

## Small towns in Lower Silesia during the pandemic – selected issues

### Stanisław Korenik

Wrocław University of Economics and Business

e-mail: [stanislaw.korenik@ue.wroc.pl](mailto:stanislaw.korenik@ue.wroc.pl)

ORCID: [0000-0002-7629-0484](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7629-0484)

### Alicja Kozak

Wrocław University of Economics and Business

e-mail: [alicja.kozak@ue.wroc.pl](mailto:alicja.kozak@ue.wroc.pl)

ORCID: [0000-0002-6025-5529](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6025-5529)

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### Abstract

**Aim:** The aim of the article is to assess and illustrate the extent of variation in the functioning of small towns in Lower Silesia in socio-economic terms, including during the pandemic period, in reference to earlier studies.

**Methods:** The article employs a descriptive method, critical analysis of the subject literature, statistical methods, and empirical inference.

**Findings:** The analyzed indicators in small towns tend to be less favorable than in the region as a whole. This does not apply to towns located within the Wrocław Functional Area or those whose functioning is based on specific endogenous resources.

**Implications and recommendations:** As a consequence, the development gap between small towns and the region's growth poles continues to widen. Actions aimed at stimulating endogenous resources in these towns are necessary.

**Originality/value:** The originality of the research lies in identifying differentiated development paths, with many small towns experiencing a development crisis despite positive regional trends. Their lack of integration with the region's socio-economic structures became particularly evident during the pandemic.

**Keywords:** small town, new economy, pandemic, region

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## 1. Introduction

The changes that accompanied the formation of the new economy have had and continue to have an impact on all areas of socio-economic life. This impact has not been harmonious, gradual or positive; on the contrary, it has often resulted in unexpected and undesired changes often of a rapid and turbulent nature. In effect, the whole economy, as well as its individual elements, began to function in a new reality. These new circumstances bring uncertainty, continuous change and the disappearance of existing tried and tested procedures and modes of action.

These changes have undoubtedly left their mark in the spatial dimension and the settlement system it consists of. There has been an observable rapid growth in the importance of modern metropolises, whose level of development is not justified by their potential and resources. Meanwhile, there has been a re-evaluation of the importance of small towns which, in losing their previous function in the settlement system and more broadly in the economy, began to lose importance.

These transformations are also visible in everyday reality in Poland. We can observe them in Lower Silesia, a region considered to be better developed and showing considerable growth in macro-economic indicators. However, not all elements of this region have clearly benefited from the ongoing changes. One of such elements are small towns which, as a significant component of the settlement system of the region, are seeking (shaping) a new place for themselves in this dynamically changing system.

This transformation was accompanied by other events that have caused significant changes in socio-economic reality. One of them was undoubtedly the pandemic of 2019-2021. The appearance of COVID-19 made it clear that – as had been observed many times in the past (e.g. during the so-called Spanish flu epidemic caused by the H1N1 virus in 1918-1920) – there are no universal, reliable solutions guaranteeing stable and continued economic growth, neither on a global scale nor at the level of individual national economies, the more so in a smaller spatial dimension, i.e. in regions and towns. As a result, the occurrence of such phenomena leads to an increased feeling of threat and a rise in uncertainty (the so-called culture of fear), which makes it necessary to develop new assumptions for the concepts of functioning in these types of conditions (examples are the concept of the risk society or chaos theory).

The aim of this article is to assess and illustrate the scale of differentiation in the functioning of small towns in Lower Silesia from a socio-economic perspective, including during the pandemic, in relation to previous studies. To achieve this aim, the article uses the descriptive method, critical analysis of the subject literature, statistical methods and empirical conclusions.

## 2. Sources of changes in the situation of towns in the 21st century

The turn of the 20th and 21st centuries was a time of significant transformations, not only in terms of general civilization, but above all in terms of economy. This is related, among other things, to the end of the industrial era, in which the basis of the functioning of the economies of highly developed countries was industry, and the shaping of the post-industrial era, known by the term 'the new economy'. These transformations are the result of dynamic growth in the ICT sector (Information & Communication Technologies). In a short time, this sector has grown to such size and importance that it has become paramount for the entire economy as well as for its individual sectors. The effects of this process, which is still ongoing, are deep changes in the economy. These are particularly visible in the services sector which in the post-industrial economy has become the leader and the dominating factor in shaping economic growth. The widespread implementation of ICT Technologies in the functioning of services has led to the emergence of new phenomena, such as supra-territorialization

and asynchronization (Korenik et al., 2020). In the case of supra-territorialization, it has involved the severing of a fundamental feature characteristic for 20th century services, that is the spatial unity of place for the provision and consumption of services. Asynchronization, meanwhile, refers to the end of the unity of time for the creation and consumption of services. Both of these principles have had a considerable impact on the spatial structure of the economy, causing even revolutionary changes in the settlement system. The possibility for services to function in such a way in time and space results from the nature of ICT, i.e. the almost breakneck pace of growth in the phenomena of dematerialization and digitalisation in the provision of such services. These transformations have considerably reinforced the process of transferring to the principles of the new economy, with this intensification being undoubtedly due to the development of the Internet, the cloud and other elements of virtual reality. These transformations within the new economy are accompanied by a dynamic increase in the mobility of capital, services and even various kinds of goods. In addition, this process is accompanied by a continual drop in transactional costs (primarily transport and communication). This is without a doubt the consequence of a rise in the openness of the new economy in the process of globalization. Despite increasing fears of *decoupling*, that is the severing of economic and trade ties on a global scale, recently experienced during the pandemic and its resulting effects – the crisis (severing) of supply chains – the end of 2024 indicates significant changes in the process of globalization, and not a move away from it. Two processes that are growing in importance with regard to the location of investments, i.e. *nearshoring* and *reshoring*, are being talked of with increasing frequency. The first relates to action in which countries move the supply chains of key goods to nearby states, both geographically and politically. Meanwhile, the second involves restoring production to the home country. This is not deglobalization, but the next stage of globalization which focuses on regional networks.

Existing considerations, although they have not exhausted the issues of the socio-economic transformations occurring in the contemporary world, do constitute a good basis for achieving the adopted aim. To sum up, the shaping of the new economy involves numerous, often abrupt changes that have a turbulent impact on all cross-sections and forms of the socio-economic system. These transformations have clearly influenced the functioning of cities in all its dimensions, i.e. economic, social, cultural, educational, and ecological. They have often taken on forms and extent that could not be absorbed by urban structures. At the same time, it should be remembered that cities are a complex but open system subject to continual change. In accordance with the assumptions of urban resilience, in cities there is a continuous process of adapting to the transformation of internal and external conditions. However, the changes caused by the shaping of the new economy, especially in its initial phase, were so turbulent and abrupt that their effects were not only difficult to predict, but also exceeded urban communities' ability to overcome them. As a result, it became necessary to develop entirely new philosophical assumptions for the functioning of cities. Cities abruptly departed from the ordered model of the industrial city towards the amorphous city, with transformations and uncontrolled changes to the previously established social balance. This metamorphosis of urban structures was accompanied by significant changes in communities, e.g. relating to education, the value system and demographic changes. As a consequence, in a very short period of time cities were exposed to many aspects of transformation processes, as a result of which considerable areas of cities became degraded, often also in the physical sense. This was due to the fact that the rapidity, scale, intensity and character of these changes exceeded the possible perceptions of both inhabitants and city authorities. This often resulted in the collapse of the economic foundations that had earlier shaped the development of the city. In the majority of cases this affected industrial activity which had often been responsible for creating cities. De-industrialization in such a short period of time led to depopulation, which resulted in destabilization and subsequently the destruction of other elements of the urban structure. The process of degradation, often referred to in the literature as shrinking of cities (Stryjakiewicz, 2014, p. 11), manifested itself in the appearance of degraded post-industrial areas, constituting a void in the urban space. Part of the urban communities were excluded from the processes of change, which led

to the layering of society. This was all compounded by changes in the structure of inhabitants' employment, with a significant increase in white-collar employees, accompanied by a drop in the number of blue-collar employees with low qualifications. Restorative action was costly and often did not achieve the desired results. Sometimes it even had pejorative effects, as claimed Solarek, who stated that "the numerous negative phenomena that have appeared in cities over the past few decades are the result of the implementation of concepts that were supposed to serve the recovery of such cities" (Solarek, 2011). For this reason, new ways of developing cities were sought, both in practice and in theory. Currently, the opinion is often expressed that after modernism there remains no meaningful concept for the urban development of cities (Kochanowski, 2006, p. 123). The modernist concept itself, referring to the industrial city, in which Peiper defined the spatial structure using the 3M rule (*Miasto, Masa, Maszyna* in Polish – city, mass, machine) had an impact on the spatial structure (Athens card) and the urban and architectural layout. At present, a concept that combines and organises various views of urban development is new urbanism. It is so wide-reaching that it often encompasses highly contrasting ideas, while at the same time, in striving to 'return' the city to its inhabitants, it raises ecological issues within the concept of so-called green urbanism.

If we look at the city from the perspective of its size (number of inhabitants), it is commonly recognised that in the course of the transformations described above, the most negative effects were experienced by small towns. In addition, inclusivity, which is becoming the dominating approach in the globalising economy, has also had a detrimental effect on towns that until recently played an important role in the organisation of the socio-economic space as local centres organising many important spheres of life in their immediate surroundings. Currently, some of the functions that these towns fulfilled for local communities disappear, while others are taken over by large, modern urban centres, often metropolises. The shaping of the information society as part of the new economy is also affecting the situation of small towns. This is connected to the fact that every individual in this society acquires skills in using ICT technologies, including communication. As a result, technology has begun to play an ever more important role in all areas of contemporary life, enabling contact and the organising of various actions and processes without the need for a physical presence. The basis for the functioning of this system is the Internet which in connecting every member of this society means in practice that they become part of a network with almost unlimited resources. The fundamental features of this society include (Nowakowska et al., 2011, p. 58):

- the skill of acquiring and using knowledge,
- ease in adapting to turbulent and changing conditions (at work and in life),
- a predisposition for acquiring an ever-greater amount of information,
- greater professional, social and spatial mobility,
- broad access to ICT devices (including broadband).

In linking these phenomena to small towns, it should be underlined that the standard exogenous functions they fulfilled in particular are beginning to overlap with the functions of metropolises (except that the quality of these functions in the latter is higher). Meanwhile, the standard endogenous functions are beginning to 'move' onto the network and are realized via the Internet. In the second case we can talk of their 'atomization', which results in them being implemented on a smaller scale, e.g. in individual settlements or villages, or even individual households. In terms of the standard exogenous functions, a 'vampirization' effect is appearing, that is the sucking in of functions by modern metropolises from other settlement units. Most authors agree that the 21st century, or at least its first half, is the century of large modern metropolises. Also, it is worth underlining that the phenomenon of metropolitization is currently treated as a new qualitative phase of urbanization, whose driving force are phenomena related to the shaping of the new economy and the rapid development of the digital economy. At the same time, small towns have been impacted by the process of de-industrialization (in large urban centres the phenomenon of re-industrialisation can be observed), which has deepened

the crisis they are enduring. The process of the flow of functions away from small towns is illustrated in Figure 1.

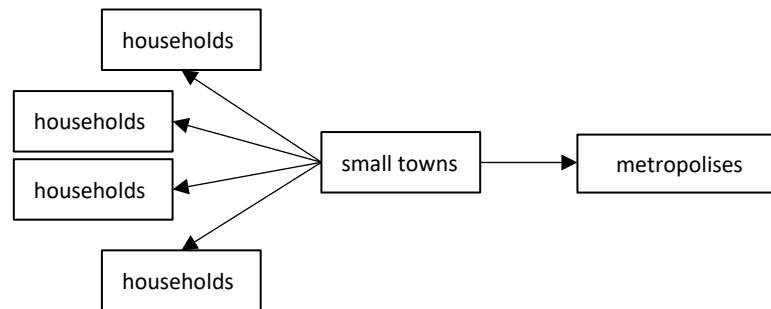


Fig. 1. Migration of the functions of small towns in the new economy

Source: own elaboration.

Obviously, Figure 1 is for the purpose of illustration only, and the process of the disappearance or the takeover of the functions of small urban centres is highly complex and depends on many factors which will be discussed more broadly using as the example small towns in Lower Silesia. For example, as emphasized in the subject literature, the socio-economic situation of such towns is significantly impacted by their location with regard to the largest urban centres (metropolises) (Szmytkie & Sikorski, 2020).

### 3. Small towns in the Lower Silesian voivodeship

In describing the spatial activity of populations, it should be underlined that one of the main sources of organizing such activity in a specific area has been the functioning of specific forms of settlement systems, that is towns. In characterizing the fundamental features of contemporary civilization, attention should be paid to the increasing phenomenon of urbanization. Today, in the era of the shaping of the digital economy, we can observe a process that, by strengthening and intensifying urbanization, results in significant changes to many areas of life. This results in the rapid spread of an urban lifestyle.

Lower Silesia as an administrative region (voivodeship) is characterized by a high level of demographic urbanization, however this tendency is clearly decreasing. In 2000, 71.5% of the total population in the voivodeship lived in cities, while in 2022 this figure was 67.5% (for Poland as a whole the figure was 61.8% in 2000, with a reduction to 59.6% in 2022). This is due to the fact that the decrease in the population living in cities over 20 years was faster, at 4% in the region in comparison to 2.2% nationally. Population density in the year 2000 was 149 people per square kilometre, while in 2022 it was already only 145 people. In Poland, this figure was 124 and 121 people per square kilometre, respectively. According to these figures, Lower Silesia still holds the third place in the country (behind Silesia and Lesser Poland).

When describing the general spatial characteristics of the voivodeship, it can be seen that it is varied in many respects, beginning with the shape of the terrain, the climate, culture, population density and the distribution of economic activity. The socio-economic situation is also diverse. Poorer economic results are noted in areas located in a band of districts in the Sudeten area, while in the north-west part of the region there is the copper ore mining and processing industry in the Legnica-Głogowski Copper Region, i.e. in Polkowice, Lubin and Głogów areas, as well as the brown coal industry in part of the Zgorzelec district. At the same time, the Wrocław metropolitan centre has also taken shape, with Wrocław and its surrounding sub-region creating a modern, rapidly developing multifunctional metropolis. This region also has a well-developed settlement system, represented by a large network of towns of varying size, an extensive network of connections between them (road and rail infrastructure), and elements accompanying settlement infrastructure. It is polycentric in nature, with the clear domination of the central settlement. Its basic flaws include considerably advanced fragmentation and the development of enclaves. Individual urban centres, especially small and medium-sized ones, are

only of local or possibly sub-regional importance, however they do not play a greater role in the region's economy. The settlement network in the region itself is very diverse both in terms of size as well as space. It is worth drawing attention to small towns (under 5000 inhabitants) of which there were 29 in 2022. They undoubtedly constitute an important element in the socio-economic space of the voivodeship, however their importance in the organising of socio-economic processes is waning. Therefore, in order to maintain their previous role, it would seem necessary to take action to diversify the development process in the voivodeship as a whole by giving it a spatial dimension and taking into account the specifics of these towns and the possibilities for activating their endogenous potential.

Table 1. Changes in population in towns in Lower Silesia over a period of 45 years (selected years)

Population	Number of towns						Population in towns (in thousands)					
	1977*	1982*	1991*	2002	2017	2022	1977*	1982*	1991*	2002	2017	2022
Below 5000	16	21	18	21	26	29	61.3	74.7	62.3	69.6	88.2	95.7
5000-10 000	29	26	29	30	28	27	194.1	107.3	193.9	203.3	188.0	198.8
10 000-20 000	19	17	17	15	18	16	199.6	233.7	236.1	211.7	245.2	221.7
20 000-50 000	9	10	13	13	12	11	381.8	330.6	397.7	379.2	343.4	304.6
50 000-100 000	4	5	4	4	4	5	278.3	367.7	312.3	298.4	278.8	353.5
100 000-200 000	1	1	2	2	2	1	129.8	135.7	246.2	236.6	213.9	101.9
Above 200 000	1	1	1	1	1	1	592.5	627.1	643.2	639.2	638.6	674
Total	79	81	84	86	91	92	1 837.4	1 876.8	2 091.7	2 038.0	1996.4	1950.5

\*Without Góra, Syców and Twardogóra districts.

Source: own elaboration on the basis of Central Statistical Office data (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, b.d.).

It should be underlined that the number of small towns has increased, as has the proportion of the population of these towns in the total inhabitants of towns in comparison to 1991. In that year, the figure was slightly below 3%, while in 2022 it was almost 5%. At the same time, outside Wrocław, we observe a considerable decrease in the population in towns above 50 000 inhabitants.

To assess the economic situation of small towns in relation to the region's average (it was assumed that a small town is up to 10 000 inhabitants), a simplified economic indicator was adopted, which included:

- number of employed persons per 1000 inhabitants,
- number of economic entities per 1000 inhabitants,
- commune budgetary income *per capita*.

In the next step, these figures were standardized and then given uniform weighting, which enabled the calculation of a synthetic indicator illustrating the average situation of small towns in the region. The calculations concerned only those towns which had the appropriate population in 2017 and had town status in 2002, and for which the data were available. A similar indicator was then calculated for the entire voivodeship, and its value was taken as 100% (reference). Analysis was conducted for 2002 and 2017 (15-years difference). It turned out that in 2002, the calculations showed that the average small town in the region had an indicator level of 82.1%, which means that its economic situation was worse than the regional average. Meanwhile, in 2017 this value had risen to 85.4% of the regional average, which indicates a slight improvement in the situation of the small towns studied, although it was still lower than the regional average. It should also be noted that individual small towns obtained varying indicator values, both lower and higher. Among them were towns whose indicator was considerably higher. The detailed calculations are presented in another article (Korenik, 2019), however here, due to the adopted aim, a table summary is presented for 2 years illustrating the position of the studied towns in terms of indicator value (see Table 2). The towns were divided into three groups: the first group were towns that obtained an indicator value higher than the average for the voivodeship economy, the second group included towns with an indicator higher than the average for the studied towns, but lower than the regional average, the third group included towns with an indicator lower than the average for the studied towns. As a result, group 1 obtained an indicator value higher than the regional value, which suggests that their socio-economic situation is better than the

average for the region. Group 2 included towns with an indicator worse than the regional average, but better than the average small town in the region. Meanwhile, group 3 included towns with an indicator lower than the average for small towns.

Table 2. Summary of towns according to indicator value for the years 2002 and 2017

Group	2002	2017
1 (indicator above regional average)	Duszniki Zdrój Karpacz, Kąty Wrocławskie Polanica Zdrój, Siechnica Szczawno Zdrój Szklarska Poręba Środa Śląska	Duszniki Zdrój Karpacz, Kąty Wrocławskie Piechowice, Polanica Zdrój Siechnica, Szczawno Zdrój Szklarska Poręba Środa Śląska Świeradów Zdrój, Żarów
2 (indicator between the regional average and the average for small towns)	Prochowice, Piechowice Sobótka, Świeradów Zdrój Twardogóra, Żarów	Nowogrodziec, Oborniki Śląskie Prochowice, Sobótka Twardogóra
3 (indicator below the average for small towns)	Bardo, Bierutów, Bolków, Chocianów Głuszyca, Gryfów Śląski Jaworzyna Śląska, Łądek Zdrój Leśna, Lubawka Lubomierz, Lwówek Śląski Mieroszów, Międzybórz Międzylesie, Mirsk Niemcza, Nowogrodziec Oborniki Śląskie, Pieńsk Piława Górna, Prusice Przemków, Radków Świerzawa, Wąsosz Węglińiec, Wiązów Wleń, Wojcieszów Zawidów, Ziębice Złoty Stok, Żmigród	Bardo, Bierutów Bolków, Chocianów Głuszyca, Gryfów Śląski Jaworzyna Śląska, Łądek Zdrój Leśna, Lubawka Lubomierz, Lwówek Śląski Mieroszów, Międzybórz Międzylesie, Mirsk Niemcza, Pieńsk Piława Górna, Prusice Przemków, Radków Świerzawa, Wąsosz Węglińiec, Wiązów Wleń, Wojcieszów Zawidów, Ziębice Złoty Stok, Żmigród

Source: own elaboration.

When analysing the above summary, it should be underlined that the vast majority of small towns are characterized by a worse indicator than the average for this type of settlement (32 towns), while a total of 37 towns among the 48 analysed were placed below the regional average. In 2017, only 11 of the studied centres achieved an indicator above the average for Lower Silesia (some of them, for example Karpacz, double this value – up to 243%). Looking at these towns more closely, we can see that they are characterized by unique functions, primarily as spa and tourist destinations (Duszniki-Zdrój, Karpacz, Polanica-Zdrój, Szczawno-Zdrój, Szklarska Poręba), or are located close to Wrocław, practically being part of the metropolitan area (Kąty Wrocławskie, Siechnica, Środa Śląska). Meanwhile, Piechowice, located on the route from Jelenia Góra to Szklarska Poręba, connects a large town with a recreational town, creating a combined urbanized system. Additionally, Piechowice itself is becoming a tourist destination. Other places worth noting are Żarów and Nowogrodziec, which have made progress in the summary. Their situation is particularly important as the Wałbrzych SEZ is located in Żarów, while in Nowogrodziec there is an economic zone. These examples show that a well-planned regional policy brings positive socio-economic effects. The general conclusion, however, is not positive – during the 15 years analysed, the position of individual towns has remained practically unchanged. It should be underlined that without an active regional policy, both at the voivodeship level as well as at the national and EU level, directed towards stimulating the endogenous potential and resources of small towns, we cannot expect their rapid development. On the contrary, these towns will suffer depopulation, lose their previous function, and remain on the peripheries of the intensively developing Lower Silesia region.

#### 4. The situation of small towns in Lower Silesia during the pandemic (selected examples)

As correctly noted by Łaźniewska (2022), the COVID-19 pandemic caused by the SARS-Cov-2 virus became a negative phenomenon that not only revealed previously existing spatial inequalities, but also deepened existing disproportions. However, the effects of the crisis varied depending on the size of a spatial unit (town) and its location. According to research by Swianiewicz and Łukomska (2020), COVID-19 had the greatest impact on large towns (towns with district rights), as well as spatial units located in large urbanized areas (agglomerations or metropolises). Towns above 20 000 inhabitants were also negatively impacted by the pandemic, however small communes were only affected mildly by the phenomenon. While it is true that the authors examined the financial side of local government units, it should be remembered that finances always reflect the shaping of real processes in the economy.

When analysing the situation of small towns in Lower Silesia, we can try to assess whether their situation changed significantly during the pandemic. Employing a previously adopted methodology, selected small towns in the region were subject to research for the period 2019-2021 (as shown in Table 3). Towns from the last group (group 3) were selected for the research, however data was not available for all of them. It should also be noted that the majority are towns with fewer than 5000 inhabitants.

Table 3. Synthetic indicator for selected small towns in the region during the pandemic

Town	Indicator (%) in year		
	2019	2020	2021
Bardo	58.50	94.80	64.00
Bierutów	42.00	53.10	46.00
Bolków	39.00	70.80	51.00
Głuszycza	41.00	56.60	52.00
Gryfów Śląski	44.00	47.68	42.00
Jaworzyna Śląska	53.60	85.60	67.00
Leśna	38.00	47.02	44.00
Lubawka	37.60	50.11	43.00
Lubomierz	32.20	42.36	47.00
Lwówek Śląski	49.00	57.79	53.00
Mieroszów	60.00	107.10	81.00
Międzybórz	51.60	62.00	48.00
Międzylesie	37.00	45.30	45.00
Mirsk	38.00	75.30	38.00
Niemcza	50.00	75.90	51.00
Pieńsk	48.00	56.10	45.00
Piława Górna	43.00	68.30	41.00
Prusice	50.00	79.20	66.00
Radków	63.00	84.30	68.00
Świerzawa	42.00	48.20	46.20
Wąsosz	47.00	60.10	55.00
Węglińiec	50.00	69.90	55.00
Wiązów	50.00	59.60	49.00
Wleń	38.00	68.10	42.00
Wojcieszów	52.00	42.30	51.90
Zawidów	50.00	67.70	50.00
Ziębice	46.00	58.30	49.00
Złoty Stok	42.00	77.80	48.00
Żmigród	53.00	62.00	60.20

Source: own elaboration.



When analysing the summary from Table 3, it should be underlined that the majority of the studied towns were characterized by an abrupt rise in 2020 in relation to the regional average (with the exception of Gryfów Śląski and Świerzawa), while in Mieroszów the indicator even exceeded the regional average. In 2021, some cities continued to see growth compared to 2019, albeit at a lower rate, and in some cases a return to initial values can be seen. These results confirm earlier findings that small towns, previously characterized by a low level of development, were less affected by the pandemic. The increase in the indicator should be explained not by an abrupt improvement in their situation, but a sudden drop in the level of development across the whole region. In the majority of cases, the studied units have very limited exogenous functions, and their endogenous functions are often of a basic nature, and thus even during a general worsening in the socio-economic situation, still had to be carried out. Paradoxically, this peripheralization and a certain isolation (autarchy) protected the studied units from the effects of the crisis. Nevertheless, it is worth considering whether the situation of these units will not worsen in the future. For this reason, the authors plan to conduct further research on these locations in the coming years, expanding the analyses to include other variables, e.g. demographic ones.

## 5. Conclusions

Summing up the above considerations, it should be underlined that small towns in the Lower Silesia region show less positive indicators than the entire voivodeship. This principle does not apply to towns located close to the large, modern urban centre of Wrocław. In practice, these towns constitute part of the forming metropolitan area, benefit from its development, and participate to an increasing degree in socio-economic phenomena created by this system.

The second group of small towns with higher indicators than the regional average are characterized by specific unique functions based on endogenous rare resources. These are tourist towns, often referred to as spa towns. The functions of these towns were shaped in the 19th century and developed throughout the 20th century. These resources and the reliance on exogenous functions stabilizes their socioeconomic situation and creates the foundations for their further functioning and development.

The third group of towns with positive indicators are those which have benefited from the location of economic zones and the initiation of economic activity by external investors. The third group of towns with positive indicators are those which have benefited from the location of economic zones and the initiation of economic activity by external investors. As the results show, this form of interventionism has turned out to be effective in these towns. Regarding improvements in the situation of the remaining small towns in the region, efforts should be made to ensure the provision of various types of services in their area, and – what is particularly important in Lower Silesia – to increase the accessibility of transportation, particularly to the metropolitan area (Chądryńska & Iwaszko, 2012, pp. 39, 40).

Another issue is the impact of the pandemic on the analysed indicators in small towns. The research covered the most numerous group of small towns, group 3. According to the calculations, most of the studied units noted a sudden increase in the indicator in 2020. This phenomenon, also confirmed by other authors, indicates that it is not the situation of these towns that has improved, but that the region, which was used for comparative purposes, has experienced a considerable deterioration of the socio-economic situation. Of course, this type of research should be continued and supported by additional observations.

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## Małe miasta Dolnego Śląska w okresie pandemii – wybrane zagadnienia

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### Streszczenie

**Cel:** Celami artykułu są ocena i zobrazowanie skali zróżnicowania funkcjonowania małych miast na Dolnym Śląsku w przekroju społeczno-ekonomicznym, w tym w okresie pandemii, w odniesieniu do wcześniejszych badań.

**Metody:** W artykule wykorzystano metodę opisową, krytyczną analizę literatury przedmiotu, metody statystyczne oraz wnioskowanie empiryczne.

**Wyniki:** Analizowane wskaźniki w małych miastach kształtują się mniej korzystnie niż w skali całego regionu. Nie dotyczy to miast zlokalizowanych w granicach Wrocławskiego Obszaru Funkcjonalnego oraz tych, które opierają swoje funkcjonowanie na specyficznych zasobach endogenicznych.

**Implikacje i rekomendacje:** Konsekwencją jest narastający dystans w poziomie rozwoju małych miast w stosunku do biegunów wzrostu regionu. Konieczne są działania nakierowane na pobudzanie endogenicznych zasobów w tych miastach.

**Oryginalność/wartość:** Oryginalność badań polega na wskazaniu zróżnicowania ścieżek rozwoju, gdzie znaczna liczba z nich przeżywa kryzys rozwoju mimo pozytywnych tendencji w skali całego rozwoju. Brak ich powiązania ze strukturami społeczno-gospodarczymi regionu uwidocznił się w trakcie pandemii.

**Słowa kluczowe:** małe miasto, nowa gospodarka, pandemia, region

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