

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGES IN MEDIUM-SIZED TOWNS IN POLAND DURING THE TRANSFORMATION<sup>1</sup> PERIOD

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**Abstract:** The article presents the results of research into the consequences of a socio-economic transformation, which began in 1989 in medium-sized Polish towns. A two-part model depicting the structure of these transformations was based on an analysis of economic, social and spatial changes in 21 towns.

**Key words:** socio-economic transitions, transformation, Poland, medium – sized towns.

Political and socio-economic changes, which took place in Central and Eastern Europe originally started in Poland in 1989 and then spread to other countries of the communist block, like the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia or the former USSR countries. The author attempted to create a model of those changes, showing their tendencies. The author analysed data from 1988-2002. The spatial analysis included Tomaszów Mazowiecki with 70 000 inhabitants and 20 other medium-sized towns in different parts of Poland<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 1).

The model consists of two parts. The first one concerns socio-economic changes and is rather universal (Fig. 2.). The consequences of the transformation process are presented in three aspects: functional, economic and social. The other part of the model regards spatial changes in Tomaszów Mazowiecki alone and can only be used for comparison and further study in order to draw a more universal model (Fig. 3.).

In the first part of the model both positive and negative features of the transformation process are presented. Among the positive ones there are first of all democratisation of life and introduction of free-market economy. Those triggered a number of further positive changes in the ownership system and organisation in economy. Several large state enterprises were closed, while others managed to survive and were successfully transformed. Traditional industry (mining, textile, steel, chemical industry, etc.) clearly lost its predominant position in urban economy, and was partly replaced by new industries. Firms which set up their new factories in the towns mentioned above represent other than traditional industry ranches, like construction materials, food or vehicle production. Therefore branches of economy changed. Former state factories also underwent considerable transformations as far as the ownership system was concerned. The majority of them were privatised (Fig. 2.).

1 Transformation is a particular process of moving from socialism to capitalism. It is a process of particular changes, which consist in breaking the continuity of the state's economic system. Transformation is a process which consists not only in moving from one system to another (system transformation); it is also a change of the system of values. This kind of transformation regards the basic spheres of social life (Cholaj, 1998).

2 A medium-sized town is considered to be inhabited by 40 – 180 thousand people (Kaczmarek, 1998).

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Fig. 1. Investigated towns and their localisation in Polish provinces

The economic boost brought about by the introduction of free-market economy was very important for the towns. There appeared many new private service and production companies. At present they dominate urban economy as far as the number, employment and production output are concerned. What is more, many new investments were made by foreign companies. New firms generated jobs and led to a greater variety of urban economy (Fig.2). In some centres a very important localisation factor was introduced, which was the special economic zones. They function, for instance, in Tomaszów Mazowiecki, Kutno or Zgierz. In the special economic zone of Tomaszów Mazowiecki several major industrial and service investments were made. Investors in those special zones receive a number of benefits, such as support from town authorities or tax exemption.

On the other hand we observe a number of negative effects of the transformation process. The weakness of state enterprises and problems arising from the inability to adapt to the new system led to many negative phenomena (Fig.2). Large state enterprises, which had functioned in traditional industry branches lost their markets and entered the stagnation phase. The production output, income and employment decreased, while debts increased. As a result some of the state enterprises were not restructured successfully and declined. The factors described above led to an advanced regression of traditional urban functions.



The economic development of most medium-sized towns in Poland before 1989 was based on industry. Limiting its role brought a number of negative effects, like economic stagnation and disastrous unemployment. Growing unemployment led to lower family incomes and in some situations to extreme poverty. As a consequence, birthrate, the migration balance and the number of population dropped, while poverty and crime rate increased (Fig. 2.).

In the towns in question two contradicting tendencies can be observed. On the one hand there is the demographic and social stagnation resulting from the economic crisis of the 1990s. On the other hand private enterprise developed and part of former state enterprises were reformed. As it is economy that largely determines the condition of society, we can expect that its steady development should eventually result in decreasing social problems.

The model of spatial transformations was based on a detailed study of Tomaszów Mazowiecki. It presents the comparison of a socialist town (before 1989) and a post-socialist one (emerging after 1989). The space of Tomaszów Mazowiecki as a socialist town was marked by a clear division of functions. Residential areas were practically devoid of the service function. Only in the town centre and along the main street – Warszawska Street – it was slightly better developed (Fig.3). Industry and the residential area occupied sizeable central areas, due to the fact that land rent was not applicable there. The town population was mixed and the socially dysfunctional areas were not very distinct in the town space.

After 1989 land rent was introduced and some industrial areas took on the service function. Services developed in the town centre and entered the surrounding housing estates (Fig.3). That answered the inhabitants' needs. The biggest changes, however, took place in the northern peripheries, where the largest bankrupt factory of "Wistom" was situated. As a result of its decline unused wasteland appeared. In the north-western part, near Road No 8, some of the old factories are still functioning (Fig.3). Also new investments were made in this region. This proves the present significance of roads as another localisation factor. Moreover, the region described here is a special economic zone, which attracts investors.

In the socio-spatial structure of Tomaszów Mazowiecki we can observe two distinct sectors differing from each other as far as buildings and social structure are concerned. Part of the old buildings in the town centre and the areas surrounding the "Wistom" factory are socially dysfunctional and degraded. On the other hand, part of the town centre and the buildings south of it make the area of positive changes. There new residential estates were built, inhabited by the richer part of the community.

The spatial structure of Tomaszów Mazowiecki shaped by transformation processes is of the concentric-wedge type (Fig.3). In the town centre we find a concentration of tenant houses. Apart from them there are large areas with industrial and service activity. In the area surrounding the town centre there are residential block estates. Blocks of flats occur along old tenant houses and one-family detached houses. The next zone can be described as the outer zone, which surrounds the town centre and its outskirts. It contains a lot of arable land, forests and industrial areas. After 1989 we could observe an expansion of one-family houses estates. The system described above cooccurs with social phenomena, which create zones of varying social and physiognomic character.

#### Literature

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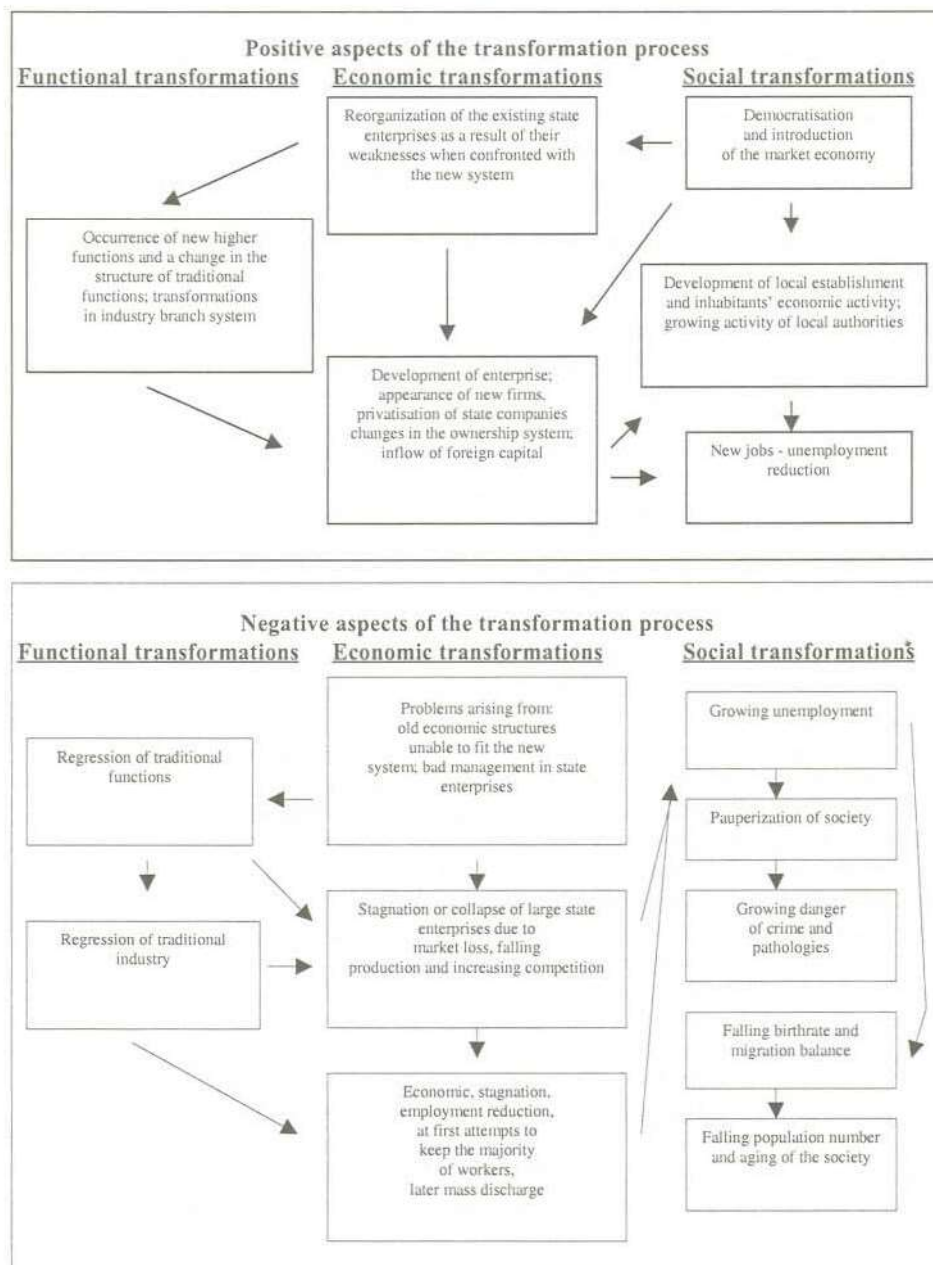
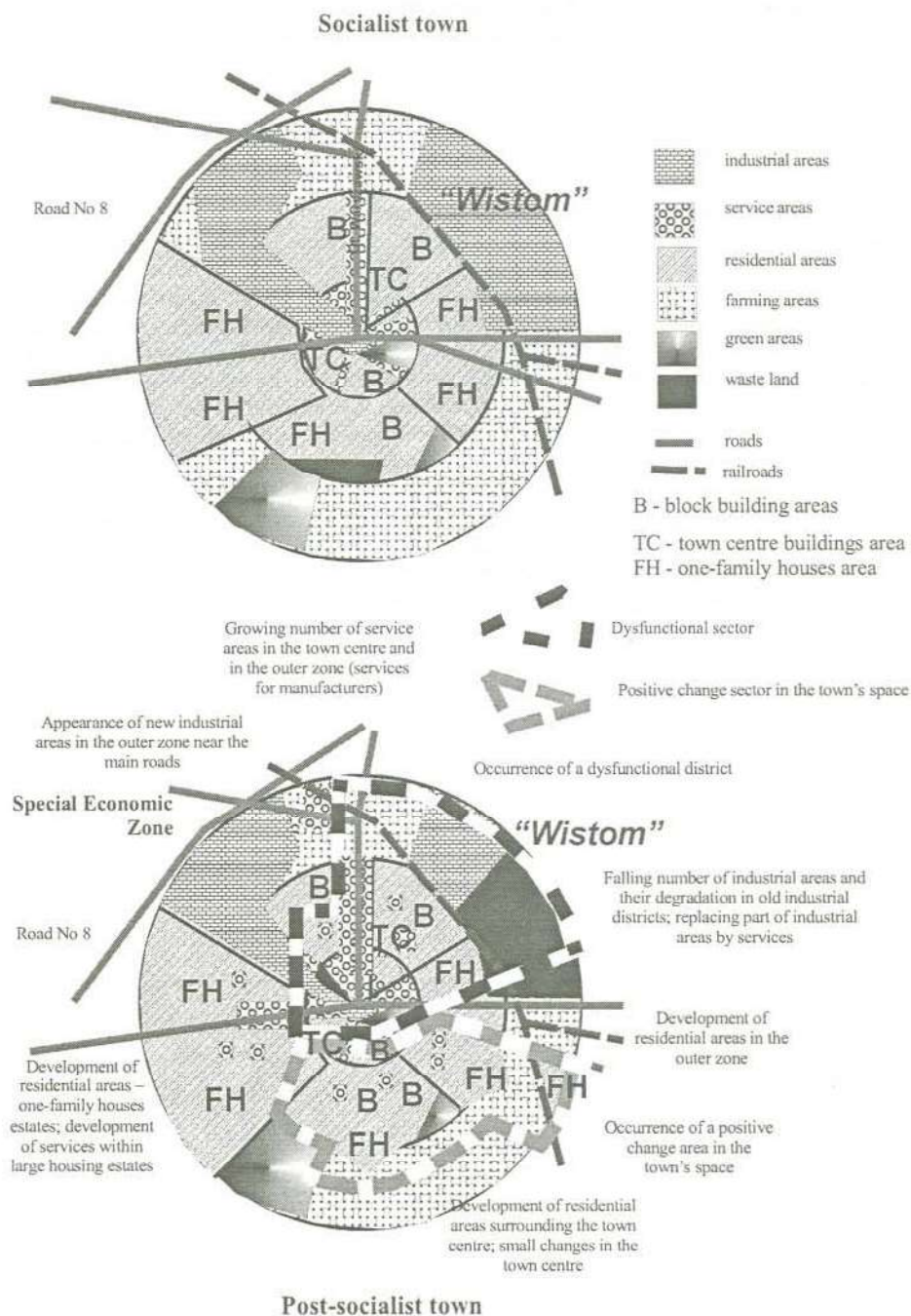


Fig.2. The process of socio-economic transformations in a medium-sized Polish town





**SOCIOEKONOMICKÉ ZMENY V STREDNE VEĽKÝCH MESTÁCH  
V POĽSKU POČAS TRANSFORMAČNÉHO OBDOBIA***Zhrnutie*

Politické a socioekonomické zmeny v strednej a východnej Európe v roku 1989 naznačujú celkový systém transformácie. Prezentovaný príspevok uvádza jej vplyv na priemyselné stredne veľké mestá v Poľsku. Výskum sociálnych, funkčno-ekonomických a priestorových zmien umožnil autorovi vytvoriť transformačný model skladajúci sa z dvoch častí.

Prvá časť modelu súvisiaca so socioekonomickými časťami prezentuje pozitívne a negatívne aspekty transformačného procesu. K pozitívnym patrí predovšetkým demokratizácia života a vstup do trhovej ekonomiky. Ďalšie zmeny súviseli so systémom vlastníctva a organizáciou ekonomiky. Priemysel bol privatizovaný a reorganizovaný. Tradičné priemysel stratil význam a do veľkej miery bol nahradený novými odvetvami a novými službami. Na druhej strane sa objavil i rad negatívnych efektov transformácie. Štátne podniky fungujúce ako časť tradičného priemyslu stratili svoj trh a začali stagnovať. Taktiež sme svedkami značnej regresie tradičných urbánnych funkcií, čoho dôsledkom sú masové redukcie pracovných príležitostí a nárast nezamestnanosti. Dôsledkami nezamestnanosti a nízkych príjmov boli klesajúca miera natality a bilancia migrácie, čo viedlo k poklesu populácie a prudkému vzrastu chudoby.

Ďalšia časť modelu ukazuje priestorové zmeny v Tomaszów Mazowiecku – stredne veľkom meste v Lodžskom veľkovoľvodstve. Toto mesto prešlo významnou transformáciou po roku 1989. Zvýšil sa okruh služieb, časť priemyselných oblastí bolo degradovaných. Zároveň sa však v tom istom čase objavili nové rozvojové centrá blízko hlavných ciest s početnými investíciami do služieb a nových produkcií.

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