

Development of new towns in Poland. A case study of local labor markets

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Abstract. The article attempts to assess the effect that obtaining urban status has on changes in the local labor markets of new towns. The analysis concerned those towns that were granted urban status for the first time between 1990 (the beginning of the transition to a market economy) and 2020. The analysis and research results did not show any significant correlation between the obtaining of urban status and improving labor market conditions. Despite the increase in entrepreneurship and the greater mobility of incoming employees, the localities did not become more attractive locations for medium-sized and large enterprises. Work-related population flows did not undergo major transformations and the range of influence of local labor markets was still mainly limited to the new towns' own gminas, which together with the directly neighboring gminas formed functional urban areas that nonetheless rarely exceeded the boundaries of the powiat.

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1. Introduction	130
2. Materials and methods	130
3. Analysis and results	131
4. Summary	137
Notes	137
References	138

1. Introduction

The concept of urbanity provides certain meanings and contents that, depending on experiences and places, can be understood in various ways. This is confirmed by the different definitions in force in various countries to define settlement units as “urban” (United Nations, 2018). According to Forstall and Chan (2015: 858) in Poland “urban units are incorporated municipalities”; more precisely, they constitute sole municipalities (urban gminas) and towns with defined boundaries, as opposed to rural areas (urban–rural gminas). However, national legislation lacks clearly defined requirements for localities applying for status of the town. This was pointed out by Szmytkie and Krzysztofik (2011), who, on the basis of issued decisions, defined groups of criteria and factors conducive to obtaining urban status. The only legal acts relating to this procedure are the *Act of 8th March 1990 on local self-government* and *“the Regulation of the Council of Ministers of 9 August 2001 on the procedure to be followed when submitting applications regarding [...] granting municipal status or status of a town, [...] and documents required in these matters.* The first one states that: “granting a gmina or locality urban status, determining its boundaries and changing them are made in a way that takes into account the social and technical infrastructure as well as the urban layout and the character of buildings”. On the other hand, the regulation emphasizes that the application should contain: basic statistical data on population number and land area, results of consultations with residents, broken down by gmina and town area, historical outline, information on architectural, cultural and religious monuments, the character and technical condition of buildings, and information on the employment structure in the gmina.

The article attempts to assess the effects of obtaining urban status on changes that have occurred in the local labor markets of new towns. The analysis concerned those towns that were granted urban status for the first time between 1990 (the beginning of the transition to a market economy) and 2020. Although a particular argument for granting status of the town is its urban origin, in the mentioned period, out of one hundred and twenty mostly restituted towns, twenty-one centers were becoming towns for the first time. Thus, they constitute a significant group that should be analyzed in detail, especially in terms of the causes and motivations behind local authorities and communities making efforts to change their status to urban for the first

time in the history of their locality. Small towns in Poland have been a subject of wide interest, as evidenced by the overview provided by Kwiatek-Sołtys (2011), especially in terms of their functions and level of socio-economic development. In Polish geographic literature since 1990, new towns have been examined by, inter alia, Szymańska (1993), Drobek (2002), Krzysztofik (2006), Sokołowski (2008, 2014) and Konecka-Szydłowska (2011, 2012). In most cases, the works analyzed centers in terms of various socio-economic criteria, indirectly constituting attempts to verify the legitimacy of the status granted. This article, by contrast, aims to take into account the type and magnitude of changes that have been taking place in new towns since they obtained urban status. It is also important to what extent the expectations of local stakeholder groups were reflected in the reality of the functioning of their new town and thus what the consequences of the decision were. For this purpose, the actual changes that have taken place in the socio-economic space of a town should be identified. Despite the scope of the research being limited to changes in indicators relating to local labor markets, the results of the analyses may also be useful to representatives of local self-governments that consider applying for urban status in the future.

2. Materials and methods

For new towns in Poland that in the last thirty years have obtained urban status for the first time, two variables were calculated based on data from Statistics Poland. The first is percentage changes in the number of natural persons conducting economic activity and the second is percentage changes in the number of employed, excluding micro-enterprises. The year 2019 (being the last year for which data are available) and the year in which the town obtained urban status (or the next year for which data were available) were selected as time moments. In the following part, the values of two types of indicators were determined based on the results of research by Statistics Poland on commuting in 2006, 2011 and 2016. The first, referring to work-related population flows, was calculated by dividing the number of incoming commuters by the number of outgoing commuters for new towns. On the other hand, the second, which describes the range of influence of new towns as supra-communal labor markets, was determined as the percentage share of incoming commuters from external gminas in the total number of incoming commuters to new towns. The remaining part of the analysis concerned

identifying changes in commuting direction and range of influence of the labor markets of the new towns.

3. Analysis and results

The discussed group of towns consists of centers that are the seats of urban-rural communes, with the exception of the urban commune of Krynica Morska (in the years 1993–2013, another new town, Czarna Woda was also an urban commune). These are small towns with fewer than 20,000 inhabitants – but in most cases fewer than 5,000. At the end of 2019, the largest towns were Siechnice, Sędziszów and Borne Sulinowo (8,320, 6,408 and 5,099 people, respectively), and the smallest were Krynica Morska, Morawica and Sanniki (all below 2,000 people). Local labor markets in new towns are characterized by a predominance of micro-enterprises employing fewer than ten persons and small enterprises of 10 to 49 employees. According to data from Statistics Poland, the presence of medium-sized enterprises in 2019 was recorded in 18 out of the 21 centers, the exceptions being the towns of Krynica Morska, Czarna Woda and Stepnica. The number of companies belonging to this size class was largest in Siechnice (eight), and smallest in the towns of Gliniojeck, Halinów, Radłów and Sanniki (one each). On the other hand, large enterprises of 250 to 999 employees appeared only in two centers – Siechnice and Morawica (one each). The largest companies (employing 1,000 or more) were recorded only in the towns of Sędziszów and Zwierzyniec; they were, respectively, the boiler factory “SEFAKO” and the furniture manufacturer “JOBON”.

Urban status offers some development opportunities, including the use of JESSICA urban development funds. Moreover, attractiveness as a location for large-format stores, petrol stations and investment zones also increases. At the same time, new towns with fewer than 5,000 residents can still use Rural Development Programme funds, and teachers retain the rural allowance. Furthermore, no measurable benefits can be predicted in advance, although the likelihood of new investments and external capital is potentially higher in a newly created town where the value of land and real estate also has the potential to increase. However, an important factor is the location and accessibility of communication, human resources and the involvement of local authorities, which affect the overall investment climate and the possibilities of attracting investors. Despite difficulties in defining the tangible benefits of obtaining urban status, in

places where the possibility of such a change is being considered, numerous expectations and arguments of support for this initiative are repeated. As an example, there are the statements of the burgomasters of the four towns established in 2017–2018, which were published in the local media¹. According to them, status of the town brings: increased prestige (Tułowice), a next stage in development (Sanniki), a “strengthened position” of the locality itself and its entire gmina (Morawica), and a reason for pride and satisfaction (Mielno). The new towns also count on: attracting investors and, thus, additional budget revenues and new jobs; being inhabited by young people and people returning from abroad; additional funds for the revitalization of towns and wider access to EU funds; setting up a police station; lower probability of the gmina joining the neighboring provincial capital; an increase in land and real-estate values; and additional promotion and the creation of a place brand. In the case of Mielno, which is a seaside resort, a negative effect was also mentioned, namely the loss of access to a real-estate tax exemption for running a business that rents up to five guest rooms to tourists.

As the Statistics Poland data on the number of employed do not include the smallest enterprises (up to five people for 1995–1998 and up to nine in subsequent years), the detailed analysis of the labor market variables also included the number of natural persons conducting economic activity (Table 1). In this way, for towns in Poland that in the last thirty years obtained urban status for the first time, percentage increases were calculated between 2019 (the last year with available data) and the year in which the town obtained urban status (or the next year for which the data were available).

In all of the analyzed centers except Szepletowo, Tychowo and Mrozy, there were percentage increases in the number of natural persons conducting economic activity, which attests to an increase in the level of entrepreneurship among their inhabitants. There were unfavorable numbers of employed persons (except in micro-enterprises) in 2019 compared to the numbers for the years immediately after obtaining urban status in 14 out of 20 centers, which is related to the lack of medium and large enterprises that would generate additional jobs on local labor markets. The results allowed five groups of towns to be distinguished (Fig. 1). The first group, characterized by over 100% increases in the value of both variables, included Siechnice (Dolnośląskie Voivodship) and Zwierzyniec (Lubelskie Voivodship). They are characterized by the most favorable changes in a longer period of time. (They obtained urban status in 1997 and 1990,

Table 1. Percentage changes of labor market variables in new towns

New town	Year of obtaining urban status	Change in population size [%]	Change in the number of natural persons conducting economic activity [%]	Change in the number of employed except in microenterprises ^a [%]
Golczewo	1990	-2.1	119.0	-30.9
Sędziszów	1990	-6.6	213.9	-4.2
Zwierzyniec	1990	-16.3	130.6	129.4
Krynica Morska	1991	0.9	39.3	-39.8
Czarna Woda	1993	-12.8	175.8	-11.9
Borne Sulinowo	1993	162.6	144.6	-35.2
Gliniojeck	1993	-2.5	104.9	-2.7
Siechnice	1997	105.2	274.7	241.9
Świątniki Górne	1997	19.7	98.7	-0.4
Halinów	2001	19.9	42.3	4.9
Olszyna	2005	-8.9	16.0	-36.3
Radłów	2010	1.0	29.9	-7.4
Szepietowo	2010	-6.5	-2.8	6.0
Tychowo	2010	0.4	-6.5	12.8
Gościno	2011	-2.3	2.3	-7.4
Mrozy	2014	1.7	-3.7	N/A
Stepnica	2014	1.3	8.9	-12.0
Mielno	2017	-2.9	4.5	20.7
Morawica	2017	-0.8	8.6	3.1
Sanniki	2018	-1.7	4.6	-3.3
Tułowice	2018	0.7	3.0	-4.5

Source: ^a Excluding companies of natural persons employing up to 5 persons (in 1995–1998); excluding companies of natural persons conducting economic activity employing up to 9 persons (in 1999); excluding economic entities employing up to 9 persons (since 2000). Source: own elaboration based on data from Statistics Poland

respectively.) The new towns, which also recorded increases in the value of both variables, but of less than 100%, are Halinów (Mazowieckie Voivodship), Mielno (Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship) and Morawica (Świętokrzyskie Voivodship). The last two centers were granted urban status in 2017, so the time frame in their case is very limited. The next two groups recorded an increase in the number of natural persons conducting economic activity and a decrease in the number of employed except in micro-enterprises. The greatest negative values, exceeding -30%, occurred in the towns of northern and western Poland (Krynica Morska, Olszyna, Borne Sulinowo and Golczewo). The last group was characterized by decreases in the number of natural persons conducting economic activity.

According to the definition included in the *Job Training Partnership Act* (US General Accounting Office, 1985: 13), the labor market area is “an economically integrated geographic area within which individuals can reside and find employment within a reasonable distance or can readily change

employment without changing their place of residence”. In simple terms, the local labor market is “an area in which the travel time to work is so short that it does not constitute a significant barrier to employment” (Góra & Sztanderska, 2006: 6). Thus, an important element of the diagnosis of local labor markets is the analysis of work-related population flows. Commuting to work can be simply defined as the circular migration of people between places of residence and places of work. Before 1990, they were the subject of numerous general studies in Poland (Lijewski, 1967; Gawryszewski, 1974; Kitowski, 1988) as well as detailed publications on both a regional and a national level. In the post-communist period, due to the lack of statistical data, the number of publications has significantly decreased. Only the availability of national-scale data for 2006 from Statistics Poland (then the Central Statistical Office) (Kruszka, 2010) contributed to the resumption of this issue (Śleszyński, 2012). Commuting to work is conditioned by groups of factors differentiating this type of flows, such as population, economic

or spatial. The first group includes, among others, population broken down by age groups (especially the percentage of adults in the mobile working age below 45); the level of education and labor demand of people with certain qualifications, gender, and having children (especially in the case of women). Economic factors are related to the level of wealth of the inhabitants and the financial attractiveness and profitability of jobs available on the market. The last group concerns both the size and hierarchy of

localities in the settlement network, as well as the spatial and transport accessibility of the workplace in relation to the place of residence.

Due to the lack of detailed qualitative research concerning, among others, reasons for taking up a job outside the usual environment, the only uniform source in terms of methodology are the quantitative data of the Central Statistical Office / Statistics Poland from 2006, 2011 and 2016. They were used to determine two types of indicators

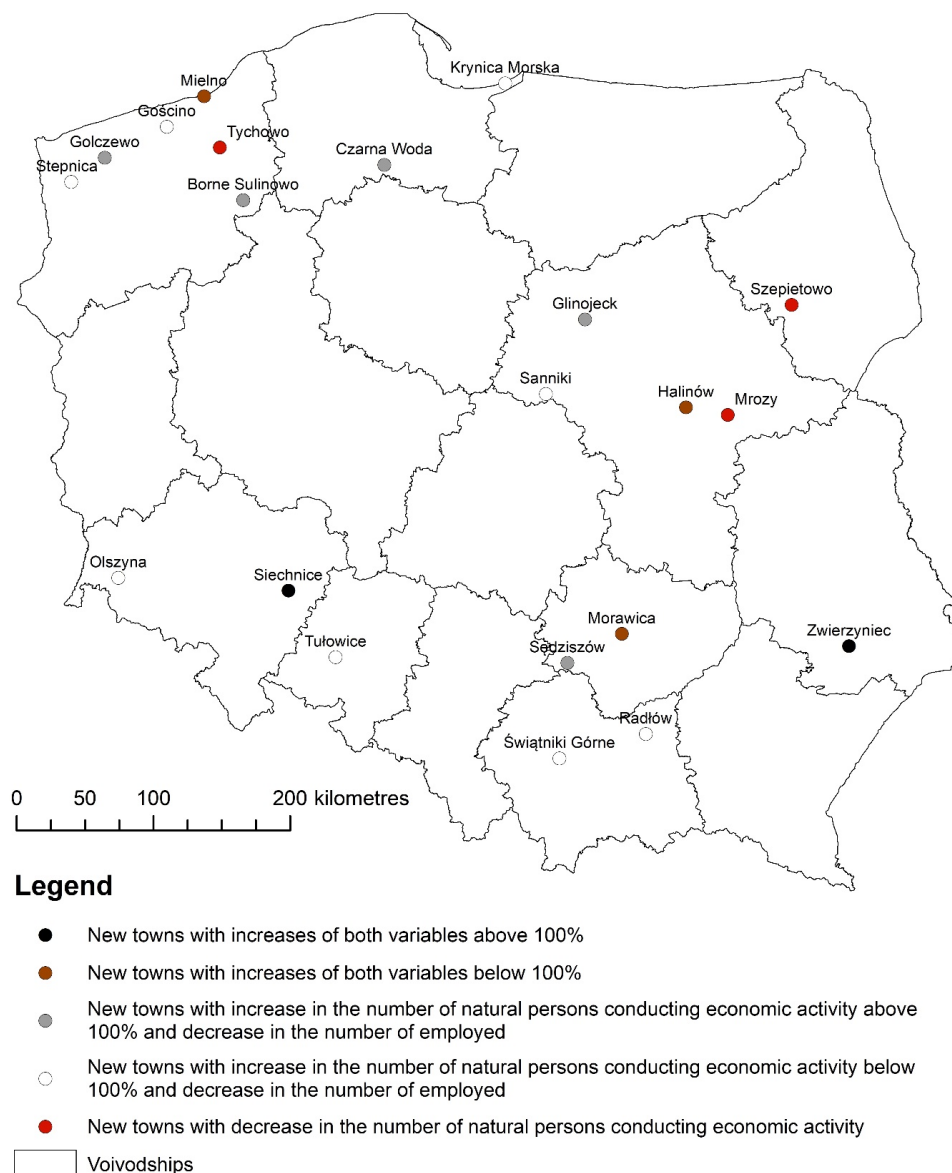


Fig. 1. Distribution of new towns in Poland and their classification according to percentage changes in labor market variables

Source: Own elaboration

for new towns and are presented below (Table 2). The first, referring to the work-related population flows, was calculated by dividing the number of incoming commuters in relation to the number of outgoing commuters from new towns. On the other hand, the second one describing the range of influence of new towns as supra-communal labor markets was determined as the number of incoming commuters from the outside of new towns' gminas as a percentage of the total number of incoming commuters to new towns.

Taking into account the limited scope and relatively small amount of available data on commuting (since 1990, the first values that have been determined by the Central Statistical Office were for 2006 and the last for 2016), the changes in indicators were analyzed in relation to localities that obtained urban status in 2005–14. Thus, there was no way for the results to explain the results of the administrative reform of 1999 nor Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004. In the case of Olszyna, the total number of incoming commuters (281 people) in 2006 had decreased to 100 people by 2011, which can be associated with the effects of the economic crisis between 2008 and 2009 and its echo in subsequent years. In the group of towns that obtained the status after 2006, there was a slight decrease in the value of work-related population flow indicators in 2016 compared to 2011 in all centers except for Gościno (i.e., in Radłów, Szepietowo, Tychowo). Despite the decrease in the number of incoming commuters in relation to the number of outgoing commuters that took place in 2011–16 in most centers, there was also an increase in the share of incoming commuters from external gminas recorded in all centers. Mrozy (the value of the indicator of work-related population flows was 0.28), Radłów (0.31)

and Halinów (0.35), all of which are located in the vicinity of major cities (Warsaw and Tarnów), had a significant advantage of outgoing over incoming commuters in 2016. In turn, the highest values of the indicator, showing a significant advantage for incoming over outgoing commuters in 2016, were recorded in the towns of Stepnica (2.05) and Szepietowo (1.92). There are numerous industrial and service plants that in Stepnica include wood-processing plants and furniture production and in Szepietowo include enterprises dealing with the production of aggregates, concrete elements or plastic packaging.

As a case study, the detailed analysis covered Olszyna, Radłów, Tychowo and Gościno, which were granted urban status in 2005, 2010, 2010 and 2011, respectively. In this way, it was possible to distinguish and compare two periods of time based on the available data. The analysis concerned the work-related population flows from outside the borders of new towns that were one-sided (incoming commuters) and involving at least ten people. Most of the arrivals to work in 2016 came from the same directions as in previous years (2006 or 2011). Incoming commuters came from rural areas or neighboring gminas within the powiat of the new town. Only in a few cases did these areas lie in other neighboring powiats directly bordering the gminas of the new town. Such exceptions were the urban–rural gmina of Gryfów Śląski in the Lwówecki powiat adjacent to the urban–rural gmina of Olszyna and the rural gmina of Grzmiąca in the Szczecinecki powiat adjacent to the urban–rural gmina of Tychowo. For the town of Olszyna (Fig. 2), comparing 2006 with 2016, there was a change in the commuting from two areas. In 2016, incoming commuters from the rural part of the Nowogrodziec gmina did not exceed ten people (the same as was

Table 2. Values of labor market indicators in new towns

New town	Year of obtaining urban status	Work-related population flows indicator			Indicator of range of new towns as supra-communal labor markets [%]		
		2006	2011	2016	2006	2011	2016
Olszyna	2005	1.08	0.30	0.47	74	65	79
Radłów	2010	-	0.38	0.31	-	29	51
Szepietowo	2010	-	2.07	1.92	-	58	73
Tychowo	2010	-	0.82	0.73	-	28	32
Gościno	2011	-	0.50	0.73	-	45	63
Mrozy	2014	-	-	0.28	-	-	75
Stepnica	2014	-	-	2.05	-	-	45

Source: own elaboration based on data from Statistics Poland

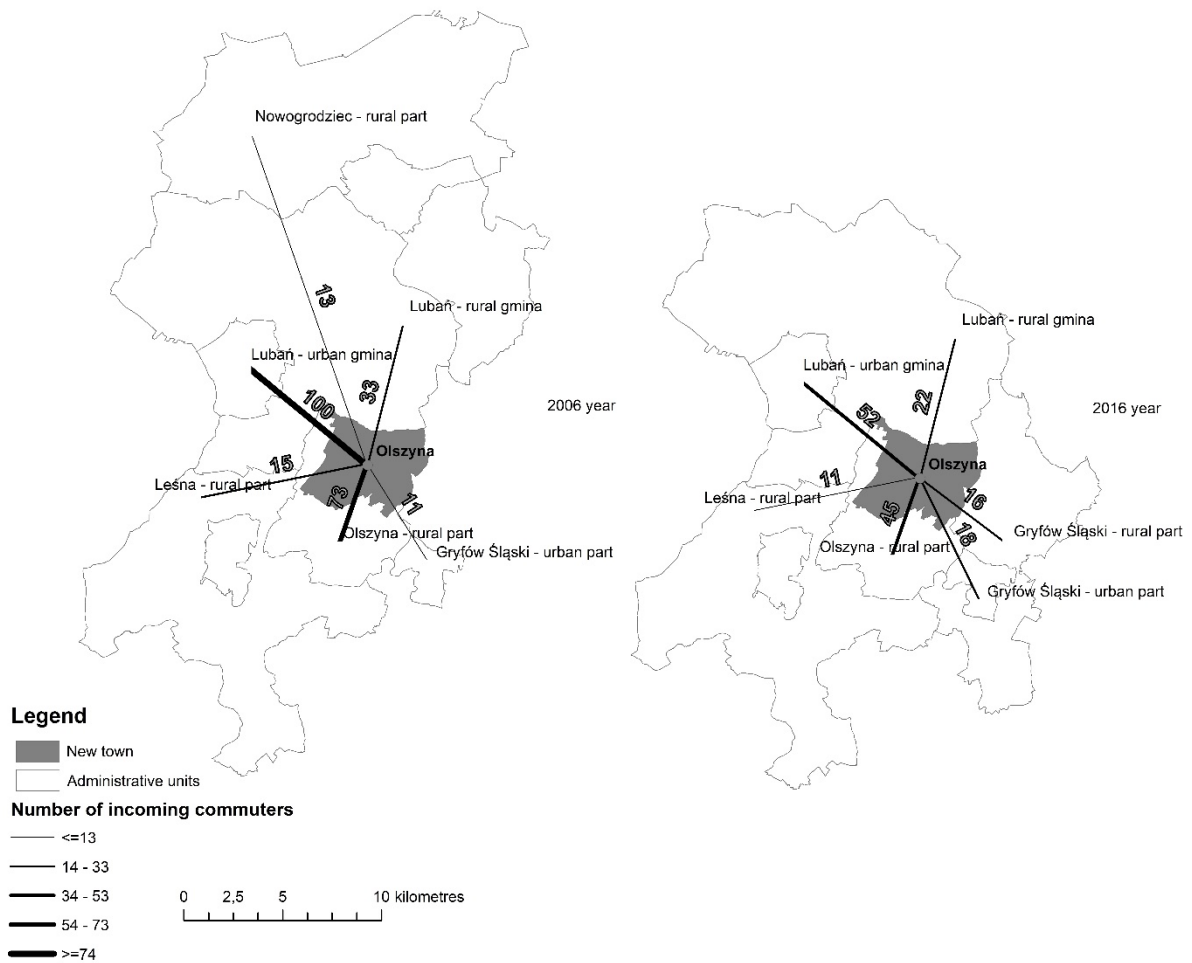


Fig. 2. Changes in range of influence of Olszyna in Dolnośląskie Voivodship

Source: Own elaboration

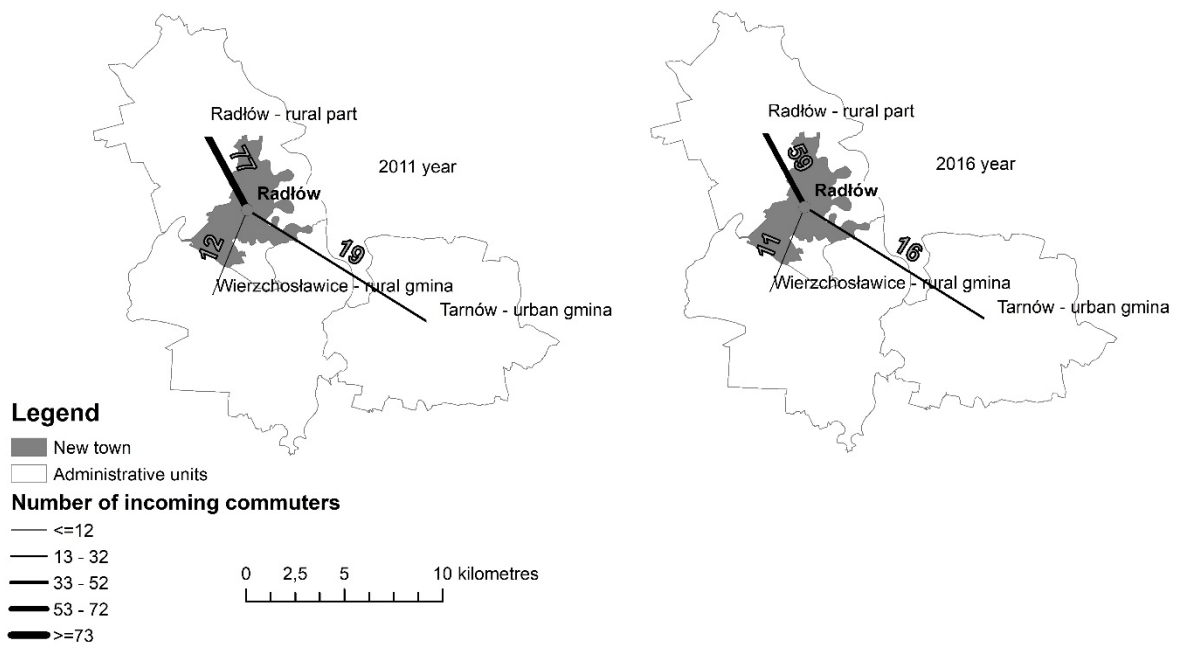


Fig. 3. Changes in range of influence of Radłów in Małopolskie Voivodship

Source: Own elaboration

recorded in 2006), but there was a group of people from the rural part of the Gryfów Śląski gmina. Between 2011 and 2016, the places of residence of incoming commuters within individual units did not change (Radłów, Tychowo) or concerned one area (Gościno). In the last case, a new area appeared in the form of the rural gmina of Kołobrzeg, from which ten people commuted to work in Gościno (Fig. 4). However, this is the minimum value to be included in the list of shared data according to the assumptions adopted by Statistics Poland, so this area, as well as others with a value below ten, was not previously shown.

The only center in 2016 for which an increase in the number of incoming commuters from all directions was recorded was Gościno. It increased by 12 people in the rural part of the urban-rural gmina of Gościno, and by seven people for the

urban gmina of Kołobrzeg. The opposite occurred in the other localities, where in Radłów (Fig. 3) the decrease occurred in all areas or with few exceptions, such as an increase of 21 people in the rural part of the urban-rural gmina of Tychowo (Tychowo) and seven people in the town of Gryfów Śląski (Olszyna). The results indicate that new towns, despite being located in different parts of the country, have similarly small ranges of influence of labor markets. Thus, the work-related population flows in 2016 came mostly from the same areas directly bordering the urban-rural gminas of the examined new towns.

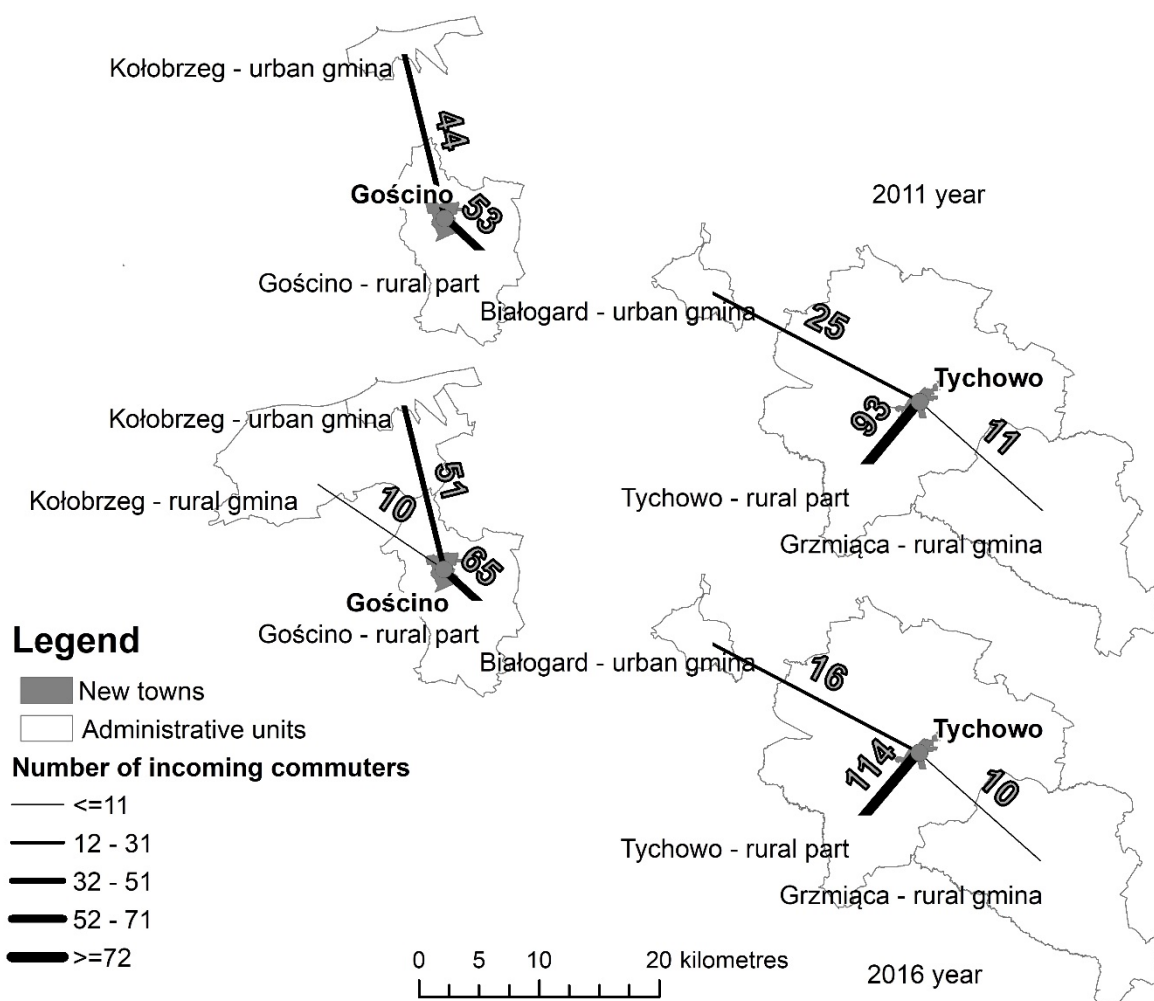


Fig. 4. Changes in range of influence of Tychowo and Gościno in Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship

Source: Own elaboration

4. Summary

The analysis and results did not show any significant correlation between the obtaining of urban status and development in terms of improving labor market conditions. Despite the expectations of localities applying for a change of status to “urban” that were emphasized especially by local authorities during information meetings or with the help of local press and media, there was no real synergy of actions aimed at linking the circumstances of obtaining urban status with tangible benefits to public and private entities. During the analyses and field observations, the authorities’ policy towards external capital and new investors who had not previously been interested in operating in the countryside was seen to be passive. The lack of charismatic leaders and the activity of local elites was manifested in ineffective lobbying to attract to the new towns investments that might provide additional budget revenues, jobs and the possibility of limiting economic migration (especially among young people). One example is the ineffectiveness in attracting investors to the Tychowska Investment Zone.

About 90% of the new towns that in the last 30 years obtained urban status for the first time recorded a percentage increase in the number of natural persons conducting economic activity, indicating an increase in the level of entrepreneurship among their inhabitants. In turn, in 70% of the centers, there was a percentage decrease in the number of employed, except in micro-enterprises, which is related to the lack of medium-sized and large enterprises that would generate additional jobs on local labor markets. In 2019, new towns, like other centers of up to 5,000 inhabitants, were dominated by micro-enterprises. This is confirmed by the high value of the correlation coefficient, which for the discussed group of towns amounted to approximately 0.99, between the percentage increases in the number of natural persons running a business and the percentage increases in the total number of economic entities. The greatest negative values, exceeding -30%, occurred in towns of northern and western Poland, where the economic stagnation of the centers was a consequence of changes since the post-communist transformation and its long-term effects related to losing their agricultural service function due to the liquidation of large, state-owned farms. The most favorable changes in the value of the number of employed except in micro-enterprises and the number of natural persons conducting economic activity occurred in Siechnice

(Dolnośląskie Voivodship) and Zwierzyniec (Lubelskie), which were characterized by increases in the value of both variables of above 100%.

The results indicate that directions of commuting and range of influence have not undergone major transformations since urban status was obtained. The analyzed new towns, being centers located far from the main urban agglomerations of the country, were still characterized by a limited range of impact of labor markets, which confirms previous research results (Konecka-Szydłowska & Perdał, 2017). A decrease in the value of work-related population flows indicators in 2016 compared to 2011 and in 2011 compared to 2006 occurred in all localities that obtained the urban status in 2005, 2010 and 2011, except for Gościno. This proves a small and diminishing role of local labor markets in new towns. Despite the decrease in the number of incoming commuters in relation to the number of outgoing commuters, an increase in the share of incoming commuters from external gminas was recorded in all centers, which indicates greater mobility of employees than in previous years. Few groups of incoming commuters from powiat centers (and thus towns of higher rank in the hierarchy) can be identified with “commuting of specialists, managers or senior officials” (Guzik, 2015: 7). Moreover, the work-related population flows came mainly from new towns’ own gminas, which together with the directly neighboring gminas formed functional urban areas that nonetheless rarely exceeded the boundaries of the powiat.

Notes

¹Information based on articles published in local media. Mentioned in the order of citation. “Tułowice miastem! Jest zgoda rządu” on [nto.pl](https://nto.pl/tulowice-miastem-jest-zgoda-rzadu/ar/12310661) (*Nowa Trybuna Opolska*) from 27th of July 2017 <https://nto.pl/tulowice-miastem-jest-zgoda-rzadu/ar/12310661>

“Nowe miasto Sanniki chce mieć rynek z ratuszem [WIZUALIZACJE]. I inwestorów, którzy zrobią interes na Chopinie” on [plock.wyborcza.pl](https://plock.wyborcza.pl/plock/7,35681,22858471,nowe-miasto-sanniki-chce-miec-rynek-z-ratuszem-wizualizacje.html) (*Gazeta Wyborcza Płock*) from 4th of January 2018 <https://plock.wyborcza.pl/plock/7,35681,22858471,nowe-miasto-sanniki-chce-miec-rynek-z-ratuszem-wizualizacje.html>

“Morawica miastem od 1 stycznia - co to oznacza dla mieszkańców?” on [morawica.pl](http://www.morawica.pl/asp/_pdf.asp?typ=13&menu=1&dzialy=1&akcja=artykul&artykul=93) (local website) from 30th of December 2016 http://www.morawica.pl/asp/_pdf.asp?typ=13&menu=1&dzialy=1&akcja=artykul&artykul=93

“Mielno i Unieście miastem. Co to oznacza?” on plus.gk24.pl (*Głos Koszaliński Plus*) from 31th of December 2016 <https://plus.gk24.pl/mielno-i-uniescie-miastem-co-to-oznacza/ar/11644049>

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