

*Identification of contemporary socio-economic structure and functional classification of small towns in Poland - in search of model solutions for towns of economic success*

*Scientific objective*

It has been 30 years since the introduction of a new social, economic and political system in Poland. Its aftermath embraced deep transformation of all sectors of the economy as well as social and cultural life. Dynamic changes covered entire territory of the country, including small urban centers, which are the research subject of the proposed project.

The fundamental scientific objective of the project is to identify and evaluate contemporary social and economic structure and functional classification of small towns in Poland. Recognizing these matters shall enable constructing modeled development directions for small centers representing various functional categories. This objective will be subordinated to other detailed goals within the project: 1) preparation of the *Atlas of Small Towns*, 2) social and economic analysis of small towns, 3) functional classification of small towns, 4) model of a town of economic success and 5) dissemination of knowledge on the functional structure and development of small towns.

*Description of the research*

The research will cover all small towns (below 20,000 inhabitants) in Poland. According to data from 2019, in Poland there are: 354 towns with less than 5,000 inhabitants, 184 with population between 5,000 to 10,000 and 184 with the number of residents between 10,000 to 20,000. In total, this gives the number of 722 small towns. The study will be based upon the most recent statistical data, while the reference point for the assessment of the direction and dynamics of changes over time will be the mid-1990s, i.e. the period in which the Central Statistical Office (CSO) started to collect systematic and available statistical data from the Regional Data Bank (RDB), later replaced by the Local Data Bank (LDB).

Project procedure assumes five research stages (tasks) that will allow to achieve all planned goals. There is one specific objective for each stage. The first stage will consist in the development of the Atlas of Small Towns, which in the form of maps, text and photographs will present the social, economic and cultural characteristics of small centres. The second stage will consist in the identification and evaluation of social and economic phenomena and processes taking place in the last three decades in small towns in Poland. In the third stage a method of functional classification of cities will be developed and in the fourth stage cities of economic success will be searched for and described. The final stage will consist in the dissemination of the project results.

*Significance and results of the project*

The proposed project is of considerable cognitive importance. It will result in a multi-layered, but at the same time synthetic recognition of contemporary social and economic processes in small urban centers in Poland, which will enable their comparison and evaluation, as well as identification of the most favorable development directions for the coming years. An important role will also be played by developing the method for analyzing the functional structure *per se* and coherent classification of all small towns in Poland. This in turn shall allow to confirm or reject proposed research hypotheses.

In its practical layer, undertaken subject matter will act as a reference basis for other detailed research on this issue, and results obtained will complement the knowledge to be potentially employed by representatives of other scientific disciplines. Publications, conferences and other forms of disseminating research results will also be of great significance to practitioners and planners involved in forming regional development policy. Identified good examples (so-called good practice) and model solutions for particular functional categories of towns will be disseminated.