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Development of educational services in small towns of the Małopolskie and Podkarpackie voivodeships

Abstract

The aim of this study was to present the variety of educational services in small towns of Małopolskie and Podkarpackie voivodeships. Performance of educational services is determined by numerous factors, of which the key ones are: economic and social policy, rules governing the funding of education and demographic processes. Education is a public service aimed at particular citizen groups (children, youth, adults) or at the society itself. The main methods used in study was analysis of statistic data and structural coefficient and profiles of educational services.

The first part of this paper deals with the condition and structure of the system in consideration to the types of schools and number of students affected by demographic changes in the region. The second part is an analysis of educational profiles in secondary schools in small cities with relation to their local job market and the economic advancement of the regions. The paper contains a juxtaposition of barriers and opportunities for the development of educational services in the analysed towns.

Keywords: educational service; geography; settlement network; small towns

Introduction

The interest of Polish geographers in small towns displays a certain regularity and variety of the topic range. Studies which analyse functional structure of towns are most commonly represented. It is largely defined on the basis of the professional and vocational structure of local populations. On the other hand, it is not very common to encounter studies which research how the functionality changes and evolves for a particular category of a settlement. These research trends, however, made it possible to distinguish and identify the influence of certain functions on the development of cities and settlement network in the region, along with its typology (Jerzyński, 1977; Rajman, 1984; Łoboda, 1992; Pawliowska-Maj, 1990).

Another research direction is connected with the role of a local community in the socio-economic growth and development of a city. a particularly important research issue is to evaluate the reaction of local communities to development problems which are caused by internal and external factors (e.g. financial difficulties and

limits, demographic changes). These issues are taken up by the studies which analyse contemporary functions of small towns, their changeability and dynamism, as well as point out the factors leading to their reactivation (Domański, 1991). Additionally, this study includes those which estimate the influence of local authorities on the shaping of the image of Polish cities (Parysek, 1995).

Through the standpoint of this paper, an essential topic group is represented by the studies of morphologic and functional structure of small and medium-sized towns (Górka, 1986; Łoboda, 1992; Rajman, 1984). The latest studies in this matter additionally accentuate the role of individual economic entities in shaping the functional city environment. The subject-matter literature increasingly concerns itself with the role of small towns in local settlement networks. The location of regional centres in the settlement network and their role as the heart of local development within that network appears to be a predominant issue in this field of interest (Brodzińska, 1979; Maik, 1993; Wysocki, 1975). Some of the more recent studies deal with contemporary opportunities for the development of small towns in the period of political transformation in Poland (Jażewicz, 1999; Kwiatek-Sołtys, 2004). It is increasingly common to take into consideration such factors as social problems, including the role of small towns in providing particular services for the changing rural environment.

Despite their low population number, small cities constitute a very important part of the Polish settlement network. Settlement network consists of 903 cities, including 685 small towns. They fulfil various exogenic functions, but also serve as service centres for the surrounding rural hinterland. One of the functions of such the small towns is to education, available through private or state funding. According to the legal basis, in return for fulfilling the educational duty, local governments are entrusted with funds subsidised by the state. The subvention depends on many factors, e.g. number of pupils, type of the settlement (town, village).

Methodology

The main interest of this study was the educational services in small cities. The definition of a small city is not entirely meaningful. There are different approaches towards the population threshold for small cities. In paper, a small town has no more than 20,000 inhabitants (Heffner, 2005; Heffner, Marszał, 2005; Kwiatek-Sołtys, 2004). Such towns from the Małopolskie and Podkarpackie voivodeships were chosen for a detailed analysis. Their provinces are shown different level of social and economic advancement. The Małopolskie (Cracow) voivodeship is industrial and agricultural, whereas the Podkarpackie (Rzeszów) one is agriculturally-industrial with some signs of new branches (e.g. advanced industrial technologies). Both provinces are dominated by small towns and show a level of urbanisation below the national average. Urban population state in the Małopolskie voivodeship amount for 51.3% and in the Podkarpackie one – 41.5% only.

The aim of the research was:

- to present the condition and the structure of education in small cities, as well as to establish the rank of these settlements in the education system,

- to compare a profile of education in secondary schools in small cities with relation to the requirements of local job markets,
- to reveal and define the barriers and opportunities for the further development of educational function in the analysed towns.

The research was based on the number of pupils, schools, profiles of education, population according to the division into age groups – all available from the Local Data Bank provided by GUS (Central Statistical Office of Poland), statistical annals published by regional departments of GUS in Kraków and Rzeszów, Regional Examining Commission in Kraków as well as the Internet websites run by schools in small cities. Data on the education service were verified by research conducted in a large group of educational institutions in small towns of both voivodeships. This was achieved through the inspection of teaching practise undergone by the Pedagogical University geography students.

Profile of the small town research pool

The area of interests contains 85 small cities. Małopolska province settlement network consists of 61 cities, including 47 small towns. Podkarpackie province settlement network comprises 50 cities, with the domination of small cities up to 10,000 citizens (Tab. 1). Small cities constitute large portions of the total number of cities (Małopolskie – 77.1%, Podkarpackie – 78%), yet they are home to a relatively small portion of city population (Małopolskie – 20%, Podkarpackie – 25%).

Tab. 1. Small towns by their population number in 2013

Classes of population number (groups size) [in thou.]	The Małopolskie Voivodeship				The Podkarpackie Voivodeship			
	Small cities		Population		Small cities		Population	
	Number	%	Thou.	%	Number	%	Thou.	%
0–2	3	6.4	4.9	1.3	5	12.7	19.7	7.1
2–5	12	25.5	40.2	10.6	11	28.3	30.7	11.0
5–10	16	34.0	117.6	31.1	13	33.4	76.9	27.5
10–20	16	34.1	216.1	57.0	10	25.6	151.6	54.4
Total	47	100.0	378.8	100	39	100.0	279.1	100.0

Source: author's own work based on *Województwo małopolskie...*, 2013; *Województwo podkarpackie...*, 2013; *Powierzchnia i ludność...*, 2013

Very small cities, below 2,000 inhabitants, constitute the smallest group since the Małopolskie voivodeship has only 3 (6.4%) and the Podkarpackie – 5 (12.7%). The share of towns between 2,000 and 5,000 inhabitants is similar, hence they compose one-third of the small cities in both analysed regions. The number of cities with 5,000–10,000 population is higher in the Podkarpackie voivodeship – 33.4%, whereas in the Małopolskie one – 32.0%. Domination of towns that are inhabited by up to 10,000 citizens in the Podkarpackie province is the result of different genesis

of the settlements. On the other hand, it is also a reflection of the current economic structure. The number of towns inhabited by 15,000–20,000 people is higher in the Podkarpackie voivodeship (6 towns), whereas the figures are substantially smaller in Małopolskie (5).

The layout of small towns in the Małopolskie province is regular. This is mainly caused by the conditions of the natural environment and the uneven industrialisation. The vast majority of the current small cities were established in the mountains and foothills, while the rest is located in uplands and lowlands. The distribution in Podkarpackie voivodeship is different. Most small towns can be found in lowlands (The Sandomierska Basin) on the northern border of Carpathian Foothills and within the Jasiocko-Sanockie Depression. Looking at the location of small cities of this province, one can distinguish a particular territorial pattern. They are situated along river valleys (of San, Wisłoka and Wisła) and main routes, e.g. Kraków-Rzeszów-Przemyśl and Jasło-Krosno-Sanok-Ustrzyki Dolne (Rajman, 2001; Rajman, Kwiatek-Sołtys, 2009).

Structure of the education service in small cities – conditions and diversity

The development of education service is affected by many factors. Among the pivotal macroeconomic factors are: the social policy and the changes governing the financing of education. Demographical processes and financial condition of the local governments play also the decisive role as microeconomic factors (Kołodziejczyk, 2008).

Service of education is provided by various subjects. However, the greatest share is that of the public sector. Local governments are the prevailing institutions responsible for organisation of the school network in municipalities and districts. The share of private sector in small towns of Małopolskie voivodeship is only 1.5%–5.1% depending on the type of school, and 1.2%–3.4% in the Podkarpackie one.

The structure of educational system in small cities is dominated by primary schools and lower secondary ones (Tab. 2, Tab. 3). This situation is an answer to the elementary educational requirements of the local population. Allocation of these institutions in a particular region (city, municipality) should be proportional to the population. The average number of pupils in a small towns primary schools of the Małopolskie province is 328, but in 16 towns is below this average and in 9 towns does not exceed 200 (e.g. those of Nowe Brzesko, Alwernia, Ryglice and Czchów). The similar average for lower secondary schools 311. In 24 small cities are below this average and in 9 the students number does not exceed 200 (e.g. Alwernia, Kalwaria Zebrzydowska, Ryglice, Radłów, Jordanów). In the Podkarpackie province the average number of pupils in primary school is 228, but in 6 towns it below exceed 200 (Cieszów, Narol, Przecław, Sieniawa, Dukla, Ulanów). The average for the low secondary schools is 207 students. Again, in 10 towns those numbers do not reach the average.

In both of the discussed voivodeships, the third group of schools with the considerable number of pupils are that of the secondary schools which comprise in total over 20%. Lesser shares are observed in the schools of next stage of education, such as post-secondary schools, the post-secondary schools, the centres of continuing education, the supplementary schools for adults as well as institutions offering higher education (Tab. 4).

Tab. 2. Structure of educational system of the Małopolskie and Podkarpackie voivodeship by number of schools types in 2013

Type of school	Małopolskie voivodeship	Podkarpackie voivodeship
	%	
Primary schools	43.6	52.8
Lower secondary	23.5	20.2
Basic vocational	4.5	3.1
General secondary	11.7	9.9
Technical secondary	11.0	9.8
Post-secondary schools	5.7	4.2
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: author's own work based on *Województwo małopolskie...*, 2013; *Województwo podkarpackie...*, 2013; *Oświata i wychowanie*, 2013

Tab. 3. Primary schools and lower secondary schools in small towns by number of pupils in 2013

Classes of population number of small towns [in thou.]	Małopolskie voivodeship		Podkarpackie voivodeship	
	Primary schools	Lower schools Schools	Primary school	Lower secondary school
	%			
0–2	52.0	45.5	51.2	46.9
2–5	50.5	44.0	50.0	47.0
5–10	46.3	41.0	48.1	46.3
10–20	42.2	35.2	47.9	44.5

Source: author's own work based on *Województwo małopolskie...*, 2013; *Województwo podkarpackie...*, 2013; *Oświata i wychowanie*, 2013

Tab. 4. Secondary and post-secondary education in small cities of the Małopolskie and Podkarpackie voivodeship by number of students in 2013

Classes of population number of small towns [in thou.]	Małopolskie voivodeship				Podkarpackie voivodeship			
	Secondary schools			Post-secondary schools	Secondary schools			Post-secondary schools
	Basic vocational schools	General secondary schools	Technical secondary schools		Basic vocational schools	General secondary schools	Technical secondary schools	
	%							
0–2	0.3	2.2	0.0	0.0	0.5	2.3	0.0	0.1
2–5	0.5	4.1	0.4	0.5	0.6	2.4	0.6	0.0
5–10	1.3	7.4	3.2	0.8	1.1	2.0	1.5	1.0
10–20	2.3	11.6	7.7	2.0	2.1	2.1	1.9	1.5

Source: author's based on *Województwo małopolskie...*, 2013; *Województwo podkarpackie...*, 2013; *Oświata i wychowanie*, 2013

Presentation of the state and structure of educational institutions in small towns needs to discuss the relative estimate of their availability. This availability is affected by the type of educational services provided by a particular settlement unit. Thus, the diversity of secondary schooling only satisfies meets the demand of people living small towns below 5,000 inhabitants.

The majority of the small cities in Małopolska and Podkarpackie present generally similar educational structures, with substantial difference between particular schooling units. However, this pattern is not achieved among the towns below 2,000 citizens, where the access to secondary schooling is reduced (Tab. 3, 4). An exception are the towns of specialised functions, health resorts and tourist centres where there is demand for a qualified staff, especially graduates secondary and post-secondary schools. For example at Iwonicz-Zdrój there is the significant number of vocational schools (technical secondary ones) associated with the of rest-homes, guest-houses and private owned holiday quarters.

Small divergence in the structure of education is observed between the cities populated by 2,000–5,000 inhabitants. There is a significant dominance of secondary schools offering general education (general secondary schools) and vocational schooling is scarcely offered (basic vocational schools). The exception is the towns of Tyczyn, where, since 1997, has functioned the university level school (The Higher School of Social Sciences and Economy). The existence of this institution contributed to the development of educational services and establishment of new schooling units (e.g. Centre of Continuing Education), consequently improving the position of this town in the settlement network of the region.

Substantial disproportion in the structure of education can be observed in the towns populated by 5,000–10,000 people. Those which are districts centres (powiat), like Brzozów, Strzyżów, Lesko, Kolbuszowa and Sucha Beskidzka, usually offer a wider and diverse range of their educational services. The number of secondary schools in such cities varies from 3 to 6, i.e. general secondary schools, technical secondary schools and vocational schools. Moreover, there is greater offer for adults: supplementary and technical schools which enable their students the acquisition of 'maturity diploma' (Matura), as well as variety of post-secondary schools. Additionally, there are also art schools (e.g. primary music schools) offering this specialised education.

Sucha Beskidzka (the Małopolskie voivodeship) is a district centre which deserves to be mentioned separately. Its educational offer has been extended by establishing the Higher School of Tourism and Ecology, the College of Foreign Languages for Teachers, the Private Centre for Professional Development of Teachers and other institutions for education and professional development (public and private). Dynamic growth of educational services increased the rank of this town from local to regional. The town of Kolbuszowa (the Podkarpackie voivodeship) is another example. The offer for learning is systematically developed (the number of post-secondary schools and vocational schools is increasing). Relatively positive demographic condition can be a promising factor for this town development in the domain of secondary level schooling.

Conversely, the schooling network is fairly homogenous for towns between 10,000 and 20,000 inhabitants. These are mostly the centres of districts (e.g. Lubaczów, Nisko, Miechów, Brzesko) or those of some specialised functions, i.e. industry (Nowa Dęba, Brzeszcze, Kęty, Bukowno), tourism (Ustrzyki Dolne, Limanowa) and medical treatment (Rabka Zdrój). The secondary schools and the post-secondary schools as well as various institutions for education and professional development of the youth and adults are significantly represented in these towns. Out of this group the town of Nisko gradually becomes a supra-regional centre for education,

due to the College of Foreign Languages for Teachers and the Higher School of Development and Defence (a branch department) – Table 5.

Tab. 5. The range of educational services in small towns in Małopolskie and Podkarpackie Voivodships

The range of educational service	Small towns by numbers of inhabitants			
	below 2 thou.	2–5 thou.	5–10 thou.	10–20 thou.
Local centres	Małopolskie – 3 Podkarpackie – 5	Małopolskie – 14 Podkarpackie – 11	Małopolskie – 9 Podkarpackie – 7	Małopolskie – 7 Podkarpackie – 2
Regional centres	Małopolskie – 0 Podkarpackie – 1	Małopolskie – 2 Podkarpackie – 2	Małopolskie – 6 Podkarpackie – 4	Małopolskie – 7 Podkarpackie – 5
Supra-regional centres	Małopolskie – 0 Podkarpackie – 0	Małopolskie – 0 Podkarpackie – 1	Małopolskie – 1 Podkarpackie – 0	Małopolskie – 2 Podkarpackie – 1

Sources: *Województwo małopolskie...*, 2013; *Województwo podkarpackie...*, 2013; *Oświata i wychowanie*, 2013

According to the research, the functioning of the educational system, the structure and organisation of schooling centres has notably transformed (Szmigel, 2012; Tracz, 2009; Tracz, Świętek, 2014). On the one hand, one can observe the process of school network relocation by the shrinking number of pupils, lower interest among the young people in some types of the technical schools, insufficient funds for the realisation of the educational tasks by the local governments and the continued education system reform. In the analysed voivodeships, the largest number of schools have been closed in the districts of Proszowice, Miechów, Ustrzyki Dolne, where the population dynamic is low. On the other hand, a process in which educational units are merged into educational groups can be observed. This activity is supposed to prevent the liquidation of small schools (e.g. primary, lower secondary and secondary ones) and simultaneously provide a wider range of educational offer to the society. The merging of primary schools with lower secondary ones is most common. In such units the continuity of schooling in two educational stages is possible. Units which are a result of joining lower secondary schools with upper secondary ones or merged with several types of secondary schools (comprehensive, technical, vocational), which appear in the educational structure, are expected to guarantee the recruitment of the most gifted students from the local area and prevent the redundancies among teachers.

Profiles of education in secondary schools in small towns

The meaning of education as a defining factor on the job market has considerably increased over the last years. One of the reasons for social exclusion is maladjustment of education to the current situation of the job market and needs. Adequate education level is also important for the economic development of a particular region. Having that in consideration, a various set of education projects that would increase the innovative character of the service are implemented in both analysed voivodeships. Scholarship programmes for the most gifted students encourage the youth to continue education in the secondary schools and the ones of university level, higher schools are launched.

A very important and informative concept depicting adaptation and adjustment of the educational system for the needs of the local society and economic development of small towns is the offer of profiles of education in secondary schools and the post-secondary ones. The variety of educational paths in secondary comprehensive schools is the right answer for the expectations and demands of the young students. Besides some rather traditional profiles, like biology-chemistry, mathematics-physics, foreign languages, humanities, the new ones are offered, e.g. engineering and defence, social, bilingual. Their graduates usually take up higher or post-secondary schooling. Over the last years the number of secondary comprehensive schools has not shrunk and in some instances of merged centres the recruitment is conducted separately for each type of school within a joint unit.

The vocational education and training have a particular influence on the economic growth and the background of the small towns. Their presence, as well as the wide offer of education profiles, seems to confirm the availability of the services and a proper adjustment to the current needs of the local job market and attractiveness for the young people. The secondary schools in small towns from Małopolskie voivodeship prepared a rich offer of education.

Detailed scrutiny of the educational profiles allows to say that the offered paths of schooling in these types of establishments are highly related to the size of the educational centre, its local infrastructure and the local economic conditions. In small cities located in agricultural zones (e.g. Brzostek, Proszowice, Miechów), there are secondary vocational schools which provide education strictly connected with farming (e.g. agriculture technician, mechanic and farming machinery technician, farmer), small gastronomy (e.g. cook, confectioner) and personal services (salesman, hairdresser). As it was revealed in the research conducted, in over a dozen secondary schools of this region, where operate small or greater industrial plants the educational offer is still related to the traditional industrial profile of the area. Examples are: Brzeszcze (mining), Sułkowice (blacksmithing), Kęty (mechanic technician). In the Podkarpackie voivodeship one can mention: Jedlicze (mechanic technician, mechatronics technician), Nowa Dęba (mechanic technician), Nisko (electrician). Along these profiles some new specializations are offered, e.g. computer technician, economy technician, administrative technician, which is the reaction to the needs of the local job market and interests of the contemporary youth. Conversely, in the towns located in touristic and health resort zones, the offer is represented by paths of education connected with servicing the touristic traffic (hotel management technician, economy technician, cook, confectioner) and personal services (hairdressing technician, sales technician, salesman). The towns of Rabka Zdrój, Sucha Beskidzka, Krynica Zdrój are good examples in the Małopolskie voivodeship, use of Rymanów Zdrój, Lesko, Ustrzyki Dolne from the Podkarpackie voivodeship is represent the same trend. However, in smaller cities where the economic activity is more varied, the secondary schools offer training in services and production. What is more, some new profiles begin to appear as well (e.g. logistics technician, advertisement technician).

According to the number of pupils and that of offered profiles in the end of 2013, the secondary schools of both region, the most popular education paths were: computer technician, economy technician, hotel management technician, mechanic technician, administrative technician. In the basic vocational schools the most common choices were: car mechanic, whitesmith, painter, small gastronomy cook,

hairdresser and salesman. These are the trades which allow for self-employment if the situation on the job market is difficult.

Opportunities and barriers for the development of educational services in small towns

Implementation and realisation of the education is legally regulated. An important role in this area is played by the local government, i.e. the authorities of municipality, district and voivodeship (province). Schooling is also influenced by the level of socioeconomic advancement of the area, which modifies the development of educational services. The research on concentration and availability of public services revealed high level of access to education in the districts of the Małopolskie voivodeship. Additionally, a tendency to dominate in the domain of education has been observed in large urban centres (Kraków, Tarnów, Nowy Sącz) which does not leave the educational system in small cities unaffected (INSE, 2012; Tracz et al., 2003). Similar tendency is present in the Podkarpackie voivodeship. Rzeszów is the leading educational centre on all levels. Over the last years cities of Tarnobrzeg, Krosno and Przemyśl have become a subregional centres of education, with access to university level schooling (Tracz et al., 2009).

The access to educational services and the variety of the profiles in small towns is determined mainly by their position in the settlement network. Very small ones below 2,000 inh. usually fulfil their services in the area of comprehensive teaching securing the function of kindergartens, primary schools and lower secondary ones. Potential and financial resources which are at the disposal of district seats allow for offering extensive secondary schooling and in some cases university schooling (e.g. Sucha Beskidzka and Nisko). The secondary level education in these centres is varied and usually strictly connected with the demand of the local background of economy and society. The towns which are not the seat of a district (10,000–20,000 inh.) are diversified according to schooling traditions of their regions and actual socioeconomic changes.

The fundamental barrier in the development of educational services in small towns of the analysed provinces is the gradual decrease of the number of children and youth in group age of 5–16 years. This problem affects the small towns in both researched regions. Another problem is the fact that the local governments find it particularly challenging to secure financial resources to sustain educational institutions. The issue is especially visible in small cities of strong service and agriculture profile. Thus, being concerned solely with economic outcome of many local councils decide to liquidate some of the schools, merge them in groups or hand down the management of educational institutions to associations.

In the case of small towns located in the neighbourhood of greater cities (e.g. Kraków, Rzeszów, Tarnów, Nowy Sącz) one can observe the decline of certain secondary schooling and this process intensifies. Those towns simply cannot cope in the education offer with large educational hubs. Young people, very often gifted and talented decide to leave their small hometowns and commute to renowned schools in big cities.

Conclusion

After the analysis of the condition and structure of the educational services it can be stated that they play a very important role in the development of small towns and that they modify their background. The structure of education, numbers of schools and teaching profiles of the secondary and post-secondary ones are closely related with the size of a small towns, infrastructure and the level of economic development. Higher level of development stabilises the access to the educational services as well as improves their quality. Additionally, it stimulates the changes of professional structure within a population group. The development of educational services in small towns, their diversity, significantly increases intellectual potential of the communities and improves the competitiveness of the town and the region in the area of socioeconomic growth.

The evaluation of the number and types of schools functioning in small towns of the analysed voivodeships displays a strong relation to the rank of the towns within the hierarchy of the settlement network. However, the educational offer can also be modified by the rank-and-file initiatives of self-governed organisations or local communities. The examples are: Tylicz, Sucha Beskidzka and Nisko, which increased their educational offer and created new institutions (including the university level).

As it has been shown by the analysis of the educational services, the existence of a vocational higher schooling institution in a small town favourably affects the development of education, particularly the spectrum, quality and structure of teaching profiles. The local governments can achieve that by preparing the grounds for such services, organising meetings with interested higher schools as well as suggesting types of schools and profiles of education which should be implemented in a given community.

The main barrier in the development of educational services are negative changes in demography seriously affecting many small towns of the region. Additionally, small towns situated in the vicinity of large centres experience outflow of pupils into the schools in the big cities.

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