of development high-lighting the elements most powerfully expressing their identity. The ways of development of small towns in their social-economic growth is related to diverse service functions and individual functional and aesthetic programme consistent with the towns specific character and its role in the region.

1. Small towns in the Małopolskie Province settlement network – a general overview

Malopolska is a region characterised by a prominent natural landscape and cultural qualities, with an extensive settlement network, encompassing picturesque historical urban centers. It is one of the most geographically diverse regions of the country, including uplands, lowlands, foothills and mountainous
areas. Factors such as an extant medieval network of chartered towns, specific natural conditions, and the state investment policy have influenced the distribution of small towns, their size, and functions. A distinguishing feature of towns in the Małopolskie Province is the diversity of their level of development [1,2]. Most of the small towns are located in mountainous and foothill areas (29 centres), while the least were established in lowland areas (6 centres). There is a correlation between the geographical location of a centre and its function. For example, towns located in the mountains are characterised by functions related to servicing tourist traffic (Krynica, Stary Sącz), while those located in hilly areas are mainly specialised in economic activities related to agriculture (Proszowice, Słomniki). Another type of towns is situated in the metropolitan area of Kraków, which acts as a motor of their development processes (Niepołomice, Krzeszowice). Another type of towns are urban centres located in the vicinity of border crossings, which enhance their potential development opportunities (Muszyna, Piwniczna).

Over half of the towns in the Małopolskie Province date back to the period of medieval chartered towns. Between the 16th–17th centuries, 5 small towns were established, then between the 17th–19th centuries – another 6, and before the II World War, additional 2 towns were granted municipal rights. In the second half of the 20th century, 8 new towns with diverse functions were established. The population numbers of the towns in Małopolska are characterised by considerable spread. Only two cities, Kraków and Tarnów, have over 100,000 inhabitants, while Tarnów is six times smaller than Kraków. The majority, i.e. 78%, are small towns with under 20,000 inhabitants. Small centres are significantly diversified in terms of demographic processes and the effects of modern economic transformation processes. Smallest towns barely exceed 2,000 inhabitants (Świątniki Górne, Czchów, Ryglice). This notable disproportion impacts the level of their economic development, which is overshadowed by the dominant metropolitan Kraków. The influence of the metropolitan centre is significant, and it remains the fact that areas in its vicinity are particularly privileged.

Demographic changes in small towns of the Małopolskie Province show differences for towns which were until recently located in separate administrative borders. Thus, towns from the former Katowice Province are characterised by weak development dynamics. However, towns of the former Bielsko-Biała province have a good position, while the greatest population dynamics is a feature of towns of the Nowy Sącz Province.

2. Characteristics of business entities

The evolution that Poland has been undergoing in the recent decades leads to a variability of the functions of urban centres, which is most severe in small towns. Initially during the transformation process, it was evident that the number of business entities was increasing, and the related changes in the town sizes and the employment structure of their population were noticeable. The said number depends on several components such as the economic and social factors, the geographical location, transport accessibility, and area attractiveness, as well as the efficiency of the local government.

In 1988, on the eve of the social and political transformation, in all small towns of the Małopolskie Province, over 4,500 private craft enterprises were registered in total, as well as 4,000 retail and service establishments. There was a large disproportion between towns. The largest number of private manufacturing and service facilities were located in cities characterised by industrial functions, such as Kalwaria Zebrzydowska, Wolbrom, Kęty, Wadowice, and health resorts, such as Krynica Zdrój and Rabka Zdrój.

In the early 21st century, 38,500 different business entities operated in the small towns of the Małopolskie Province. The rise of their numbers was most rapid during the initial years of the transformation until 1992. After that, the growth of small and medium enterprises was much more difficult due to the saturation of local markets. The highest annual increase in the number of business
entities was reported in towns operating in the vicinity of Kraków, such as Dobczyce, Słomniki, and Proszowice.

Retail is the main activity of 40% of all business entities, and it dominates the sectorial structure. It is a distinctive phenomenon of the social and economic transformation process in Poland. The largest proportion of employees (i.e. 40%) belong to industry and specialised functions in health resorts.

Small towns play an important role in providing access to basic services for inhabitants of rural areas. District towns act as centres of public services and economy. Efficient access to these services requires a well-developed transportation network in the whole province. Therefore, factors such as good access to transportation and the development of public transport are of particular importance in the integration of regional and local centres.

The largest numbers of business entities were registered in towns with specialised functions, such as health resorts and industrial centres. The least of them exist in the smallest and newly-established towns. Having analysed the number of business entities per 1000 inhabitants, Kalwaria Zebrzydowska is far superior compared to other towns, with 222 entities per 1000 inhabitants, with an average of 100 entities per 1000 inhabitants. It is the result of the establishment of manufacturing enterprises operating in the furniture and upholstery sector [3,4].

The diversification structure of individual business entities points to the changing importance of production and services that serve the immediate needs of small towns. In the sectorial structure of business entities, retail dominates, while the next sectors are: manufacturing (12%), construction (10%), real estate services (10%), and transportation (7%). It is the approximate structure of business activities for small towns. Health resorts are an exception. Small towns in the Małopolskie Province are characterised by underdeveloped (compared to their capabilities) tourism services related to pilgrimage sites. Research from the late 1990s has shown that in the small towns of the former Kraków, Nowy Sącz, and Tarnów provinces, industry in the functional structure has undergone transformation [5].

The changes are related to the invigoration of private manufacturing activities (Skala, Proszowice, Nowy Wiśnicz), but also to the decrease of the number of large state-owned enterprises that have ceased operations or changed the form of their ownership.

Service-providing entities are usually located around the main market square and adjacent streets (Skala, Niepolomice, Piwniczna, Stary Sącz, Biec). Manufacturing and retail entities are most often situated outside the immediate town centre. Often, businesses are located along the town’s main street (Dobczyce, Proszowice, Świątniki Górne, Sucha Beskidzka, Kalwaria Zebrzydowska) which results in the creation of long dense retail and services chains. Some towns have industrial zones connected to the existing transportation infrastructure (Dobczyce, Niepolomice).

3. Towns in the immediate vicinity of the metropolis

Small towns located in an area that is directly affected by a metropolitan centre are distinguishable from other towns by a relatively higher level of socio-economic development. Several towns located in the immediate vicinity of the Kraków Metropolitan Area have a high potential for development, e.g. Niepolomice and Dobczyce, [6].

Niepolomice — a city with around 10,000 inhabitants, 25 km away from Kraków, is currently associated with dynamic development that based on its investment zone. The town’s rich history dates back to the 13th century, its historical buildings (the royal castle and the church) were built in the 14th century, and its old forest acted as prized hunting grounds of the Piasts and Jagiellons alike.

Currently, Niepolomice is one of the most dynamically developing communes in Poland. Due to its favourable location, good infrastructure, and the activities of the local government, the town has become a target of investment for over 60 large companies. In the local plans and studies, the Niepolomice Investment Zone, an area of approximately 500 hectares, was designated for manufacturing and technological purposes. It is complemented by smaller zones in Ochmanów and Wola Batorska. However, the economy of Niepolomice is not solely based on large companies. Apart
from them, there are over 200 business entities in operation, among them: shops, service establishments, banks, and small-scale manufacturing ventures, which results in the creation of many jobs. The commune owes its economic development to the presence of microenterprises, operating in the field of services, retail, and craft. The main aim of the Development Strategy of the Municipal Commune of Niepołomice is the further expansion of the Niepołomice Investment Zone, as it drives the economic growth and generates sustainable employment. Therefore, key activities are clustered around the creation of an attractive offer for new business ventures. Statistics of the Polish Central Statistics Office (GUS) have shown that Niepołomice has become an important employment centre for employees from outside the commune. Over 40% of all employees come to work in the local businesses from outside the town’s borders. Due to the development of the zone and the influx of inhabitants from Kraków, several housing investments have been planned and are under development, including single- and multi-family housing of low intensity.

The creation of the Niepołomice Investment Zone has initiated a prominent modernization process of the commune’s socio-economic structure, using the existing technical infrastructure, left over by the establishments undergoing restructuring.

Dobczyce is a town with over 6,000 inhabitants, located in the picturesque Raba River Valley, 30 km away from Kraków. Its convenient location, natural conditions, and ruins of a medieval castle, along with the relics of its fortifications and traditional historic architecture create many possibilities for development. One example of pro-investment policies of the local authorities is the “Green Dobczyce” industrial zone of 51 hectares, equipped with complete infrastructure. The zone houses business establishments which have relocated their activities from Kraków, such as Wawel S.A., ZPC Lajkonik, and a dozen or so other manufacturing plants.

One of the first activities supporting the restructuring processes towards the end of the 20th century was the plan for creating a separate prospective industrial zone in the Local Spatial Management Plan. Further actions of the local authorities were aimed at providing the zone with the best possible utilities, as well as land acquisition and reappurcelling so that the area would encourage investors to establish more ventures and expand their activities. Conditions for the fostering of entrepreneurship, and thus the creation of new jobs, were created. This strategic goal was achieved through the realisation of the Dobczyce Industrial Park Development project, which was co-financed by the European Union. Through the creation of new jobs, the industrial zone has prevented the increase of unemployment.

The town of Dobczyce also has significant development opportunities in the tourism sector, which nevertheless requires a more attractive offer in terms of available services and promotion. Restrictions applied to recreational activities at the Dobczyce reservoir pose a certain obstacle to the development of tourism. It is necessary to introduce some changes in the spatial management plans regarding the expansion of the functions of the Dobczyce reservoir, as well as the development of tourist infrastructure.

The unique landscape and natural values are the main strengths for the town’s development, while the high concentration of manufacturing plants in the industrial zone is an additional asset.

4. Spatial activities in the urban regeneration programmes

Urban regeneration, as an integrated set of actions spanning multiple years, aimed at driving the crisis recovery processes of selected urban areas, has been known in Poland since the early 1990s. Despite the strong involvement of the local authorities, there have been perceptible shortages and barriers related to the financing of urban regeneration programmes. After Poland’s accession to the European Union, financial assets have been mobilised, with the aim of the realisation of these programmes. In the situation where regeneration is conducted through multiple projects spread over time, it is necessary to link the regeneration programmes to the local spatial management plan. Among the beneficial factors is the development of diversified forms of action and their application to local needs.
The author presents the planned activities regarding the spatial management sphere, as well as the investment tasks encompassed by the urban regeneration programmes of small towns, in which issues related to urban planning and architecture merge with the socio-economic programme. These are comprehensive programmes initiated by local authorities as efforts to improve the town’s condition and overcome the crises faced by the areas at risk, as well as to revitalize the economy and enhance the town’s functions and aesthetics.

One of the Local Regeneration Programmes was the one introduced for Dobczyce for the years 2008–2015. Based on diagnoses and analyses, a regeneration area was determined, encompassing the whole town. The analyses were conducted in sub-areas into which the town was divided, in accordance with the types of investment and development possibilities, [7, 8].

The town’s area was subdivided into various functional and spatial zones characterised by common features due to the type of investment and identified spatial issues. 12 zones were designated, including the Old Town, the Town Centre, the Housing Estates, the Industrial Zone, and the Raba Valley.

The Old Town (13.6 hectares), a strict urban heritage conservation zone, aimed at the reduction of onerous functions and the introduction of functions related to museums and tourism, with construction activities restricted to the preservation of the medieval architecture. The Town Centre (87 hectares), along the historic route, where the main market square was developed, with its transformation into a general-purpose town square and exclusion from transit traffic. The Housing Estates (73 hectares) require the introduction of services related to education and culture, as well as the creation of new traffic routes and sets of services integrating the estates with the city centre. The Industrial Zone (57 hectares) requires the introduction of a protective green belt that would mitigate the nuisance resulting from increased traffic. The urban regeneration programme was also applied to a large area along the Raba River (179 hectares), with intentions to develop the area for recreational purposes and to cultivate the greenery arranged after the reclamation of these areas, [9-12].

Spatial activities presented in the regeneration programmes are examples of solutions to key problems and of the use of historical and spatial resources for the development of town services and tourism. The projects create a new spatial and functional structure, fitted with a network of new public spaces and tourist offerings, increasing the attractiveness of Dobczyce.

The town of Niepołomice also has an urban regeneration programme, and the area that requires special intervention is the town centre.

The market square space has suffered from degradation in terms of its transportation-related functions, while the square itself is currently a parking lot. The main road along the western and southern frontages of the square creates a barrier that disturbs the historical urban layout of the castle, the market square, and the church. The town centre is characterised by poor service offerings, while the existing retail and services venues are randomly distributed. The urban regeneration programme for the Niepołomice town centre incorporates activities that are aimed at organising the communication network, thus freeing the market square from vehicular traffic. It is possible to restore its representative function and revitalize its service offerings. The elimination of any collisions between the road traffic and pedestrians will result in a well-defined public space between the main urban objects: the castle square, the market square, and the church square.

5. Conclusion
The social and spatial development of small towns is affected by the globalisation and metropolisation processes, which change their internal potential. Progressing metropolisation processes influence the organisation of interdependencies in the zone of Kraków’s dominant influence. The population and economic suburbanisation processes contribute to the development or strengthening of service, production, or housing functions in some towns. This applies to towns in the suburban zone, such as Niepołomice, Dobczyce, and Świątniki Górne.
The developmental perspectives of small towns are diversified due to changes in their economic functions. There is a large variety of activation factors of small towns. The effects of economic transformation are not uniformly positive. The reduction of the number of industrial plants, privatisation, and reduction of employment have weakened the town’s role. Unemployment acts as a development barrier, as it becomes a priority to mitigate the tensions in the local labour market and not to seek new possibilities of economic activation. The economic changes have brought about the revitalisation of commercial activities, evident in the increase of the rate of inhabitants per retail outlet. However, the most durable element of the economic base turned out to be crafts rooted in local traditions.

Examples of spatial activities in urban regeneration programmes occur in various ranges of intervention, but also possess some common features. Among them are: care for public spaces, extending the scope of services, providing access to unoccupied areas for recreational purposes, and activities aimed at organising the transportation system. Urban regeneration programmes integrate activities of varying types and scales, while the regeneration processes positively influence the aesthetics of urban spaces, preservation of cultural heritage, revitalization, and economic growth.

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