

Chapter I

THE OUTER METROPOLITAN ZONES

1. The outer metropolitan zone – definition, basic characteristics

The distinguishing feature of metropolises (cities of appropriate size with zones directly connected to them) and metropolitan areas refers to their functions, which are often understood as a synonym of all urban functions shaping outer areas of cities. These are region-forming functions which link the centre (central city) with its hinterland. However, assuming that a metropolis (and its metropolitan area) functions mainly thanks to its outer contacts and actions (other metropolises, international and supra-regional activity), metropolitan functions cover a much greater number of and more convoluted types of links. The metropolitan area is a functional unit formed by a large, complex and functionally coherent conurbation, an important characteristic of which is the occurrence of metropolitan functions, as well as of functional connections [Markowski *Funkcje...*].

The definition of metropolitan area in terms of space it is a matter of convention, although its extent cannot be equated with the suburban zone. A *metropolitan area* is a settlement system of urban traits (monocentric or polycentric), composed of many structures of urban and rural nature, characterised by a high degree of urbanisation.

A metropolitan area includes the zone of a significant scope of daily influence (workplaces, places of residence) and terrains of possible development opportunities in which metropolisation processes are taking place and in which there is a sufficient accumulation of (substitutionary) businesses complementing metropolitan functions of the central site (location of metropolitan functions). A considerable internal functional integration with strong functional relationships, as well as a well-developed transport and communications networks, are also significant.

The emergence of a metropolitan area is a consequence of the development of metropolitan functions which cause multidirectional migration of population and relocation of business activity, in particular the one requiring large useful floor space, to the outskirts of central areas of urban agglomerations. It results in new forms of connections both between those areas and centres of metropolises. Small urban centres of the outer metropolitan zone are often the place in which the above mentioned transforma-

tions occur. Numerous scopes of influence are variable and dynamic. A metropolitan area is a collection of settlements of vague and dynamic borders, the line of which is mainly of conventional and informational nature.

While defining *metropolitan area*, it is usually explicitly assumed that it is a zone in which it is possible to identify spatial effects of the impact of its proper metropolitan functions and local consequences resulting from international influence of other metropolises [Marszał 2005, pp. 200-211]. In the case of the majority of Polish centres of metropolitan nature, consequences are not yet that important, except for the fact that in each of them there is a chain of shopping and service centres (hypermarkets, shopping malls) of global commercial companies.

According to Marszał and Markowski [2006], it is possible to assume that a *metropolis* is a system with a defined critical mass, which makes it possible to maintain a sustainable competitive advantage or allows for its spontaneous reconstruction on an international level. Demand factors, *i.e.* the competition in these systems, are of secondary importance (creation and absorption of innovations). A metropolis is, above all, a system causing the occurrence of activity, creative and able to autonomously generate demand.

Metropolitan area is also defined as the territory (space) of a large city or interdependent large cities (metropolitan area centre) and functional surroundings linked with it or with them (the outer zone of the metropolitan area), determined in accordance with the basic territorial division of the country into communes [low-level administrative units; in Polish – *gmina*], constituting a settlement complex inhabited by at least 500 thousand people, directly connected with a foreign transport, communications and service networks [Markowski 2007]. Functional link between the communes forming the outer zone with the centre of the metropolitan area is a link within the framework of which in the outer metropolitan zone there are metropolitan functions of the highest level, in particular political, administrative, economic, social and cultural functions, which complement metropolitan functions of the central area. The definitions of the metropolitan area clearly separate the centre from the outer area. Trafas and Ziobrowski indicate the occurrence of conflict situations within metropolitan areas. They cumulate in the outer metropolitan zone and constitute its characteristic feature. The outer zone is functionally connected with the centre of the system by an urbanised area with a high degree of social, economic and spatial conflicts [Trafas *Badania...*].

2. Small towns and rural areas in the outer metropolitan zone

As far as the spatial and socio-cultural structure of European countries is concerned, small towns and their rural hinterland constitute an important element of the landscape, economy and social life. If after the entrance of Poland into the European structures the ways of management and directions of socio-economic links between

rural areas are subject to change, it impacts also the development conditions of small towns. Little urban centres functioning in metropolitan areas, in which economic, social and cultural changes take place in an extraordinarily dynamic way, are in particular situation in terms of development [Knox, Meyer 2011, pp. 142-158].

Small towns² and their rural hinterland are home to a significant part of European countries' population, especially in regions in which agriculture still plays an important role. The original role of small towns in the settlement system came down to the function of local support of surrounding rural areas, while a large part of their inhabitants earned their living from agriculture.

As far as the development of small towns is concerned, the functional type of the rural hinterland is of key importance. From this perspective, it is possible to distinguish three main types of rural surroundings of towns:

- agricultural (of dominant agricultural function and agricultural services);
- tourism-oriented (of a significant share of tourist function in the local economy);
- urbanised, often also industrialised, within the scope of influence of a large urban agglomeration (of dominant non-agricultural functions and a high level of urbanisation of villages).

Due to the industrialisation of the 19th and the 20th century, in the scope of influence of large urban centres and their emerging agglomerations, rural areas entered into the phase of an impetuous urbanisation, suburbanisation and semi-urbanisation, which resulted in their profound functional transformation [Heffner 2000, pp. 103-118; Heffner 2000a, pp. 44-59].

Small towns located in spheres of strong influence of urban agglomerations are also subject to significant changes in municipal functions, which result mainly in an increasing role of the residential function related with the fact that the majority of their residents capable of work have been absorbed by outer labour markets – in large urban and industrial centres.

Analogous transformations constitute a characteristic feature of the rural hinterland of small towns. They change current patterns of service and strengthen shifts of at least a part of central functions to main urban centres. In urbanised areas, towns and their rural surroundings resemble more and more the outlying residential areas located within urban agglomerations. However, most of them maintain – primarily due to the existing morphological systems of local malls – basic service functions [Heffner, Marszał 2006, pp. 7-20].

Socio-economic processes, which were taking place in the second half of the 20th century throughout Europe, significantly changed an external conditions for the development of small towns, also in Poland. Spheres of economic connections and of the influence of all large urban areas, in particular of metropolitan ones, expanded. Service functions of extended range (specialist and basic), locating in mass in their

² In most studies, small towns are urban settlements with a population not higher than 20 thousand inhabitants within the administrative borders of a given town. See [Heffner 2005, p. 11-34].

outer zones, caused another change of the conditions for the development of small towns. Local centres, located within the scope of links with the central labour market and regional market, have been gradually transferring their remaining service functions (often only basic ones) to new shopping and service centres located on the outskirts of urban agglomerations [van Heur 2010, pp. 189-192].

In this context, it is important to search for both factors which maintain the development of towns, mainly in urbanised areas, and the formation of the concept relating to their functioning as urban structures ensuring high standard and level of life of their residents and of the population from neighbouring rural areas³.

There is considerable evidence to indicate that small local centres located on the outskirts of agglomerations usually go through the process of transformation of municipal functions, which takes place under the influence of both central areas (cities of agglomerations) and in numerous new centres emerging in the outer areas (shopping and service centres). Moreover, in the case of small local centres, traditional central functions (local shopping and service centres for neighbouring rural areas and mining districts) are transformed into monofunctional structures, in particular related to the rapid development of the residential function (in small towns as well as in their rural surroundings). In small towns located in the contact area with the remaining part of the region narrowly specialised services of basic character as well as the recreational and tourist functions can often be observed.

In the case of small local centres (small towns, rural communes), functional changes lead to spatial transformations which necessitate new forms of local development management, including utilities provision. At least some of relationships between the functioning of the local economy and economic behaviours of inhabitants in the zones of links between towns are not known to local politicians and activists engaged in their economic and social development. Economic behaviours of residents of cities and their rural surroundings are also recognised in a very superficial way [Heffner 2009, pp. 59-74].

³ It is a particularly important issue for a dozen or so (15) small towns located in nearly entirely urbanised the outer area of the Upper Silesian agglomeration. The western part of this area is dominated by rural areas undergoing progressing suburbanisation, northern and eastern part are nearly entirely urbanised, especially in contact areas with large municipal centres (Bytom, Katowice, Sosnowiec, Dąbrowa Górnicza). While in the northern part, rural areas with highly advanced urbanisation are mixed with rural areas undergoing semi-urbanisation. Structural transformations launched by economic transformation processes in the area of Upper Silesian Agglomeration significantly changed its traditional economic and spatial make-up, resulting in transformations in the field of production, but also facilitating the development of service functions, both market and non-market ones. It covered not only central areas of main cities of the Upper Silesian Agglomeration, but also their edges, where a couple dozen trade and service centres and wholesale centres are located. These clusters of new, comprehensive services enforce the nearby local centres to redefine their hitherto development concepts (up to now, it was based on the basic service functions), but also search for a formula of operation in the transformed space of the Upper Silesian metropolitan system.

3. Functional and spatial changes in towns and rural areas in the outer metropolitan zone

It seems that, at the beginning of the 21st century, small towns and related rural areas are again becoming particularly important for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of life of many Polish and European residents. The Polish integration with European structures considerably affected the conditions for the management and the directions of socio-economic connections between small towns and rural areas at different scales. The quantitative dimension makes them an important component of the regional growth. Small urban centres are also a significant element of the landscape, economy and socio-cultural life. They shape the quality of life at the national and European level.

Over a couple of decades preceding the year 2010, fundamental changes in the functional structure had taken place in urban centres in Poland. The process of de-industrialization, understood as a decline in employment in manufacturing and an increase in the importance of the service function, has become omnipresent. The phenomenon has become apparent in all urban centres, including small towns. Although in numerous little urban centres there still are small industrial plants, the significance of the industrial function has been decreasing due to a fast increase in the number of service and commercial establishments.

Such a general direction of functional changes implies a decrease in the share of the exogenous sector in total employment and, at the same time, a process of concentration of these functions (“elution”) in few larger centres. Towns gradually lose their specialised service functions (higher level functions), which are overtaken by regional and supra-regional centres.

Although the communications and transport infrastructure is still underdeveloped, the decrease in the importance of the distance factor “takes away” service functions from local urban centres in which they were traditionally anchored. The process can be directly related to the phenomena of concentration occurring in the hierarchical layout of central places. It turns out that market thresholds for services and workplaces of the so-called creative sector are lower from thresholds for less specialised services and workplaces; their location is more casual. Thus, central functions located in small towns of metropolitan areas get eluted easier and faster as far as the domain of secondary services is concerned, which results in the gradual decrease in their attractiveness and competitiveness.

As for the direction of the development of small centres (small towns), the functional type of the rural hinterland is of key importance. Such a dependence is confirmed by functional changes which take place in local centres located in the outer metropolitan zone. In the vast majority of cases, the nodal location in the local space (*i.e.* the availability of the rural, but highly urbanised surrounding), the urban landscape and the “centrality” understood from the functional perspective – constitute the

basic indicators and reactivators of the urban character of small towns in the zones of progressive suburbanisation. The spatial layout of centres of such type is a result of a historically shaped set of layers in the morphological system and buildings, as well as of the evolution of municipal functions.

In the light of new socio-economic conditions which occurred after 1990, attempts were made in many small urban centres to strategically redefine the role and the place of those centres in shaped spatial structures of metropolises and their rural surroundings – in particular in the expanding suburbanisation zones located around urban agglomerations.

In small towns, attempts are made to find new boosts to development and to identify chances for the improvement of living conditions of local communities. Taking into account the competition for growth factors (residents, capitals, demand potential, renown of the place, *etc.*) with central areas of urban agglomeration, actions and activities focused on the use of the specific character of places, local advantages and opportunities probably constitute the best development strategy. Key elements determining the success of these actions include:

- appropriate diagnosis of external conditions;
- ability to use the occurring development opportunities;
- mobilisation of the place's own capacities by means of creating possibly the most favourable endogenous development conditions and maintaining local entrepreneurship;
- creation of organisational, social and economic structures supporting local pro-development initiatives.

The objective of such actions should not be to develop this category of towns in the quantitative aspect, but rather to increase the quality of life and the attractiveness of small centres by means of the improvement of living conditions, growth of wealth of their inhabitants and enhancement of the marketing position.

The majority of towns fit in the economy of rural areas, but their significance for the country is subject – if the relationships are not sustained and developed – to fast degradation. In areas of metropolitan type, their economic links with the rural surroundings disappear or decrease to a large extent due to the existence of new forms of service and availability for rural residents, such as shopping malls, wholesale centres, centres of tourist services, *etc.*

Little urban centres located beyond the territory of large agglomerations usually arrange the rural space and are particularly predestined to play the role of local development centres. Among features which constitute the starting point for their integration with rural hinterland leading to the emergence of structures such as local economic areas, the most important include the multifunctionality, quality of urban area, economic efficiency of local structures, spatial availability and openness of the urban layout.

At least some of relationships between the functioning of the local economy and economic behaviour of inhabitants in the zones of links between small towns are not

known to local politicians and activists engaged in their economic and social development. Economic behaviour of residents of cities and their rural surroundings is also recognised in a very superficial way.

Generally, local economic links between companies operating in small towns are weak. They supply the local market, but they use mainly an external potential. Non-agricultural companies constitute the main labour market for the residents of towns and are of particular importance for the rural surroundings.

Main problems, which appear in the form of threats to the transformation process of rural areas related to towns, include principally:

- economic stagnation of small towns in the outer areas of urban agglomerations, which is often connected with the industrial monofunctionality;
- negative demographic processes and phenomena of depopulation in the rural settlement network located on the outskirts of urban agglomerations, which limit the potential of local markets in small towns;
- increase in unemployment and lack of qualitative changes in the rural labour market, as well as related social threats;
- weak capital accumulation, decapitalisation of productive and service assets as well as of real estate in small towns and in rural surrounding, which makes it impossible to initiate changes.

It is possible to say that two general statements relate to the development of small urban centres in the outer metropolitan zone:

- development goals have to ensure the achievement of competitive advantages in possibly the widest rural hinterland (in this case, urbanised or partially urbanised one – in the suburbanisation zone),
- it is necessary to strive for possibly the largest share in the benefits of the influence in more distant (rural) zones.

The knowledge of the scale and scope of connections with the regional, national or international system makes it possible to assess the dependence of the local market of small towns on external economy.

The factor determining the development of towns and the size of the area of service is the attractiveness of their resources and the scope of services provided in a given town. It is therefore recommended for regional policy to support actions significantly increasing the attractiveness of resources of small towns (it can be housing stock, service institutions, sets of monuments, recreational and tourist advantages, investment areas, *etc.*) [Leibovitz 2006, pp. 45-48].

An improvement of availability of the most important urban centres and, within them, an increase of security and better quality of the urban area represent important elements of the formation of identity of inhabitants as well as sources of the development of positive social approaches directly influencing the level of social and economic activity of residents.

An integrated system of public transport as well as an improvement of transport links in the entire metropolitan area constitute a stimulus for the development of urban functions in small towns. Contrary to common belief, it influences the increase in the mobility of inhabitants, improvement of traffic safety, decrease in the number of negative environmental impacts of transport. At the same time, it increases the competitiveness and attractiveness to investors, potential residents and tourists visiting these towns [Lorentzen 2011; Waitt, Gibson 2009, pp. 1223-46].

For modern metropolitan areas and towns located in their outer zones, it is also important to create good image of resident- and investor-friendly places, *e.g.* thanks to actions favouring the renewal of the urban fabric by means of revitalisation of degraded areas (*e.g.* areas previously in military, agricultural [large-scale] or industrial use, *etc.*). In this way, small urban centres in the outer areas of urban agglomerations can compete in a more effective way for inhabitants who move from central areas to rural zones undergoing the urbanisation process.

It is also necessary to undertake initiatives related to the development of space in centres of small towns. Space with distinctive buildings (*e.g.* objects of historical value, cultural value), as well as appropriately developed places (green areas, areas valuable for cultural or natural reasons) should be recognised and preserved. All these actions and initiatives favour the development of attractive administrative and business, economic and recreational zones – restoring at least some of traditional central functions of towns. The support should be focused mainly on actions increasing the attractiveness of their structural features (availability, quality of space, quality of the environment, central functions, image). The reason for it is that shopping and service centres built on the outskirts of agglomerations are becoming new competitors of towns, as they provide a comprehensive offer, high quality of services, convenient access and free parking.