FACTORS DETERMINING CHANGES IN URBAN SETTLEMENT SYSTEM IN POLAND IN THE 20TH CENTURY

Iwona JAŻDEWSKA

Abstract: *This paper discusses major factors shaping urban settlement system in Poland in the 20th century. Special attention has been given to the policy of European powers that greatly contributed to changes in Poland's settlement system through border delineations and decision on leaving Poland within the Soviet sphere of influence. These factors, independent of Polish state, have been confronted with civilisational processes occurring according to certain models (e.g. migrations). Of major importance was also foreign and home policy pursued by Polish government.*
Key words: *Poland, urban settlement system*

Introduction

Urban settlement system of every country has some specific features that developed throughout centuries. These features depend on natural environment and history of a state. It continuously undergoes some changes, but on the other hand it is one of most durable elements of settlement. A detailed presentation of writings on settlement system n Poland has been provided by E. Biderman (1992). In this paper urban settlement system is understood as a set of towns (nodes) distributed in the geographic space and connections among them (lines) such as transportation links, financial, business, military, administrative, social, cultural and religious bonds. Studies on urban settlement systems can be focused on either nodes or lines, or both these elements simultaneously. This paper is focused on nodes and to a lesser degree on railway connections.

Changes in urban settlement system in Poland cannot be discussed without referring to state border shifts. According to Koter and Kulesza (2001) "Poland is among those European countries that most frequently experienced border shifts. These changes did not consist in temporary acquisitions and losses of some areas as it often occurred in other countries. Here, the country advanced beyond its proper, geographically natural frames and encroached deep into adjacent ecumenes while its own historical provinces fell away. In some periods Poland disappeared for a long time from the Europe's map". For this reason the time horizon of this paper is restrained to the 20th century and the area concerned is defined by Poland's border from 1922 (389,000 km.) and 1945 (313,000 km.). In the early 20th century Poland, for over 100 years partitioned by Russia, Prussia and Austria, was non-existent on political map of Europe. It was not until the end of WW I that Poland regained independence for 20 years. Invaded in 1939 by German and Soviet armies, Poland ceased to exist as a state to re-emerge in another shape in 1945.

During the 20th century the urban settlement system underwent changes caused by external and internal factors including political, economic and social processes. A question arises here: Which of so many factors exerted the greatest influence on Poland's urban settlement system in the 20th century? To answer this question some selected cases will be examined and explained through historical facts.

Iwona Jażdzewska
University of Łódź, Poland iwjazdz@geo.uni.lodz.pl

Brief characterization of urban settlement system in Poland in the 20th century

Until 1918 Poland did not exist as an independent state. The Treaty of Versailles restored sovereign Polish state and delineated its borders. Their course was a cause of conflicts with neighbouring countries. The eastern border was finally defined by terms of the Treaty of Riga in 1921. The Treaty of Versailles demarcated also the northern boundary giving Poland access to the Baltic Sea. Gdańsk, however, the major port in this section of the Baltic coast, was proclaimed a free city, practically remaining under German authority. In 1936 urban settlement system in Poland consisted of 603 towns (fig. 1).
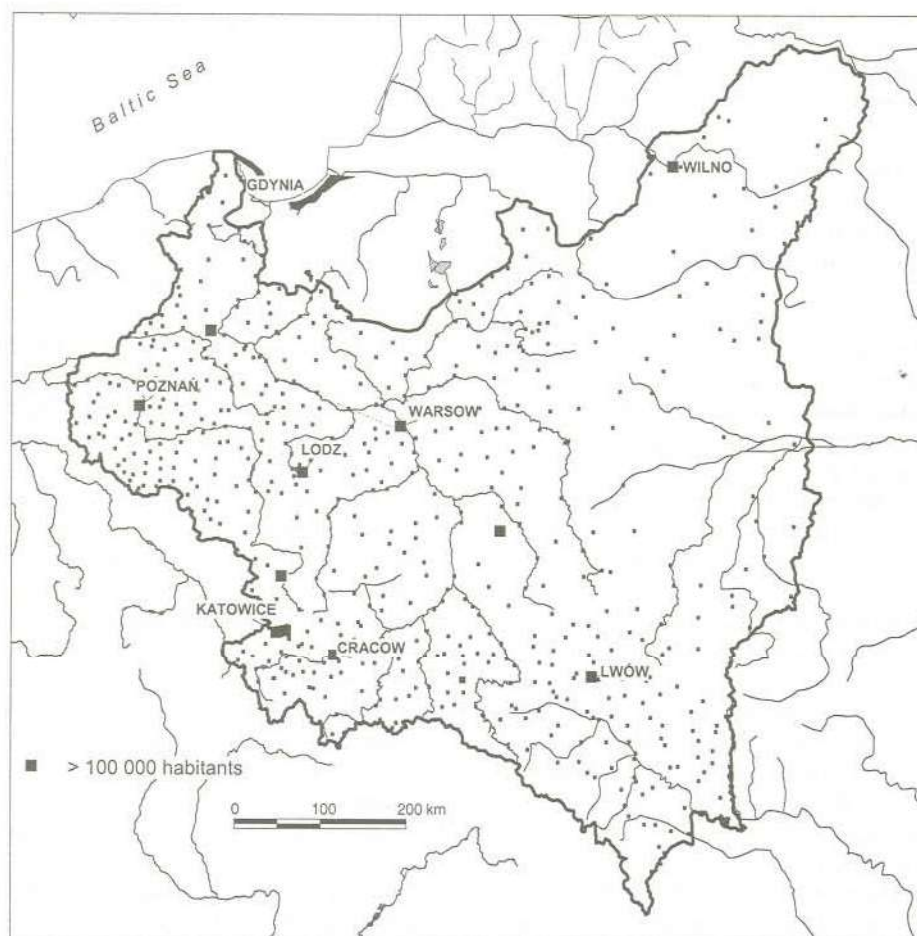

Figure 1. Urban settlement system in Poland in 1936
Source: author based on Uhorczak (1937)

In 1921 the fighting ceased and the political and economic situation became more stable. Reconstructed towns were bound together thus forming a nationwide system. Unification of three sections of Poland that used to be under the administrative system of three different

countries was not an easy process. Particularly problematic was transportation system, especially railways, which did not form a coherent network (fig.2). Western provinces, formerly under Prussian occupation, with dense and well-developed railways sharply contrasted with central and eastern regions, much retarded in this respect. Moreover, some areas were totally devoid of railways. There wee no railways connecting eastern and southern sectors of the country. In the interwar period Poland managed to create a unified system of railroads and constructed a trunk line from the port city of Gdynia to Upper Silesia industrial region.
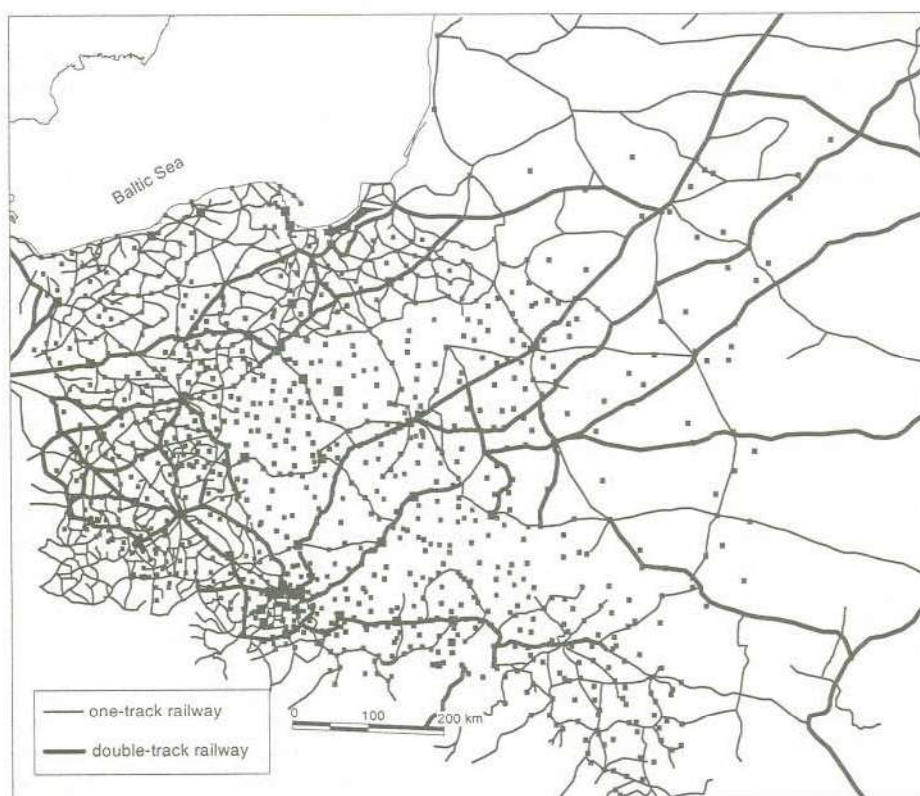

Figure 2. Fragment of railway system in Central Europe in the early 20th century
Source: author based on E. Romer's atlas

Some towns, deprived of municipal rights by Tsar's orders in 1867-1870, were raised again to the status of towns right after WW I.

In 1919 three towns (Aleksandrów Kujawski, Ciechocinek and Wołomin) were granted municipal status for the first time. In the years to come they were followed by some other towns: Stawiszyn (1921), Kartuzy and Kamienna (1922), Bielawa, Konstantynów Łódzki (1924), and Łapy (1925).

Major problems of the newly established state resulted from war destruction and lack of port on the Baltic coast. Therefore in 1920 a decision was made to found the port city of Gdynia, north of the Free City of Gdańsk. Gdynia was granted municipal status in 1926 and in 1931 it was already 40th largest city in Poland with a population of 30,399.

In the interwar period former degraded towns gained municipal status e.g. industrial settlements such as Konstantynów Łódzki, Siemianowice Śląskie, Starachowice or tourist resorts such as Zakopane, Krynica, Krzeszowice, Ciechocinek and the port city of Gdynia. It should be noticed that at the moment of receiving municipal status the industrial settlement of Siemianowice Śląskie had population of 37,888 and was 31st largest town in Poland. On the other hand Ruda Śląska with 25,000 inhabitants was not recognized formally as a town before 1939. Some towns were incorporated into Poland' urban settlement system as a result of conflicts with neighbouring countries (e.g. Lviv, Vilnius, Katowice, Chorzów, Poznań, Pińsk, Brześć, Grodno, Nowogródek, Łuck, Równe).

While some settlement units were given municipal status, at the same time some other towns were degraded. In 1931-1939 as many as 39 towns were deprived of municipal rights. In 1936 small towns dominated in Poland: towns with less than 10,000 accounted for 75%, whereas those having less than 5,000 were 50% .

German-occupied country suffered tremendous population losses. Extermination of Polish and Jewish population as well as displacement of Germans after WW II put an end to multicultural character of towns. Decrease in population in many towns was in excess of 50% (e.g. in Brzeziny, Łask, Bełchatów, Aleksandrów Łódzki, Przedbórz, Wieruszów, Uniejów). Łódź had 497,000 inhabitants in 1946 (predominantly Polish), down from 672,000 in 1939 (of various ethnicity) (Jażdżewska 2000).

After 1945 a reconstruction of the country and its settlement system started within new borders and under strong influence of the Soviet Union (fig. 3). By terms of the Alta Conference Poland acquired ex-German territory in the west as a compensation for eastern provinces taken over by the Soviet Union. Germans were forced to leave their homes and settle on the other side of the Oder River. Polish expatriates from the east found themselves in a similar situation. A significant proportion of displaced Poles settled down in the so-called Regained Territories. Massive external migrations ceased after 1949 followed by internal migrations from rural areas to towns and among towns of different size (fig. 5). Internal town-to-town migrations were directed mainly from small units (less than 10,000 inhabitants) to medium-size and big towns (Rykiel, Jażdżewska 2002). This tendency occurred until 1989 as later on migratory movements were hampered by the economic downturn.

Changes in urban settlement system in Poland after 1950 resulted also from industrialisation policy carried out by the ruling communist party and the government. It brought about new towns on the country's map. Some of them regained municipal status lost in previous century; others were raised to the status of town for the first time. In the second half of the 20th century many administrative changes were introduced, including those affecting borders of urban settings. Far-reaching changes occurred after 1975 administrative reform when the number of voivodships increased from 17 to 49. New regional chief towns experienced o significant population growth. In 1999 another administrative reform reduced the number of voivodships down to 16, but the intermediate level of districts (poviats) was restored. Many degraded former voivodship capitals became district administration seats. At the end of the 20th century small towns (under 10,000) made up 50% of the total and the share of medium-size and big towns increased compared to the year 1936 .

After 1980 due to political and economic crisis towns in Poland experienced stagnation which remained visible till the end of the 20th century. The condition of towns depended on local self-government bodies, activeness of the inhabitants and investments. Some towns took advantage of the new economic circumstances and embarked on economic development. Migrational flows changed their direction, as population increasingly tends to settle in small
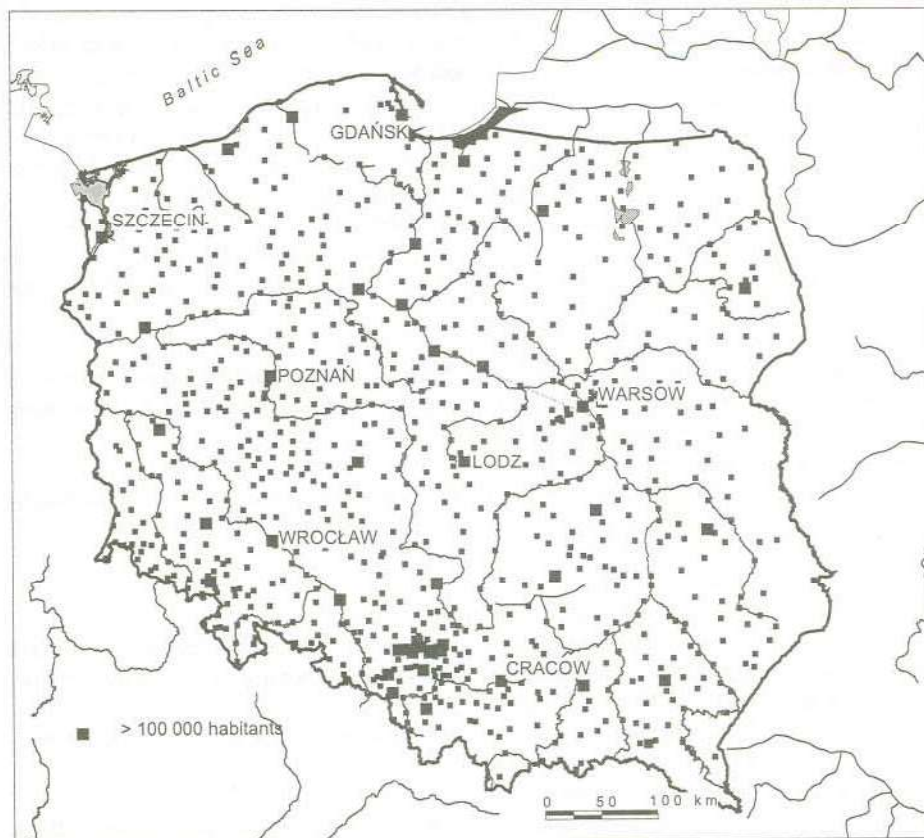
Figure 4. Urban settlement system in Poland at the end of the 20th century
Source: author

towns and rural areas within suburban zones around big cities. Thanks to European Union funds life conditions in towns improve and new employment opportunities can be created.

The answer to the question formulated in the introduction: Which factors did exert the greatest influence on the urban settlement system in Poland in the 20th century, is composed of a few parts. One includes external determinants, the other internal factors that modify settlement system in Poland.

Due to particular geopolitical position of Poland, external factors have been more influential than the internal ones. Their impact was mainly connected with territorial changes and country's border shifts. The major external factors causing changes in the settlement system of Poland include:

1. foreign policy pursued by leaders of European countries and the USA
- delineation of Poland's borders at the Treaty of Versailles (June 28, 1918) after 123 years of occupation
- German and Russian occupation since September 1939

- Extermination of Polish and Jewish population. Jews lived mainly in towns and so did Poles in the Russia-occupied areas. The sharpest decrease in population after WW II was in towns (e.g. Brzeziny near Łódź lost 60% of its pre-war population of 14,000)
- After the Yalta Conference Poland's border once again were determined by foreign powers: Russia, France, Great Britain and the USA, under strong pressure of Stalin
- Displacement of Poles from eastern provinces to western regions (called the Regained Territories); displacement of Germans from western regions to Germany
- Policy of Soviet leaders imposing legal and architectural models to be followed in Poland; construction of new towns (e.g. Nowa Huta, Nowe Tychy) and housing estates dominated by monotonous block-of-flats townscape; proprietorship changes - nationalisation of lands and real estate.

Of major importance in shaping Poland's settlement system was the foreign and home policy of Polish government as well as social and political factors. Main internal factors influencing changes in urban settlement system in Poland in the 20th century include:

1. foreign policy of Polish government
- course of borders defined by the Treaty of Versailles led to conflicts with neighbouring countries. Within a couple of years (1920-1921) wars were fought:
    1. against Ukraine (for Lviv)
    2. against Lithuania (for Vilnius)
    3. against Czechoslovakia (for Cieszyn)
    4. against Germany (for Silesian towns – three uprisings and a plebiscite resulted in incorporation of eastern Silesia with Katowice and Chorzów to Poland, and for Poznań – uprising in Wielkopolska)
    5. against the Soviet Union (resulting in incorporation of Pińsk, Brześć, Grodno, Nowogródek, Łuck and Równe to Poland)
- economic cooperation within COMECOM
- applying for EU membership which led to legal regulations concerning, among others, urban management and land proprietorship

2. home policy of Polish state
- restitution of municipal status by degraded towns (in 1919-1939 as many as 49 towns were raised to the status of towns)
- granting municipal rights to former industrial settlements (e.g. Konstantynów Łódzki, Siemianowice Śląskie, Starachowice) and tourist resorts (e.g. Zakopane, Krzeszowice, Ciechocinek) and the port city of Gdynia
- degradation of towns: since 1932 as many as 39 towns were deprived of municipal rights
- increase in urban population through incorporation of surrounding areas to towns
- changes in administrative divisions caused either acquisition or loss of administrative functions by particular towns

3. economic factors
- development of transportation systems
- nationalisation
- industrialisation

- privatisation
- foreign investments
4. social factors
- high population growth rate in the post-war period
- internal migrations – at first from rural areas to towns followed by increasing town-to-town migrations (Rykiel, Jażdżewska 2002).

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FAKTORY DETERMINUJÚCE ZMENY V URBÁNNOM SÍDELNOM SYSTÉME V POĽSKU V 20. STOROČÍ
Zhrnutie

Vyššie uvedené faktory prezentujú najdôležitejšie determinanty zodpovedné za zmeny v sídelnom systéme v Poľsku. Zdôrazňujeme, že mimoriadne dôležité boli rozhodnutia európskych lídrov, ktorí zmenou hraníc spôsobili aj modifikáciu sídelného systému. Násilné pričlenenie Poľska k východnému bloku ovplyvnilo formu poľských miest ideologickými, architektonickými a právnymi úpravami Sovietskeho zväzu. Hore uvedené faktory, nezávislé od poľského štátu, môžu byť konfrontované s civilizačnými faktormi (migrácie, nové technológie). Rozvoj urbánneho sídelného systému v Poľsku v 20. storočí závisel rovnako od vnútornej a vonkajšej politiky poľskej vlády.

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