A comparative study of local railway networks in Poland and the Czech Republic

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Abstract. Despite similar economic and legal conditions in Poland and the Czech Republic, the situation of local railway lines in each of these neighbouring countries is completely different. In Poland more than 90% of third-category and over 44% of second-category lines were closed down between 1989 and 2011, whereas the Czech Republic did away with only 14% of its regional lines during the same period. This means that two decades of transformation processes in Poland have resulted in a massive decline in the importance of the regional railway network, which is one of the most important symptoms of a rapid decline in the role of the railway transport system as a whole. By contrast, the Czech Republic still has one of the densest railway networks in Europe, thanks to the vital role of its local lines. The main reasons for this big difference between the two countries – and for the very minor importance of the regional railway service in Poland – are the lack of a realistic transport policy at the state level and the badly conducted restructuring of the national PKP railway company (PKP – Polskie Koleje Państwowe, Polish State Railways). Other reasons are the poor state of the railway infrastructure and also factors connected with the structure of settlement, as well as the historical development of the railways in certain parts of the country. These factors have merely reinforced an already vast bureaucracy and aggravated the wastage for which the PKP was known during the communist period. The main question that arises concerning the future is whether decision-makers in Poland at both national and regional levels – as well as those in the railway companies themselves – will be able to follow the Czech example, as this would appear to be the best solution for the greatest crisis the Polish railway system has seen in decades.

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1. Introduction. The concept of local railway lines and their role in the transport system

Local railway lines are those which do not belong to any network of national significance and which are characterised by relatively low technical parameters (a low minimum curve radius, a high maximum gradient and low quality of the track). In many European countries the responsibility for organising services on these lines lies with local governments – which is why national railway companies often play a less important role than regional railway operators, including those owned by private capital.

In Central Europe local railway lines were mostly built between about 1880 and 1914, once the main networks had been constructed. The main aim of local railways was to connect towns of local importance, industrial plants or tourist resorts with the main railway line. New local lines led to an increase in the density of the country’s entire transport system. One important benefit of these lines was that they boosted the profitability of the main lines to which they were connected (Kretz-Kettermann, 1989: 34). Local lines were usually constructed by companies formed by local authorities and industrialists, though with considerable financial aid from the state. This was made possible thanks to special local railway acts which were passed – for example, by special acts granted as tax exemptions – not only for those firms which were responsible for the construction of local railways, but also for those which were responsible for running them (Kupka, 1898). Up to the second half of the 20th century the local railways – which had a monopoly on passenger and goods transport – played a vital role in the economy of the regions and exerted a strong influence on their spatial organisation (Kretz-Kettermann, 1989: 69). They stimulated building and trade, increased the profitability of agriculture and enabled workers to live outside industrial centres (Koziarski, 1993a: 84).

The role of local railway lines underwent a complete change in the second half of the 20th century because of the rapid growth of motorisation. Individual road transport, which is much more flexible and offers ‘door-to-door’ journeys, has in many cases displaced local railways. Nowadays it is the car and not the railway that has a fundamental bearing on spatial organisation, not least because of its independence of the fixed route (Kretz-Kettermann, 1989: 70).

The political, economic and social transformation of Central-Eastern Europe has ushered in the rapid growth of private motorisation, which has been accompanied by a fall in the significance of public transport (Ivan, 2010: 394). This process has been intensified by residential and industrial suburbanisation (Ivan, 2010: 395). As a result, the role of local railway lines in the new economy and in spatial organisation is nowadays generally less important. According to Marada et al. (2006: 54) it is often limited to connecting mountainous areas (because of the higher reliability of railways in winter) and to providing services for tourists (because of the attractiveness of a particular line). Even if the present significance of local railways cannot be compared with their role at the beginning of the 20th century, local railways can nevertheless continue to be an important element of the transport system at the regional level. Their importance, however, differs significantly from one country to another.

2. The aim of the article and methods of research

The aim of this article is to compare the respective situations of local railway lines in Poland and the Czech Republic and to attempt to discover the reasons for any differences. In order to be able to discuss the present importance of these railway lines in both countries, we must first analyse their respective situations as they were in 1989.

The methods of research that were used comprised an analysis of railway timetables, cartographic and literature sources – including railway company documents and acts of parliament – and a basic quantitative analysis of the railway networks of Poland and the Czech Republic.

This article will discuss only normal-gauge railway lines on which there is (or has been) a regular passenger service on working days throughout the year. Lines which operate only at weekends or during the tourist season (e.g. the ‘coal trunk line’ between Herby Nowe and Inowrocław) or with the fact that they play a strategic role as important interregional connections (e.g. Pila – Tczew – as part of the former Prussian Eastern Railway service between Berlin and Gdańsk/Kaliningrad).

3. The delimitation of local railway lines in Poland

In order to delimit local railway lines in the Polish network, two criteria may be applied. The first is a technical one and relates to the division of Polish railway lines into four categories according to their technical characteristics. This is an official classification that can be found in a decree of the Ministry of Transport issued in 1998. Classic local lines are those belonging to the third category, whose official heading reads ‘of local importance’ (in Polish: ‘znaczenia miejscowego’ – Rozporządzenie Ministra Transportu i Gospodarki Morskiej…, 1998). The author of the present article, however, is of the opinion that second-category lines can also be classified as local railway lines – especially after 1989, which saw the beginning of a vast scaling-down of the railway network in Poland. The second criterion relates to the services on the line. According to this criterion, local railway lines are those on which only stopping trains (in Polish ‘pociąg osobowy’ – nowadays ‘pociąg rejsowy’) operate. In Poland neither criterion is very coherent (be it for 1989 or for 2011), as on the one hand quite a few second-category lines (and even some third-category lines) were used by fast trains – especially in 1989 – while on the other hand there are plenty of first-category or even trunk-line sections where only stopping trains are in service. This is connected with the fact that many of these important lines are vital only for freight trains (e.g. the ‘coal trunk line’ between Herby Nowe and Inowrocław) or with the fact that they play a strategic role as important interregional services between Berlin and Gdańsk/Kaliningrad).

4. Local railway lines in Poland at the end of the communist period and today

Local railway lines as defined by both aforementioned criteria were an important element of the Polish railway network until the beginning of the 1990s. They formed a dense system, particularly in the western and northern parts of the country, i.e. in those regions which were in the German partition up to 1918 (Fig. 1).

The situation at the present time is completely different. The development of the Polish national railway system since the beginning of the political, social and economic transformation of the country began in 1989 has been characterised by a massive scaling-down of the network. Between 1989 and 2011 more than 36% of the lines were taken out of passenger service.

Table 1. The length of railway lines of various types with passenger services in Poland in 1989 and 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of line</th>
<th>A – 1989</th>
<th>B – 2011</th>
<th>A – B 1989 to 2011 difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trunk lines</td>
<td>7,850</td>
<td>6,490</td>
<td>-17.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second-category lines with fast trains</td>
<td>1,165</td>
<td>2,119</td>
<td>+25.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second-category lines with stopping trains only</td>
<td>2,014</td>
<td>1,113</td>
<td>-44.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second-category lines with stopping trains only</td>
<td>5,535</td>
<td>3,064</td>
<td>-44.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third-category lines with fast trains</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>+30.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third-category lines with stopping trains only</td>
<td>3,716</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>-91.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20,941</td>
<td>13,302</td>
<td>-36.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Explanation: A – length (in km); B – A – 1989 to 2011 difference

The process of closing down those railway lines which were seen as ‘uneconomic’ had actually already begun during the communist period, but the larger-scale changes date back to the first years of the transformation. The intensity of this scaling down of the Polish railway network was particularly high in the years 1988–1992 and 1998–2002 (Komusiński, 2010). Local lines – especially those of the third category – were the first to be closed down for passenger service. More than 90% of them disappeared from the map of the Polish passenger railways between 1989 and 2011 (Table 1). As a result, not many local lines are now left. The regional differences that were so significant in 1989 are today very small.

However, in the western part of Poland the number and density of local lines is still slightly higher than in other regions (Fig. 2). The quantitative changes in Polish railway lines of different types between 1989 and 2011 are shown in Table 1.

5. The delimitation of local railway lines in the Czech Republic

An unequivocal delimitation of local railway lines in the Czech Republic is much easier because the regional lines are listed in a Government resolution of 1995 which excluded them from the network of nationally important railways (Usnesení vlády České republiky…, 1995). The list comprises 128 lines, which are in fact 133 sections (including all three Czech narrow-gauge lines and two lines which no longer existed in 1989) – thus 128 sections. However, the service criterion can also be applied to the Czech case, and so local lines are also those on which only stopping trains (in Czech ‘osobní vlak’) as well as fast-stopping trains (in Czech ‘spěšný vlak’) now run.

Both criteria are quite coherent, as all the ‘official’ regional lines are used only by stopping trains. However, there are some sections belonging to the national network where only stopping trains are in service.

6. Local railway lines in the Czech Republic at the end of the communist period and today

Local railway lines have always played a very important role in the Czech Republic (before 1993 in the Czech part of Czechoslovakia). The extremely high density of the Czech railway network (10.9 km/100 km² in 2011) is largely due to the great number of local lines which exist in all parts of the country. Although some sections were closed down after the end of the communist period, there is not much difference...
The Czech railway network in 1989

Explanation: A – of national importance on which there is a fast train service during the whole year; B – of national importance on which there is a stopping train service only; C – regional lines (stopping trains only)

Source: Compiled by the author on the basis of Atlas drah České republiky, 2006 and Jízdní řád ČSD 1989‒1990

Fig. 3.

The Czech railway network in 2011

Explanation: A – of national importance on which there is a fast train service during the whole year; B – of national importance on which there is a stopping train service only; C – regional lines (stopping trains only)

Source: Compiled by the author on the basis of Atlas drah České republiky, 2006 and Jízdní řád ČSD 1989‒1990

Fig. 4.

Table 2. The length of railway lines of various types with passenger services in the Czech Republic in 1989 and 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of line</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lines of national importance with fast trains</td>
<td>4,999</td>
<td>3,954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lines of national importance with stopping trains only</td>
<td>1,041</td>
<td>1,947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional lines (with stopping trains only)</td>
<td>3,153</td>
<td>2,691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9,193</td>
<td>8,592</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Explanation: A – length (in km); B – B – 1989 to 2011 difference

Source: Compiled by the author on the basis of Jízdní řád 1989‒1990 & Usnesení vlády České republiky..., 1995

7. Local railways in the Polish and Czech networks – a comparison

In Poland local railway lines now play hardly any part in the country’s transport system. More than 90% of sections of local importance (third-category lines) were closed down for passenger traffic between 1989 and 2011. Those which are still in operation – together with some second-category lines and degraded main connections – are in fact a rather unimportant and neglected element of the Polish railway network. After 1989 many first-category lines and even trunk lines (which used to play an important role as inter-regional connections) were degraded and are now de facto local lines (e.g. Kędzierzyn Koźle – Nysa and Leszno – Głogów). Moreover, the number of trains is usually smaller and journey times are usually longer than they were in 1989. Komusiński (2010: 42–44) has examined this problem on the example of eight railway lines, two of which are second-category lines and three of which are lines with stopping trains only. Between 1988 and 2008 on two lines with stopping trains only the number of trains decreased by 50–57%, while only one line maintained the frequency it had had in 1988. The average speed of trains decreased on one line by 18%, while it increased by 12% and 19% on two other lines. However, Komusiński (2010: 46) stresses the fact that these speeds of about 50 km/h at the very most (and on some lines 30 km/h or even less) cannot be said to come up to passengers’ expectations. This is a reflection of the poor state of the railway infrastructure and is also characteristic of many main lines. The percentage share of local lines in the total length of the railway networks of Poland and the Czech Republic are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. The percentage share of local lines in the total length of the railway networks of Poland and the Czech Republic in 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of line</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Third-category (PL)/Regional lines (CZ) with stopping trains only</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>31.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All third-category (PL)/Regional lines (CZ)</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>31.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third- and second-category (PL)/Regional lines (CZ) with stopping trains only</td>
<td>26.90</td>
<td>31.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Explanation: A – percentage share in the total length of the railway network; a – Poland; b – Czech Republic

The table shows that all the Polish third-category lines, together with the second-category lines where only stopping trains are in service, make up just 26.9% of the total length of the network that is available for passenger services; ‘real’ local lines (i.e. those of the third category) account for only 3.9%, while third-category lines used only by stopping trains account for just 2.5%. Although local differences in the distribution of these lines are not very significant, the western and northern parts of Poland continue to have slightly denser networks. These, however, are now mostly isolated sections. More extensive systems of local lines – albeit degraded main lines – are located south of Gdański (Chojnice, Wierzuchin, Grudziądz), in the vicinity of Poznań and in Lower Silesia.

In the Czech Republic, by contrast, the decrease in the length of local railway lines between 1989 and 2011 was very small and was limited to certain sections of very low importance. The regional lines are still a vital element of the railway system; they make up 31.3% of the total length of the Czech railway network, which is not much less than the 34.3% that it was in 1989. It should be stressed that – unlike in Poland – the standard of service on these lines is usually comparable with that of 1989, owing to similar levels of mechanisation.

Poland – the standard of service on these lines is usually comparable with that of 1989, owing to similar levels of mechanisation. The reduction in Poland was rather dramatic – from 465.9 million in 1995 to 261.3 million in 2010 (i.e. 43.9%). A fall in the number of rail passengers in the 1990s and 2000s was also characteristic for the Czech Republic, but the scale was considerably smaller – 27.4%. What is more, a stabilisation of the number of passengers can be seen after 2005. This would seem to indicate that over recent years the number of rail passengers, especially those using rail transport frequently (i.e. commuters) – has levelled off and is not likely to undergo significant changes.

Probably the best illustration of the different role played by the railways of both countries in the transport of passengers is a comparison of their respective percentage shares in passenger-kilometres. While in 1995 the Polish State Railways transported 15.5% of inland passengers, this share later decreased to 14.8% in 2000, 13.4% in 2005 and 12.1% in 2010. In other words, the impact of rail on the Polish transport system can be described as falling far short of its potential. In the Czech Republic the fall was less significant – from 10.8% in 1995 to 7.1% in 2008. This shows that the Czech railways too have suffered somewhat as a result of the increasing number of private cars, though to a much lesser extent. Indeed, by contrast with Poland, the main losers in the competition with individual road transport have been public bus services and not the railways (Benes et al., 2008: 39).

The considerable difference in the importance of local railway lines in Poland and in the Czech Republic is just one aspect of the fundamentally different approach to rail transport in each country. Although the railways still played an important role in the transport systems of both countries at the end of the communist period, the first decade of free market economics brought about a complete change. Figures 5–7 show the most important indicators for Poland and the Czech Republic for the period 1995–2008/2010: the total length of the railway networks, the number of passengers transported and the percentage share of rail transport in total inland passenger-kilometres.

Fig. 5 shows that the total length of the railway network in Poland decreased between 1995 and 2010 from 23,986 km to 20,228 km (i.e. by 15.7%), whereas it increased from 9,430 km to 9,568 km in the Czech Republic (i.e. by 1.5%). The data refers to the total length of the network, i.e. also to lines with freight trains only.

What is much more interesting from the point of view of passenger transport analysis, however, is a comparison of the numbers of passengers transported by rail in Poland and in the Czech Republic (Fig. 6). The decrease in Poland was rather dramatic – from 465.9 million in 1995 to 261.3 million in 2010 (i.e. 43.9%). A fall in the number of rail passengers in the 1990s and 2000s was also characteristic for the Czech Republic, but the scale was considerably smaller – 27.4%. What is more, a stabilisation of the number of passengers can be seen after 2005. This would seem to indicate that over recent years the number of rail passengers, especially those using rail transport frequently (i.e. commuters) – has levelled off and is not likely to undergo significant changes.

Probably the best illustration of the different role played by the railways of both countries in the transport of passengers is a comparison of their respective percentage shares in passenger-kilometres. While in 1995 the Polish State Railways transported 15.5% of inland passengers, this share later decreased to a mere 6.2% in just 13 years. In other words, the present impact of rail on the Polish transport system can be described as falling far short of its potential. In the Czech Republic the fall was less significant – from 10.8% in 1995 to 7.1% in 2008. This shows that the Czech railways too have suffered somewhat as a result of the increasing number of private cars, though to a much lesser extent. Indeed, by contrast with Poland, the main losers in the competition with individual road transport have been public bus services and not the railways (Benes et al., 2008: 39).

8. The reasons for the differences

The reasons for the insignificant role of local railway lines in Poland are to a large extent synonymous with the causes of the general crisis in the national railway system, the symptoms of which are listed above. It is the view of the author of the present article that the condition of local railways can to a certain extent be seen as being one of the indicators of the general state of a country’s entire railway transport system. The main lines can serve as an indicator, as they are irrevocably given much more attention by the authorities and, as a result, are often the only railways that are in relatively good condition. A good example of a country where the role of regional and local railway services is rather insignificant while at the same time many new high speed lines are being built is Spain (or, in part, France). The reasons for the general decline of the railways in Poland have been listed in many publications, e.g. by Taylor (2007) and Koziarski (1993b, 1995). Taylor (2007) divides them into two categories: external, i.e. those inherent in the State, and internal ones, i.e. those inherent in the Polish State Railways and its present successors. Among the former the most important factor is the railway transport policy of the State, which Taylor describes as being inherently faulty, deficient and inconsistent (Taylor, 2007: 183). One of the most significant results of this policy is the very bad financial situation of Polish railways (Taylor, 2007: 183–185). This permanent financial crisis has had a bearing on the condition of rolling stock and, in particular, infrastructure, whose condition – in the present author’s opinion – can only be described as disastrous. In his book on the railway system of the industrial urban agglomerations of the southern macro-region of Poland – written at the end of the communist period – Koziarski (1989: 39) sees the poor state of the infrastructure as being one of the most important reasons for the closing down of local railway lines in this part of Poland. The areas of neglect listed by Koziarski – the poor condition of the track, points, signal systems and also the rolling stock – have plagued local rail connections in all regions of Poland since the 1980s or even earlier. Koziarski (1993b: 177) writes that many local lines remained in service until the condition of the infrastructure finally made it impossible for it to be used anymore. The impossibility of the present article is of the opinion that the closing down of passenger services on several ‘uneconomic’ Polish railway lines bears all the hallmarks of a vicious circle. The low number of passengers results in low...
profitability, which in turn leads to the closure of the service. The result has been a constant decrease in the number of passengers. This process – which is peculiar not only to Poland – is described in many publications (e.g. Marada, Kveton 2010: 22). The restructuring process of the PKP national railway company that was begun in 2000 – and in particular the saddling of the regional governments (wojewózships) with responsibility for the Przewozy Regionalne company (regional railway service) in 2009 – have multiplied the problems mentioned above and have exacerbated chaos on the Polish railways. Several companies are active in the sector: apart from the biggest railway company – Przewozy Regionalne – which has 16 owners (i.e. the voivodeships), there are also firms which operate only in one voivodship (Arriva RP in the Kujawsko-Pomorskie voivodeship) and regional railway companies created by regional authorities in the Mazowieckie, Śląskie, Dolnośląskie, and Wielkopolskie voivodeships. Paradoxically, this rather high level of liberalisation has often brought with it no improvement in standards of service – nor even better management – because the decisions of local governments to create their own railway companies are frequently purely political and the new companies quite simply inherit or imitate the bureaucratic structures of the PKP and the Przewozy Regionalne companies. The reasons for the decline of Polish railways, Taylor (2007) singles out disastrous management, which manifests itself in wastage and a lack of ideas for any improvement (Taylor, 2007: 190). The author of the present article thinks that other forms of management that ought to be emphasised are the enormous bureaucracy and unjustifiable proliferation of employees both in the PKP and in its successor company Przewozy Regionalne (or regional railway service). It is also his opinion that one of the most disastrous aspects of this wastage with respect to local railways was the rolling-stock policy of the PKP up to the beginning of the 21st century. During the communist period and in the 1990s the Polish State Railways used heavy diesel locomotives (e.g. class SU 45 or ST 43) with one or two carriages – instead of light railcars – even on trunk lines. As a result, many an important town either had no railway station at all, or the station was very far away from the town centre (Lijewski, 1986: 56). It was above all in the central and eastern parts of Poland (e.g. the former regional (Przewozy Regionalne) policy was that the location of many towns with regard to the railway network was rather unfavourable, e.g. Zamość and Łomża (which were voivodeships or county towns between 1975 and 1998). Lijewski (1985: 20) stresses that this factor, combined with the low density of the railway network, the low frequency of trains and a lack of coordination between timetables was responsible for the minor role played by rail transport in journeys to county towns, e.g. the capitals of the Sowałskie, Włocławskie and Sieradzkie voiwodeships (according to the former administrative division of Poland into 49 voivodeships between 1975 and 1999).

The author of the present article is also of the opinion that one factor which has favoured the rapid decline in the role played by rail transport in Poland, especially after 1989 – is the scattered distribution of settlement and workplaces in the country. The political, social and economic transformations begun in the 1990s have increased this scattering, which is combined with the processes of suburbanisation and the decline of traditional heavy industry. This has usually led to a lengthening of the walking distance to the nearest railway station, which is one of the most important factors taken into consideration when deciding on the use of public transport (Bittner et al., 2006: 58) think that in coming decades much of the former railway network will probably disappear due to commuting (Ivan, 2010: 397, 409). As a result, it has no longer been possible – or even relatively simple – to maintain the important role of the railways as a means of transport used by commuters, especially given the extremely rapid growth of motorisation and the equal rapid development of private bus companies in many parts of the country.

The reasons for the totally different situation of local railways in the Czech Republic are to a certain extent the exact opposite of the circumstances of the development of railways in Poland. The author of the present article is of the opinion that the most important factors which enabled the Czechs to maintain a very dense local railway network were the country’s transport policy and the management policies of Czech State Railways (CD), as well as the fact that the historical and geographical factors which affected the development of the railways in the Russian partition of Poland do not apply (to any significant extent, at least) in the case of the Czech Republic.

The Czech State transport policy with respect to the railways (also at a local level) includes concrete items such as the introduction of lines on which trains should run at regular intervals and the integration of rail and road transport in the regions by means of a common fare system (Dopravní politika České republiky: 2005). Although – as in Poland – there is a clear distinction between the railway company (PKP) and the state company (PKP Przedsiębiorstwo Przewozy Regionalne) it now lies with the governments of the regions (in Czech kraje) this does not on the whole lead to disputes relating to competence and financial problems, as the authorities are aware of the fact that a stable offer regarding public transport in the regions must be maintained.

The second important reason for the success of local railways in the Czech Republic is the management policy of the passenger-train operator CD. Paradoxically, the level of liberalisation of the railway market in the Czech Republic is much lower than in Poland, as only five regional railways (of a total length of 130 km) are run by companies other than Czech State Railways. However, the management policies with regard to rail transport have been successful, the prime example being a proper rolling-stock policy that has resulted in investments in rail cars, which have a lower fuel consumption, greater acceleration and a much less destructive influence on the environment. The prime example of this is the České dráhy, the division of the Czech State Railways (ČSD) which is responsible for the operation of the network in the Czech Republic. The train company operates on the basis of a rolling-stock policy which has been set since 1984 – have rescued literally hundreds of kilometres of local railways (Bittner et al., 2006). The first important reason for the success of Czech local railways is the fact that the infrastructure is still relatively unaltered compared to the situation in Poland. The network was constructed after the Second World War and was considered at the time to be well designed for the growth of motorisation and a concomitant fall in the use of all public transport – a characteristic feature of the transformation process (Ivan, 2010: 394). However, it should be stressed that the considerable number of trains – on even the local lines – is a factor that encourages a considerable number of passengers to use rail transport for their journeys to work and to school. An analogous conclusion cannot be drawn in the case of public bus transport (Marada, Kveton, 2010: 23).

The arguments listed above do not mean that no discussions about the possible closure of passenger services on some local lines even in the Czech Republic (Zlamský, 2012). Serious political decisions about the possible closure of passenger services on some local lines even in the Czech Republic (Zlamský, 2012). Serious political decisions about the possible closure of passenger services on some local lines even in the Czech Republic (Zlamský, 2012). Serious political decisions about the possible closure of passenger services on some local lines even in the Czech Republic (Zlamský, 2012). Serious political decisions about the possible closure of passenger services on some local lines even in the Czech Republic (Zlamský, 2012).
passengers on Slovak railways that became evident in railway system in Slovakia consists of isolated lines on
ued, though on a much smaller scale. Today the local
length of 396 km (about 11% of the entire Slovak net-
importance of local railway lines in Poland differs
of the Sudety Mountains) with main railway lines and
fully from that in the Czech Republic and this is a good reflection of the general condition of rail transport length in the country. Owing to many exter-
ail and internal factors, Polish local lines – like the whole Polish railway system – have not adjusted to the new circumstances of the free market after 1989. The bad management practices of the PKP and the shortcomings of the communist period have not been eliminated – and so the railways have not been able to compete on the transport market. The process of liberalisation has to date not brought any substantial improvement to the local lines sector. In the Czech Republic, however, a large number of lines on transport on the part of the authorities, together with much more efficient management (even during the communist period), has made it possible to maintain most of the local railway lines as an important element of the public transport system. Although the role of the railways in the Czech transport system has also decreased after 1989, recent years have seen a level-
off the number of passengers and the number of connections in operation. This should bring hope that discussions about the future of local lines – which also take place in the Czech Republic – will not result in decisions to reduce or close passenger services – at least not on any significant scale.

The general decline of Polish railways – and not only the railway system in general but also the rolling stock, which were antiquated and whose timetables no longer met passen-
ner's expectations, could not compete with individual
racing off of the number of passengers and the number of passengers and the
transport policy. It is very difficult to say whether any direct im-
other transport began to displace rail transport as
rations are usually sections of main rail connections
connection. This should bring hope that discussions about the future of local lines – which also take place in the Czech Republic – will not result in decisions to reduce or close passenger services – at least not on any significant scale.

One cannot but wonder whether some good
czech solutions at least might not serve as an exam-
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10. Conclusions

Despite many similarities in the present socio-eco-
the history of the two countries – especially over the last 50 years – the
importance of local railway lines in Poland differs

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