

Introduction

Papers presented in this volume of *Annales Universitatis Pedagogicae Cracoviensis Studia Geographica* are all dedicated to small towns in Europe. The volume can be treated as the continuation of the deliberations and discussion presented during the session on "The place and role of small towns in complex urban systems" of the International Geographical Union Regional Conference in Kraków. The session divided into two parts took place on 20th and 21st August 2014 and met with considerable interest.

Small towns play an important role in the settlement structure of regions. In times of the globalization processes, the growth and development of world metropolises, the changing role of industry as the growth factor on one hand and the growing role of the services on the other, the development paths of the smallest urban settlement network units are differentiated. The reasons and ways for the success of many small towns and stagnation or even failure of others differ in different countries or regions but the mechanism, processes and problems seem to be similar. Identification and understanding the motives and the development paths of small towns located under different environmental, economic and even historical and political conditions became the important element of the publication.

Presented volume consists of 11 articles on demographic, social and economic development problems of small towns in Europe. Small towns of Poland, France, Germany, Hungary and Czechia are examined.

Hélène Mainet refers to sustainable polices and asks whether they can really be implemented in a small town. The author states the barriers for implementing such polices in small towns in France, emphasises the paradox between their images of sustainable places and towns where living is easy and the fact that most of them do not, and cannot, implement sustainable development policies.

The authors of the following three papers refer to the population changes in small towns emphasizing the problem of shrinkage. Gábor Pirisi, András Trócsányi and Bernadett Makkai give light to the small towns' urbanisation in Hungary. In view of shrinkage problem they ask what are the attractiveness factors of small towns in the 21st century. Manfred Kühn wonders how to overcome the disadvantages of a peripheral location and peripheralisation processes of small towns in peripheral regions of Germany. Agnieszka Kwiatek-Sołtys analyses the population changes in small towns of Poland. The author examines the population types of small towns in Webb typology and asks whether and to what extent the population changes reflect the socio-economic position of towns.

The next four papers are the valuable contribution to the studies on towns' functions. Bartosz Barosiewicz is looking for an independent tool to measure the phenomenon of economic linkages between small and medium sized towns and

their surroundings. He uses National Register of Business Entities for the delimitation of small and medium sized towns functional areas in the Łódź region. Krzysztof Wiedermann pays attention to the development of industry as the possible solution to solving the problems of labour market of small towns in Poland. Barbara Konecka-Szydłowska with Barbara Maćkiewicz study the role of the endogenous capital in the development of small towns and prove a high level of development of towns of Poznań agglomeration. Mariola Tracz analyses the condition and structure of the educational services in small towns of two provinces in Poland. The author states the barriers and opportunities of the development of educational services in small towns.

The articles written by following authors consider the role of small towns by giving the detailed case studies. Katarzyna Kulczyńska constructs models of service systems in the split towns (Słubice and Frankfurt on the Oder, Gubin and Guben, Cieszyn and Český Těšín) and notice two types of them: one geared to the service of the local population and the one geared to the transborder customer. Agnieszka Brzosko-Sermak with Monika Płaziak compare the development of border towns of Guben and Gubin, after the change of geopolitical situation, due to the EU and Schengen Area enlargement while Antonin Vaishar on the example of a small town of Kuřim examines the role of the small town in the suburban zone. The author realises that despite the growth due to the natural increase the town's future development seems unclear. According to the author the question of the sustainability of small towns in the suburban zones consists neither in coexistence with nature nor in economic and social aspects, but in their duration as an independent settlement units.

Editors and authors believe that the volume will become the fruitful contribution to the studies on small towns worldwide and hope that studied problems and methods used could be helpful for students and academics interested in studies on small towns.

Looking forward to next volumes and publications on small towns' problems.

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