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THE GERMAN MINORITY IN THE DEMOGRAPHIC STRUCTURE OF THE OPOLE REGION AND ITS ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE REGION (DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIAL ASPECTS)

1. Introduction

The demographic and ethnical situation in the Opole region of Silesia (*Śląsk Opolski*) possesses specific features not to be found in the rest of the country. The ethnical and demographic issues, especially foreign migration, has posed an important political, social, and economic problem in the Opole region practically since the 1950s. The demographically and ethnically distinguishable group of native Silesians currently numbers 320,000, while in 1950 it numbered 418,300. This is due to distinct (internal and foreign) migration processes, a distinct social and economic situation, and lasting family relations with the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG).

Currently (1999) part of the native Silesian population (over 180,000) belongs to the Socio-Cultural Society for the German Minority in Śląsk Opolski (Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Mniejszości Niemieckiej na Śląsku Opolskim), which brings together Silesians who consider themselves to be German. With the current state of sociological knowledge it is difficult or simply impossible to collect detailed statistics of the number of people belonging exclusively to the German minority. However, the population of Silesians (about 320,000) can be estimated with great accuracy in the light of demographic research and general records.

From the beginning of the 1990s a visible problem has existed in the Opole region with respect to the German minority, which consists of over 200,000 people, while 100,000 of them possess a German passport. The

role of the German minority in the system transformation (1989-1999) is constantly increasing, in the political sense as well as in the social and economic sense. The phenomena of external migration (permanent and seasonal) of the German minority, and people having double citizenship in particular, already possesses permanent features and there is a large propensity for further emigration, which has positive and negative effects on socio-economic life in the Opole region.

The aim of this study is to make a profile of the extent and structure of emigration to the FRG as well as to give a description of factors pushing and/or attracting permanent and temporary emigrants to the FRG with emphasis on the period of system transformation (1989-1999). A further aim is to portray how the German minority is placed in the demographic, socio-economic, and spatial dimension of the diverse economic situations in local communities.

The arising spatial disproportions in living circumstances of the population according to ethnical background, connected with the level of unemployment, housing conditions, health, and accessibility of education clearly divides the province (*województwo*) into areas A and B. Areas of socio-economic revival (A) are inhabited by closely knit groups of local people, while agricultural areas (B), currently finding themselves in a process of social regression are inhabited by people whose origin lies somewhere else. A significant role in the diversity of the living and working conditions in the local communities is played by capital transfer and the possibility of working in Germany.

In the light of current experience connected with the role of the German minority in the Opole region, the basic research question emerges: can the Opole region be an exemplary model for social intercourse and co-operation of Polish society with the German minority?

2. Origin of the regional population

Difficult and complicated demographic processes occurred in the years after the second World War within the society in the Opole region, which numbers more than one million people. Nowadays, it is a society of different ethnical and regional origins, different historical experiences, different identities, aspirations and attitudes. The process of creating new social ties after 1945 between population groups of different ethnical origin proceeded slowly and was disrupted by numerous crisis-sensitive factors, creating this unique regional society.

We need to remember that after the second World War several closely knit population groups of different territorial origin, with different traditions, attitudes and views mixed within the Opole territory. Different

cultures at different levels of development interacted here. The processes of integration between the populations occurred in various areas and went through many stages.

From the demographic point of view, especially interesting is the growth process of a new generation in the Opole region, children born, brought up, and educated after the second World War in a uniquely ethnically diversified environment. Over 900,000 children have been born in the Opole region since 1945. This means that in 1999 76.1% of the regional population was born after the second World War. Independently of ethnical origin, this society is demographically young and to a large extent not burdened anymore with negative war experiences. All in all, modern society in the Opole region not only has a population with a demographic and occupational structure different from that of the neighbouring regions, but also has more cultural and traditional differences, which originate from the population of pre-war residents and those who came from the eastern part of Poland (now Ukraine) after the war.

This new socio-demographic process is an important resource and historical experience, shaping a new type of society that has a good chance to join the European Union without much conflict. The success until now, showing itself in the lack of serious ethnical conflicts is also connected with the demographic situation – the high population growth (population boom) and the coming into being of new social ties between the younger generation.

3. Changes in the size, structure, and spatial distribution of the Silesian population between 1950 and 1999

Interestingly, the demographic change among the (native) Silesian population after 1945 and the process of re-population proceeded favourably until 1956. One phenomenon of the post war period was the relatively fast increase of the Silesian population, resulting from demographic compensation, which was expressed in a substantial increase in births and marriages, in spite of the relative lack of young males. The amount of losses reached 30% among men born between 1910 and 1920. Furthermore, mass migration movement before the end of the war (1945), evacuation and flight from the advancing front, as well as the later shift of the German population and the negative effects of the so-called verification caused a profound deformation of the native Silesian population. Despite the negative processes described, together with political and social processes, the process of recovery of the Silesian population was similar to the rest of the population that had settled in the Opole region.

However, the process of the recovery of the Silesian population has been permanently disturbed since 1956 due to constant emigration to Western Germany. Almost the entire population increase of the native inhabitants of the Opole region has been nullified by external mass migration. As a result the population dynamics of the Silesian people became deeply upset. The dynamic growth of the Silesian population and its labour resources became inhibited to a large degree after 1956, which had a deforming effect on the age structure and the level of qualifications. The unfavourable demographic processes connected with emigration to West Germany also hampered the integration processes, and clearly constrained the normal reproduction process in the population.

The Silesian Institute in Opole has carried out detailed demographic research and has drawn up a balance of population dynamics and emigration of the Silesian population between 1950 and 1998. The population, whose regional origin is connected with the place of residence in September 1939, amounts in the Opole region to 330,000. Currently about 60% of these 330,000 native Silesians live in a relatively small area in 34 municipalities and 11 towns.

203,500 people live in the rural area, which makes up 59.9% of the total population examined. All the towns and municipalities in which the population of local origin clearly dominates and makes up between 60 and 90% of the total population are listed below:

1. Towns: Biała, Głogówek, Gogolin, Kolonowskie, Krapkowice, Leśnica, Ozimek, Strzelce Opolskie, Ujazd, Zawadzkie, and Zdzeszowice.
2. Municipalities: Baborów, Biała, Bierawa, Chrzastowice, Cisek, Dąbrowa, Dobrzeń Wielki, Głogówek, Gogolin, Izbicko, Jemielnica, Kolonowskie, Komprachcice, Krapkowice, Lasowice Wielkie, Leśnica, Łubniany, Murów, Ozimek, Pawłowiczki, Pokój, Polska Cerekiew, Popielów, Prószków, Reńska Wieś, Strzelce Opolskie, Strzeleczyki, Tarnów Opolski, Turawa, Ujazd, Walce, Zawadzkie, Zdzeszowice, and Zębowice.

The demographic and socio-occupational structure of the (native) Silesian population examined is characterised by significant differences from the other population groups with a different regional origin, impinging on its socio-economic role. These differences are expressed in different demographic processes like:

1. The absolute decline of the (native) Silesian population living in the Opole region from 439,900 in 1950 to 320,000 in 1999.
2. Mass emigration to the FRG between 1950 and 1998, embracing over 200,000 people, contributing to the depopulation of the countryside and deeply disturbing the demographic processes.

3. The growth during the transformation period (1989-1999) of emigration for employment ('suspended' emigration), mainly connected with work in Germany, from 53,100 people in 1988 to 77,300 people in 1995.
4. The large number of divided and incomplete families as a consequence of permanent and temporary mass migration to Germany. Currently for every 100 people living in the autochthon municipalities in the Opole region about 125-130 family members live in Germany.
5. The processes of feminisation and ageing of the Silesian population, as well as the depopulation of many farms.
6. Very low population growth and a continuing propensity for emigration, in consequence of which the Silesian family is considerably weakened.

4. The size and structure of permanent and seasonal emigration to the FRG between 1950 and 1998

Demographic research indicates that external migration (permanent and seasonal) causes permanent and irreversible disturbances in the population dynamics, a decrease in the labour force, and in the level of education of the Silesian population, significantly lowering the quantity and quality of labour supply on the local labour market. Emigration also causes considerable economic losses connected with the costs of educating personnel with secondary and higher education. At the same time many negative social processes can be observed in the Opole region, like the progressing disintegration of the living and working environment and a weakening of social and family ties. In many native municipalities a deep demographic deformation is also arising, expressing itself, among other things, in the domination of women and people over 60 as well as in disturbances in the population growth. The source of the demographic crisis of Silesian families is constant permanent emigration.

The characteristic phases of permanent emigration embrace the following numbers of people per decade:

No.	Decade	Number of emigrants	Phase of emigration
1	1951-1960	60,578	Period of intensive emigration
2	1961-1970	26,540	Period of moderate emigration
3	1971-1980	50,914	Period of intensive emigration
4	1981-1990	37,464	Period of moderate emigration
5	1991-1997	17,898	Period of limited emigration
	Total	193,394	

In the period investigated 5 emigration phases can be distinguished. The peak years of intensive permanent emigration were 1957 (10,962 people), 1958 (30,382 people), 1966 (5844 people), 1971 (7499 people), 1979 (11,358 people), and 1988 (8524 people). The years of transformation are a period of increasing temporary emigration (for employment purposes). A detailed analysis of this temporary emigration for work (people staying for more than two months in Germany) indicates that this group is young, highly educated, and very active professionally. Emigration for work possesses to a large degree a family or network character. This type of emigration is long-term, and the period of work in Germany often lasts several years. Currently (1999) emigration for work in Silesian communes concerns as a rule about 10-20% of the labour power. Pushing factors for emigration for work are, besides high wage differentials, the very high level of unemployment and the restructuring of industry situated in the Silesian countryside. In 1995 about 60.3% (77,341) of the temporary emigrants in Germany were of age 18-49, 3.2% (2464 people) possessed higher education, 20.1% secondary education, and 39.4% vocational education. During the last few years the factors pushing the population out of the Opole region and attracting permanent and seasonal emigrants to Germany have become so strong, that the native population (German minority) are on the verge of their emigration possibilities from the demographic point of view. The demographic crisis in the Silesian population in the light of the susceptibility to continuing permanent and temporary emigration among the young generation is deep and deepening. This is shown by the fact that the in the last 10 years the growth of the Silesian population was completely absorbed by emigration.

The tendency of the Silesian population to decrease appears to be a permanent process, in particular among school-leavers and college graduates. Against this background the brain drain of highly qualified labour is very disadvantageous. Already more than 5000 college graduates from the Opole region have emigrated permanently and seasonally. The demand for such personnel is increasing in Germany, while there is a shortage of work in the Opole region.

5. The socio-economic role of the German minority in the Opole region

The socio-economic role of the German minority currently constitutes an integral part of the activities of the whole population in the Opole region. This expresses itself in the concentration of activity around the im-

provement of living and working circumstances in the widest sense. Sociological research shows that in the 1990s integrating factors have prevailed in the efforts of all inhabitants of the Opole region (independent of ethnical origin) concerning crucial regional matters like the administrative independence of the Opole region, the reduction of unemployment and poverty, environmental protection and the restructuring of the region. Now the question is whether the German minority plays a special, distinct role in solving regional socio-economic problems. This role can be described very generally with the slogan "the German minority is a bridge between Poland and Germany" ("Mniejszość niemiecka pomostem Polska-Niemcy").

In the area of local problems, the role of the German minority in the Opole region can be observed in:

1. Mass seasonal work in Germany, which clearly reduces local unemployment in areas inhabited by the native Silesian population (German minority).
2. An estimated 600-700 million DM transfer of labour income from Germany annually.
3. Family tourism and visits on Christian and public holidays.
4. In the field of running small businesses (mainly in the place of residence) the creation of small and medium enterprises, and investment in private real estate.

At the same time the demographic population trends have a negative influence: many villages and municipalities are depopulating and there is a brain drain due to the continuing excessive permanent and seasonal emigration. All in all, in the areas inhabited by the German minority the unemployment rate is low and there is a considerable inflow of money earned in Germany. Thus a new socio-economic situation is outlined in the spatial arrangements, expressing itself in the increasing amount of social and economic disproportions. Research shows a clear division of the province into areas of type A, inhabited by Silesians (German minority) with high socio-economic development, better living and working conditions, as well as better housing and health conditions and areas of type B, characterised by socio-economic regression, inhabited by people whose origin lies outside the Opole region (mainly agricultural population). The level of emigration between 1975 and 1997 illustrates a clear influence of permanent migration on the local labour market.

The following towns have to be rated among the main centres of emigration: Kędzierzyn-Koźle (10,440 emigrants), Opole (9581), Strzelce Opolskie (3437), Krapkowice (2542), Głogówek (1852), Zawadzkie (1390), Kluczbork (1370), Prudnik (1210), Zdzeszowice (980), and Goglin (892).

In the municipalities inhabited by Silesians permanent emigration amounted to: Biała (3142 emigrants), Komprachcice (3109), Dobrzeń Wielki (2834), Pawłowiczki (2787), Pokój (2012), Reńska Wieś (1813), Strzelce opolskie (1808), Polska Cerekiew (1792), Cisek (1707), Korfantów (1702), Bierawa (1652), Turawa (1624), Łubniany (1558), Popielów (1526), Dąbrowa (1499), Głogówek (1367), Chrzastowice (1152), and Ozimek (1078). In these municipalities the absolute decrease in population amounted to 10-20%, and about 20-30% works seasonally in Germany.

Currently a completely new socio-occupational structure is being created in the urbanised countryside of the Opole region inhabited by Silesian population. The level of socio-economic development and the economic infrastructure of the Silesian municipalities mentioned are characterised by high development. Research carried out with the aid of taxonomic methods based on 22 indicators shows that the level of development of the Silesian municipalities reaches the upper ceiling in those indicators. The same research indicates a continuous process of increasing profound spatial disproportions in living, work, health, and housing conditions, as well as in the distribution of income in the agricultural areas inhabited by people not originating from the Opole region. Over 80% of the 'native' municipalities in 1999 belonged to the areas with higher economic activity and lower unemployment in comparison with the other municipalities.

A separate economic problem is the inflow of foreign capital into the region. The statistics of inflow of German capital shows that currently, apart from the income transfers from Silesians working in Germany, the role of the German minority as a transmission medium between German capital and the Opole region is not very large.

6. Conclusions

1. Emigration to the FRG causes lasting and irreversible disturbances in the population dynamics of the Silesian population in the Opole region, and as a consequence disrupts the reproduction of the population, breaks up families, and results in the depopulation of a number of villages and municipalities.
2. For a number of years the factors pushing the Silesian population out of the Opole region to Germany have become so strong, that the areas inhabited by these people have reached the limit of possible emigration from the demographic point of view, because emigration has absorbed the whole population growth, which in turn influenced the deformation and decline of the population.

3. During the last few years the disproportions in socio-economic development and the living and working conditions (in the broadest sense) of the inhabitants of different origin have been deepening. This problem requires special remedial measures in the strategy for regional development aiming at a harmonious development of the province in all areas. The thing is not to create isolating barriers. Generally, it can be stated that the contemporary society in the Opole region, considering the growing social disproportions, massive emigration, and weak social and family ties, may be susceptible to confrontational action, because it is subject to numerous fears and threats and feels uncertain about the durability of local ties.
4. The research indicates the rising role of the German minority in the socio-economic development of the Opole region. This process is expressed in the growth of self-government and democratisation of social life, transfers of earnings from work in Germany, the return of former emigrants, family, holiday, and marital tourism, and finally the increasing political role.
5. The economic recession and unemployment in the Opole region, as well as the disproportions in living conditions is a menace for the whole society of this region. This causes the arising of crisis sensitive factors in social intercourse. The division of local society into those who can take up work in Germany because they possess dual citizenship and those who do not have such an opportunity is a source of growing social conflicts.
6. The research indicates a continuing willingness to emigrate permanently or seasonally among young people entering the labour market, comprising about 20-30% of school-leavers with secondary and higher education. In reality it turns out that a large proportion of temporary emigrants become permanent emigrants. Only in the 1990s as many as 17,900 people left permanently for Germany. During the years investigated (1990-1999) a large increase in people leaving for work and a brain drain of people with professions, for whom there is a shortage on the local labour market ensued. Thus, a problem in the perspective of intensifying emigration has emerged, that of negotiating appropriate labour conditions for Polish citizens in the European Union.
7. Statistics show that already in 1995 77,300 inhabitants from the Opole region lived temporarily in Germany (for over two months). Over 66% of them are seasonal workers often living and working in difficult conditions. On the one hand this seasonal emigration lowers unemployment in the Opole region by 50%, and the earnings of those people are almost three times higher than the average in the region. On the other hand this seasonal emigration goes together with huge social costs con-

connected with living apart from the family, difficult social conditions, and the breaking up of families. During the last decade (1988-1998) paid work in Germany has shown a tendency to grow and has become a permanent phenomenon on the labour market.