

Katowice Conurbation / Upper Silesian industrial District, Poland

Context

The Katowice conurbation (GOP) is the biggest urban region in Poland. There are 29 cities and towns in three zones: core (16), inner and outer (13). The Region has 1777 km² and 2.4 million inhabitants. The capital of the metropolitan region is Katowice. Some other great cities are: Sosnowiec, Gliwice, Bytom, and Zabrze. The Katowice conurbation has the second term: Upper Silesian Industrial District (Gornoslaski Okreg Przemyslowy - GOP). It is reference to economic genesis of GOP – the region has its roots in coal mining and industries: fuel and power-supply, metallurgy, machinery and metals or chemicals.

The last 15-20 years is the time of a distinct decrease of population in GOP. The Process is simple a consequence of troubles in the local economy and social changes in the 1990's.

Population

In Katowice Region live 2.4 million inhabitants, however if we take into consideration the emigration over the last three years it can be 10 % less. The Katowice conurbation is an exemple of short-term population decrease. The level of changes inside the region is different. There has been a marked fall in population especially inside core-zone. Clear examples are the cities of Sosnowiec and Bytom.

Year	Population	
	Sosnowiec	Bytom
1955	124,400	180,700
1970	145,000	182,600
1980	246,000	234,300
1990	259,400	231,200
1995	247,500	226,800
2001	239,800	200,200
2006	226,000	188,200

Source: *Statistical Yearbook of Poland* (1970, 1990, 2002, 2006) and Jelonek A., 1958, *Geographical Documentation*.

Explanations of the population decrease phenomena concentrate on the following:

- (1) Decline of local economic base,
- (2) Lowest-low birth rates,
- (3) Job-related migration of thousands of people to Western Europe.

Economy

The economy of the Katowice conurbation has been based on traditional branches of industry: coal mining, metallurgy or metal and heavy engineering. The privatization and liquidation of state-owned enterprises in the Katowice Region clearly have brought a general fall in their number in the 1990's. For example in Sosnowiec works only one coal-mine with about 1600 workers. In 1985 there were 5 coal-mines with 4000-5000 miners employed in each of them.

The main problem of the decade 1993-2003 was the very high unemployment. There were towns in Katowice conurbation with 25-30 % unemployment rate and more. At present [2007, August] it is 5 -15 % on average (10 -12 % in Poland according to different sources).

The political and economic changes in Poland determined new important process in employment structure of big industrial cities. Two decades ago the majority of cities (especially in the region Katowice) had a structure type of industrial or industrial-service. The contemporary type is shifted to services.

Consequences

The Katowice conurbation (GOP) is a classical example of a region where population shrinkage is clearly dependent on economic factors typically for post-socialist societies and as well as post-industrial areas. This situation translates into real estate market and building sector. Industrial buildings concentrate on brownfield and greenfield enterprises where we observe spectacular functional changes. The majority of them there are in cities of Gliwice, Sosnowiec or Tychy. The industrial landscape of central-western part of region is rather traditional.

A weak level of suburbanization led to limited development of residential building. More expansive is apartments and blocks. In comparison with the twice smaller Krakow or Wroclaw agglomerations the number of new flats is on a very low level. There are some towns as Piekary Slaskie or Swietochlowice where developers have built less than 10 small blocks since 1989/1990.

Political and planning responses

In the time of transformation the Katowice region shapes different paths of development. There are as well very creative cities leading by a clever investment policy and towns strongly delayed as well. The attempt of adjustment in development of all cities is the idea of one semi-administrative unit integrating all cities of conurbation. The first stage of this idea is the Upper Silesian Metropolitan Union (Gornoslaski Zwiazek Metropolitalny – GZM) which has formed in September 2007. The second stage will be so-called „Agglomeration Silesia”. The policy of this Union focuses on problems of regional marketing, transport, housing and infrastructure coordination, local tourism and others.