

Urban Development in Poland, from the Socialist City to the Post-Socialist and Neoliberal City

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The historical background to urbanisation

Urban development in Poland was endowed with its regional specificity: Polish culture had a landowning and rural character throughout the whole of the Middle Ages until almost the mid-twentieth century. The network of cities shaped at that time matched the needs of economy and rural settlements. In the Renaissance period this network was modified with innovations coming from the west that concerned social life, economic and cultural functions, as well as legal solutions, which made it possible to isolate people living “in line with urban law” in the social structure of a city. (*Gieysztor, 1994*) In Poland, the moderate growth of cities from the mid-seventeenth century was accompanied by a decline in their political and legal status imposed by “gentry democracy”. Gentry represented the cultural, political and economic aspirations, while the bourgeoisie was often treated with suspicion, as competitors to power and privilege. As a result the cities were developing significantly more slowly than cities in Western Europe due to institutional barriers and to the social and geographical mobility of the peasantry which was restricted by serfdom. In addition, the economic slump and military defeats in

The study has been realised within the confines of the research entitled “Social Polarisation in the Hungarian and Eastern-Central European ‘New Town’ Regions: Impacts of Transition and Globalisation” (K 106169), funded by the National Research, Development and Innovation Office.

the 17th and 18th centuries that in 1794 led to the loss of independence and partition of Poland caused the “agrarianisation” of civilisation and urban decline. Historical research shows, however, that in 1578 the urban population amounted to 28.8% of the inhabitants of the Polish territory, and in the mid-nineteenth century (1842) their proportion was only 20% (*Herbst, 1954; Dumala, 1974*). This phenomenon occurred in spite of the adoption of the modern Act on Cities in the May 3rd Constitution 1792 (the first constitution in Europe), which could not be implemented due to the lack of time and independence (since 1795 Poland had no independence).

The beginnings of urbanisation concerted with western-style industrialisation were initiated on the Polish territory as late as the second half of the nineteenth century. On the former Polish territory which was under Russian rule during the whole 19th century, new industrial towns were created or industrialised and developed, such as: Łódź, Zgierz, Żyrardów, Sosnowiec, Dąbrowa Górnicza, Królewska Huta. On the territory under Prussian rule all the new industrial towns were located or industrialised in the Upper Silesia region. One of the key factors of urbanisation and urban development was the fact that in all partitioned areas serfdom had been abolished by the end of the nineteenth century and partial enfranchisement of the peasantry was carried out, which enabled masses of rural population to move into the cities.

However, the rural migrants from the Prussian partition migrated en masse to Westphalia and other western European cities, while people from the Russian and Austrian partitions, especially from the overpopulated rural areas, migrated to North American cities, due to the limited capacity of local urban networks. In spite of these constraints, at the beginning of the 20th century the industrialisation level of the Polish areas was estimated at 26.6%, whereas in England and Wales it amounted to 77%, in France to over 40% and in Germany this proportion was 54.3% (*Dziewoński et al, 1977*).

After World War I and regaining independence in 1918, the situation changed. The first National Population Census in Poland, carried out after regaining independence in 1918, showed that in 1921 only 24.6% (i.e. 6.97 million) of the Polish population lived in 632 cities. Within the period of almost twenty years of the Second Polish Republic in August 1939 the share of urban population increased to 28.4% (*Gawryszewski, 2005*). A slight increase in

the level of urbanisation in the interwar period partially resulted from the growing overpopulation of rural areas that in turn followed from hampered foreign emigrations, the economic crisis that started in the 1920s and the economic lagging of peripheral areas forming the reborn Poland, which were left behind by the superpowers that took part in the partition.

For example the western part of the country covered the more industrialised and urbanised Silesia and Greater Poland regions with a dense network of cities and urbanisation at the level of above 30%, while the eastern part of the country covered agricultural voivodships – e.g. Nowogródzkie, Wołyńskie, Poleskie – where the urbanisation level was below 15%. In the period of 1918-1939 it was impossible for the Polish government to radically reduce this regional differentiation formed through over a hundred years of partition and lack of independence in such a short time period.

Urbanisation under centrally planned economy

Analyses of territorial changes (carried out by A. Gawryszewski in 2005) caused by World War II in Poland, showed a balance of quantitative changes concerning the network of cities. As a result of moving the Polish border to the West, Poland lost 164 cities, these were mainly small cities with low wooden buildings, usually without urban infrastructure, as well as two large cities Vilnius and Lviv. On the other hand, Poland obtained 256 cities with compact brick buildings and good urban infrastructure. However, the cities on reclaimed territories – especially the largest ones: Wrocław, Szczecin, Gdańsk, Kołobrzeg, Elbląg – were significantly destroyed. The old territories were affected by even greater damages. Warsaw and many other major cities were also largely devastated.

The post World War II Population Census of 1946 gives only a rough picture of the regional differences, due to the fact that post-war migrations related to resettlements and displacements were not completed yet. This Census showed that in 1946 33.1% of the country's population lived in Polish cities (within its new borders). According to data from the National Population Census of 1950, cities were inhabited by 39% of the country's population.

From 1950s onwards, urbanisation in Poland was determined, mainly, by intensive industrialisation, which was driven first of all

by the needs of the communist ideology. It overlapped with the formation of a vision of urban life style, which became a symbol of social progress and modernisation of society.

The specific nature of this type of urbanisation under socialism in Central and Eastern Europe, was called “controlled urbanisation” by a Czech sociologist (*Musil, 1984*), while the process of the forced socialist type of industrialisation was named “imposed” or “forced” by a Polish sociologist (*Morawski, 1980*). Both processes changed Polish society from a rural to an urban one, at least in numerical terms, and brought important modernisation consequences.

The research carried out by K. Dziewoński (1977) showed that in 1950-1955 both the urbanisation processes and the industrialisation processes were the most intensive. Within this period industrialisation was way ahead of urbanisation, while in 1956-1960, because the pace of industrialisation was slowed down, the urbanisation process gained some advantage. In the next decade, in the 1960s, the industrialisation process is again predominating, due to the imposition of selective registration restrictions which constrains migration inflow to urban areas by administrative means. In spite of this, in 1966 the number of people living in cities exceeded the number of people living in rural areas.

The migration pattern from rural to urban areas was to a significant degree regional in nature, i.e. it involved migration to the nearest major city. Interregional and intercity migration concerns mostly the largest urban metropolitan areas of Warsaw, Upper Silesia region and Tricity (Gdańsk, Gdynia, Sopot), which attracted the immigrants from all over the country.

In the next two decades (1970s and 1980s) the urbanisation process became more important than the industrialisation process, despite huge investments in industry. In the 1970s on average the cities grew by 2.4% per annum, the growth rate of the number of people in 22 cities exceeded 22% per annum (*Gawryszewski, 2005*). The decade of the 1970s was called the second stage of industrialisation, which was based on a scientific and technical revolution and increase in the share of qualified labour force in the production processes (*Dziewoński, 1988*). The State’s policy also aimed at increasing the living conditions and satisfying consumption needs (including housing needs) to a greater extent than before, especially in cities. The implementation of such objectives

was possible, partially, because the favourable international situation ensured easy access to cheap western loans and modern technology. The new industrial investments were mainly allocated outside the existing industrial regions (in the new industrialising cities), which followed from the idea of equalising spatial differences (especially in 1971-1974). As a result, such a policy strengthened urbanisation processes in the regions with a relatively lower share of urban population. It also led to significant quantitative investments and consequently to the increase of new housing resources in the areas of the existing urban agglomerations.

In the 1980s presented by the two National Population Censuses (1978-1988) the increase in the number of cities dropped. From the end of the 1980s onwards, further slowdown of the urbanisation process was observed. This was due to the introduction of martial law, the economic slump of communism in Poland and the start of economic restructuring as a result of the 1989 transformation. The new, most visible problem was the emergence of unemployment.

A more constant element of the slowdown of the urbanisation process was accompanied by a slower increase in Polish population since the 1980s (in general), due to a systematic decrease in the number of births, which continued in the next decades. The slowing down of the urbanisation process, however, is highly differentiated on the regional scale. The pace of urbanisation remains relatively higher in the eastern areas, where there is a further increase in the share of urban population, whereas in western areas the size of urban population undergoes stabilisation or regression.

Polish cities as socialist cities

The cities created in Poland under the conditions of the centrally planned economy as socialist cities were different from the cities formed under market economy, which was proved by different sociologists and geographers (*Węclawowicz, 1979, 1988, 1992, 1993, 1996, 2007, 2013; Dangschat-Blasius, 1987*). The series of numerous investigations on individual different Polish cities support such a statement in the case of: Poznań (*Gaczek, 1979*), Wrocław (*Jagielski, 1996*), Płock (*Kaltenberg-Kwiatkowska, 1982*), Toruń (*Jaroszewska-Brudnicka, 2004*), Kraków (*Zborowski, 2005*), Tychy (*Szczepański, 1991*,

1993). It concerns the international perspectives written on Polish cities as well (*French–Hamilton, 1979; Enyedi, 1998; Regulska, 1987; Hamilton–Dimitrovska-Andrews–Pilchner-Milanovic, 2005*).

The communist ideology was imposed with different success on the regionally differentiated urban areas which were formed in the past by different civilisation traditions (Russian Empire pattern, Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy pattern and German pattern). In post World War II Poland, i.e. on the current Polish territory, we can still identify the different urban structures formed in the 19th century (due to the partition of Poland). This regional structure concerns four former parts: Tsarist Russian partition (1), Austrian-Hungarian partition (2), Prussian partition (3), and regained western territory (4 – after World War II).

The concept of socialist city in Poland is closely related to the concept of industrial city. The communists in power treated the city firstly as a centre of political support from the working class and, only then, as a centre of industrial production. The new industrial cities, as well as fully reconstructed old cities, were created as socialist cities. Older large and medium-sized cities were transformed at a significantly slower pace. Warsaw and Wrocław are the special cases, because of the extent of war devastation with the extermination of over 800 000 inhabitants in the case of Warsaw, and the total exchange of the population in the case of Wrocław. Medium-sized cities underwent radical transformations only after large industrial establishments had been set up in them. New, huge complexes of housing estates for workers of the new establishments were introduced into the traditional structure of the city, which often had such far reaching consequences that the old urban structure was broken down and absorbed by the new style of blocks of flats. In spite of their historical heritage such cities as Bełchatów, Głogów, Jastrzębie Zdrój, Legnica, Łęczna, Lubin, Płock, Polkowice, Puławy, Konin, Tarnobrzeg, Tychy became in reality “new towns” located both, in the old and the new industrial regions.

Larger cities, which were not destroyed during the war and which had stronger cultural and historical traditions, such as Kraków, rather absorbed their new “socialist city-districts” Nowa Huta and did not allow for the predominance of the new form of development. Similarly, in the case of Częstochowa, in spite of the industrialisation “push”, the city maintains its pilgrim and religious functions.

In 1988 in Polish and in 1992, 1996 in English the concept of the socialist city was presented concerning the Central European region as well (*Węclawowicz, 1988, 1992, 1996*). The most significant features of the socialist cities include:

1. The domination of employment by the industrial production sector and a low percentage of middle-class residents (townspeople) meant that the inhabitants of these towns mainly consisted of the working class (proletariat).
2. The egalitarian principle and class homogeneity of socialist ideology resulted in relatively low levels of economic differentiation.
3. The central allocation of inhabitants to particular dwellings often forced citizens to live in undesirable social surroundings, reducing the chances of creating local communities.
4. The organisation of the social life of urban dwellers was around the place of work.
5. The city was absolutely dependent on the central government for its finances and was “organisationally divided”. The centralised authoritarian system had split off different decisions concerning the city, which came from different government departments and, at the local scale, from the authorities of the particular cities.
6. The mayor represented the interests of the state against the citizens, rather than the interests of citizens against authority. Even the elected city councils represented no local interests but rather the central government and its policies. The municipal offices became units subordinated to the state administration.
7. Uniformity of architecture and urban landscape created a higher proportion of waste land and led to the deterioration of the old quarters of cities (except cultural heritage parts of the old towns).
8. The builders were pressed to construct first of all only blocks of apartments, and delayed the construction of shops, restaurants, schools and post offices. As a result, in the largest cities huge homogeneous estates emerged, usually with no adequate service facilities, and frequently inhabited by more than 100,000 people.
9. Environmental problems caused by industry and urban development were ignored. There were permanent attempts to

redistribute or eliminate visible presences of non-communist symbols from the city space.

10. There was an attempt to control the inflow of people to the city by administrative means.

Polish cities together with Czech and Slovak, and Hungarian cities conformed to these generalizations to varying degrees, while maintaining a national and European character to some degree (Węclawowicz, 1992, 1998).

In respect to social composition, these cities were characterised by a predominance of the so-called producing professions in the employment structure, especially employment in industry. The share of other social categories was smaller, and urban society was to a great extent homogeneous in respect to class and only slightly differentiated in respect to economy.

It is important to mention that the egalitarian rules on class and economic uniformity, which had been adopted at the beginning, were relatively quickly and significantly reduced, and then totally abandoned. The social and professional composition of cities was determined by the control of registration (however, not so effective), which was transformed into a control tool to monitor the inflow of people to cities in line with the contemporary political interests and temporary economic needs.

In general, the evolution of urban areas in Poland could be characterised by the following priorities: post war reconstruction, industrialisation, drift toward the formation of egalitarian cities, the formation of the elements of elite cities, and, by the end of the socialist era, the gradual growth of social and spatial differentiations.

The transformation of Polish cities into post-socialist cities

In Poland and in the other Central European countries the socio-economic transition that started together with the abandonment of the communist system in 1989 and 1990 brought the return of market economy and democracy. The changes in the urbanisation and spatial character of the city were already visible long before 1989, which was related to the crisis of the centrally planned economy and discredit of the idea of social egalitaria-

nism. The economic and political crisis of the closing stage of the real socialism resulted in reduced control over urban space and a vivid development of such phenomena as illegal allotments, illegal street trade, open and public presentation of patriotic, anti-communist and religious symbols, as well as the establishment of elite wealthy areas. All these factors eroded the image of the socialist city. The process of liberating Polish cities from the features of the socialist city was significantly accelerated when the political transformation was initiated.

The most important political and economic processes, which had a direct influence on eliminating the socialist city features concerned the following elements (*Węclawowicz, 1993, 1994, 1996*):

1. the return of the importance of land rent and the increased number of actors competing for space,
2. the return of self-government, the shift in the absolute control over space from central to local,
3. the increase of social and spatial differentiation and the changing rules of the spatial allocation of people from political to economic criteria,
4. the transformation of the employment structure from the domination of industry to the domination of the service sector,
5. the substantial transformation of the urban landscape and architecture,
6. the transformation of values and symbols, mostly by replacing many manifestations of politically symbolical space by other functions and symbols.

The key element which was the most important in the process of transformation was the return of the rent of land and other market mechanisms, as well as changes in the ownership structure that were related to them. Reconstruction of the economy brought radical changes in the employment structure in the cities, which consisted primarily in decreasing employment in the industrial sector in favour of employment in the service sector, and as a result the formation of a new social and political structure of cities.

The control exercised over space was moved from central to local authorities as a result of establishing actual territorial self-governments to represent the interests of local communities, there was also increase in the number of entities competing for

urban space and specific localisations, as well as change in the spatial allocation criteria from political to economic ones. Development of private entrepreneurship gained special significance along with a quantitative increase of small and medium sized enterprises, modernisation of urban organisation and management methods.

The reintroduction of real self-government in 1989 has had positive consequences for most urban areas. The democratic legislation encouraging the formation of new social connections and ties reoriented the public attention from place of work to place of residence, provided opportunities for the formation of new social groups and social interest categories. All these new groups and categories gradually became aware of their interests in the structure of cities and learned how to express their own interests through the democratic election of local representatives to local governments. The shift of control over urban space from central to local created many problems, firstly, due to the fact that the new self-government had not been prepared to deal with the emergence of several new actors competing for space. The learning process, however, even after the decades of democratic transformation and under the impact of European integration has not completely finished yet.

The political and economic phenomena listed above, above all, increased the social and spatial differences as well as changed the spatial behavior of city residents. The urban landscape and architecture also underwent changes, the intensity of land use increased; many areas of the cities changed their functions, especially in their central parts. The symbolism of many places also changed as they were given new significance or their old – national, historical or religious values were restored.

Under the conditions of market economy the urbanisation process consisting in migration from rural to urban areas, as well as the adoption of urban lifestyle and urban professions by rural residents may be classified in terms of winning and losing socio-economic transformations. The changes in the social hierarchy and structure had basic significance (*Węćławowicz, 2002*). The best example of the above is the disappearance of the social group of rural smallholders employed in factories (peasant-workers, in Polish: *chłoporobotnik*) who played a significant part in the urbanisation of rural areas under the conditions of a centrally

planned economy. Emergence of unemployment in the 1990s affected, first of all, this social group. Geographical location within the areas affected by economic crisis or in mono-functional industrial areas was an important element that had an adverse impact on the development of many cities.

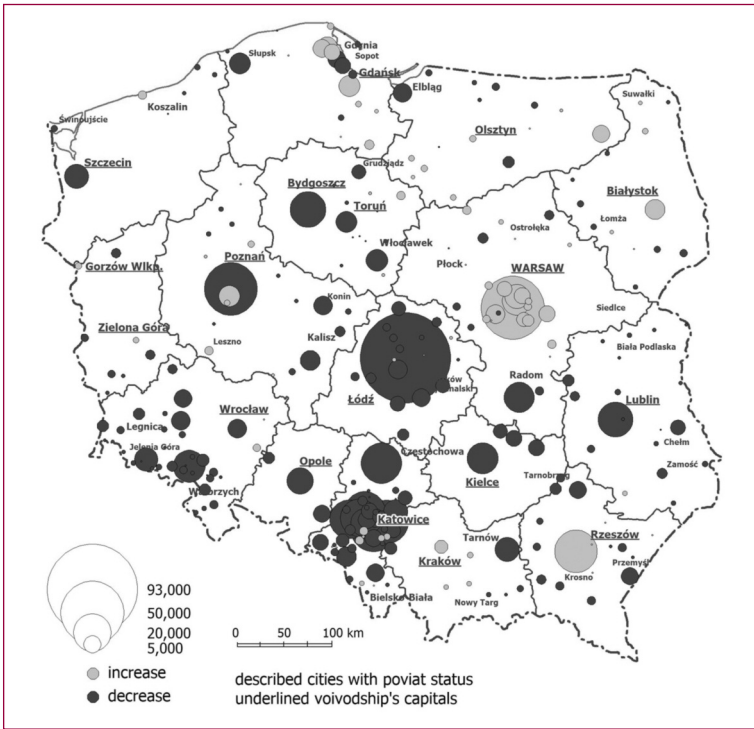
In the decades of 1988-1998 and 1998-2008 there was a significant change of trends within the scope of population development on a national scale in cities and villages. According to the data provided by the Government Population Council (2008-2009) in the first decade (i.e.: 1988-1998), the population figures in the cities increased by 495.2 thousand persons, and in rural areas these figures decreased by 102.9 thousand persons. In the next decade (i.e.: 1998-2008), population figures in the cities dropped by 393.8 thousand persons (partly as a result of a negative natural increase in cities), and in villages they increased by 252.7 thousand persons. It should be, however, recalled that the population figures dropped by 141.1 thousand persons in the whole country due to a negative balance of international migration and a decreasing level of natural increase. The contemporary urbanisation process takes place under the conditions of decreasing population figures in Poland (while temporary moderate increase for several past years will not change this general longer term trends). As a result the spatial pattern in urban population trends became evident (*Map 1*).

In general, urban areas increased around the largest agglomeration in the suburban zone with strong urban shrinking of small and medium sized cities and with the particularly large depopulation of Łódź and Upper Silesian urban complexes.

Growing economic competition between the cities, as well as differentiated levels of economic development were the basic elements that shaped urbanisation and the extent to which the cities were attractive to their new residents. The competitiveness of cities that depends to a great extent on the inherited resources but also on the policy of local authorities determines the attractiveness for investments. The most competitive cities in respect of attracting investments and people are the metropolitan areas of Warsaw, Poznań, Wrocław, Kraków and Tricity (Gdańsk, Gdynia, Sopot).

The general regularity is that the investment attractiveness of cities drops as one moves from the west to east in Poland, and the qualitative and quantitative character of urbanisation processes

Map 1: Changes in the population figures of urban areas in Poland (2000-2008)



Source: The author's own edition based on data of Polish Statistical Office

change. In the western part of the country urbanisation is subject to restructuring in the form of more rapid development of sub-urbanisation processes, the formation of a network of medium-sized cities and the large share of migration between cities (from smaller to bigger cities). In eastern Poland the classical form of urbanisation, which mainly consists in migration from rural to urban areas, is still predominating.

According to the 2014 data from the Central Statistical Office in Warsaw, it was 913 towns, of which 16 were larger than 200,000, that together accounted for over 33% of the urban inhabitants in Poland. The category of larger than 100,000 consists of 39 towns. The smallest category of towns, below 5000 inhabitants, involved 326 towns (Table 2).

In general, the settlement system structure remains relatively balanced, which ranks Poland among the group of states with the highest level of settlement pattern polycentrism in Europe. Such

Table 2: Cities by size distribution in Poland (1950-2014) (%)

Cities by size	Percentage of urban inhabitant in:				Number of cities in 2014
	1950	1990	2002	2014	
Urbanisation in Poland	39	61,8	61,7	60,3	
Below 5 000	4,3	2,1	2,4	2,6	326
5 000 – 10 000	4,5	3,3	3,5	3,3	176
10 000 – 20 000	4,2	6,7	7,0	7,0	187
20 000 – 50 000	6,2	10,4	10,7	10,9	135
50 000 – 100 000	3,4	8,4	8,7	8,4	45
100000 – 200 000	6,7	7,9	7,8	8,2	23
200 000 and more	9,7	23,0	21,6	19,9	16
Total					913

Source: Central Statistical Office, Warsaw

structure has positively distinguished and is still distinguishing Poland from other European states. The following Polish cities belong to the largest urban centers of the European Union, so-called MEGAs4: Warsaw, Krakow, Gdańsk-Gdynia, Wrocław, Poznań, Katowice along with Górny Śląsk conurbation, Łódź and Szczecin. A particularly important factor in the size structure of urban areas in Poland is that the capital does not exceedingly dominate over other cities in comparison with other EU countries. The situation is different, however, in terms of economic activity.

Currently the urbanisation level (in 2015) is very differentiated regionally from 77.3% in Śląskie voivodship to 41.3% in Podkarpackie.

Toward the neoliberal city?

The processes of the transformation of post-socialist cities, from the very beginning to current developments have been occurring in the dominant neoliberal political context, together with the

impact of globalisation and European integration processes. The neoliberal policy – generally defined as a reliance on market mechanisms – which has developed in Poland and in other Central European countries maintained some regional specificities, particularly in the scope of social, economic and spatial policies affecting urban development.

The de-industrialisation processes, initiated before the collapse of real socialism in Central Europe, overlap with the post-socialist transformation, accelerating changes in employment structure, which have become one of the most important phenomena generated by the new social and political order in cities. In general, the decrease in the number of industrial jobs was not easily replaced by booming employment in the service sector, leaving former industrial workers unemployed. This shift in the employment structure remains till now an unresolved problem in former industrial cities not only in Central Europe but also in many urban areas of the developed world elsewhere.

The new phenomena which have shaped post-socialist urban space after the 2004 European Union enlargement overlapped with the more direct impact of the neoliberal attitudes. First of all, it concerns the lack of explicit urban policy at national and local levels. Secondly, acceleration in the increase of socio-spatial segregation at regional and intra-urban scale was widely observed. Thirdly, the whole built environment was gradually improved and refurbished. The fourth phenomenon or consequence of the neoliberal impact has been the complex of changes in demographic and social behaviour, and the formation of new migration patterns on international, national, urban and interurban scales. Polish cities, like all Central European cities, have become open to the impacts of globalisation, and European-scale competition resulted in the search for new functional roles (i.e. niches in the economy or market place).

In case of Warsaw, the neoliberal direction of transformation is the most evident on the housing market (*Stępniań, 2012; Stępniań–Mendel, 2013; Górczyńska, 2015*) and also in population components (*Bierzyński et al, 2011; Bierzyński, 2014; Piekut et al, 2012*) and social segregation (*Marcińczak et al, 2012, 2013*).

The last year evolution of EU policies including the new urban policy and particularly the shift toward more place-based policy interventions overlaps with the economic crises resulting in threats

to the economic prosperity of urban dwellers. In addition, the discovery and recognition of the negative consequences of following the neoliberal theory have become visible.

The main component of urban policy in Poland

All elements of urban policy in Poland are conducted under the general legal framework concerning public administration and self-government. The constitution of the Republic of Poland identified the “gmina” as the basic self-government unit at the lowest level of administrative division (corresponding to the NUTS 5 EU classification). There are three types of those units: urban, urban-rural and rural gminas. The definition of urban is based on a legal status. As far as the urban areas are concerned, the following types of cities may be identified in Poland depending on their hierarchical status: cities with county (poviat) status, including cities like Warsaw as the capital of the country, others having regional capital status (voivodeships), and other sub-regional (poviat) county capitals status. The right of the poviats status for 65 cities was attributed by the 1999 administrative reform. The last category concerns the (gminas) cities which have urban status and mixed urban-rural status. All together there are 903 municipalities with the cities (with gminas competences), cities (with right of poviats competences) and cities of mixed urban-rural character (with gminas competencies) status¹. Nearly each year the new administrative decision modified the urban statistics. For example the latest state of 2015 indicate 915 towns, of which 304 have urban status, (66 of these urban areas have also poviat status) and 611 communes of urban-rural status.

¹ Division into NUTS units. Situation on: 01-01-2015
NUTS-1 Region (6 Units groups of woivodships),
NUTS-2 voivodships (units 16)
NUTS-3 sub-regions (72 units – groups of poviats)
NUTS-4 poviats (314 units) plus 66 cities of urban status
NUTS-5 Communes (Gminy) – (2478 units including 66 units having urban status and poviat status.

The evolution and instability of legislation and governance of urban areas are visible in case of the capital of Poland. Warsaw as the capital and the largest city of the country represents one of the specific cases. From the beginning of the 1990s till 2002 Warsaw was a municipal association of 11 gminas, with the largest Centrum gmina (inhabited by one million people). Each of Warsaw's gminas had different status, objectives, interests bringing immediate conflicts and colliding competences (particularly at the time of the rebirth of local democracy). In October 2002 Warsaw became again one administrative unit with unified status, integrated budget and management. The President of the city together with the Council deal with all the general issues and coordination, however, all the 18 districts (with historical roots) at the lowest level, have auxiliary functions. While structural problems of governance in intra boundaries Warsaw seem to be solved, the unresolved issues remain the fragmented administration of the whole metropolitan area. Currently, since the end of 2015, the new government has initiated a discussion aimed at the formation of the Metropolitan Region of Warsaw as an independent unit from the rest of Mazowsze voivodship.

In general, national urban policies should be formulated as a guide for local governments at sub-regional or urban scales, as well as for those in government administration, for the business community and for any relevant social and non-governmental organisations. Such policies should set out the intentions, main objectives and strategy of central governments towards urban problems. Problems which are manifest at more local levels and strategies to address them could then be articulated in more coherent ways.

The current stage of urban policy formation in Poland is facing several important challenges. The spatial consequence of the dominant neoliberal political attitudes in intra-urban governance practice is the lack of efficient planning regulations which resulted in deepening the chaos of the inherited urban structures. In the formation of a new urban policy, the basic challenge lies between competitiveness and cohesion or between social and economic priorities. The pressure to be competitive on the European and global scale requires the formulation of a comprehensive urban policy at national, local and intra-urban levels. A policy which will be effectively (in practice) congruent with the social, cultural, spatial and

economic policies, and first of all with the strategic vision of the country's development in the next decades must be worked out.

In the process of forming the national urban policy the question of planning for whom should be seriously considered. The concept, that in the socialist countries planning (particularly spatial planning) was structured along ideological priorities, has been replaced in neoliberal attitudes by the concept of planning in the interest of the capital. However, some questions arise. Why not plan cities in the interest of society? What can we learn (efficiently adapt) from EU and OECD urban policies, documents and practices? In the document prepared for Poland the OECD identified the following challenges related to the future development of urban areas (OECD, 2011).

The first concern is “an aging and shrinking labour force”. The second one is related to the “industrial restructuring”; it indicated the continuation in the processes of industrial decline in terms of employment and increase in the service sector. The structural transformation of employment in the situation of inadequate skills will generate unemployment problems in the long term. The third challenge addressed “inequalities within urban areas and social concerns”

The next three challenges concern transport. On the regional scale it involves “...poorly developed transport infrastructure, which fails to connect urban systems and integrate the neighbourhoods within them.” On intra urban scale the municipalities are the main actors providing public transport, but the most important challenge concerns urban sprawl and congestion with the radical increase of people employed outside their municipality. On the country scale the basic challenge concerns the lack of proper and efficient transport links between urban centres.

The permanent historical challenge concerns the “housing deficit” and probably will remain so in the next decades. As the Central Statistics Office indicates the 347 housing units per 1000 inhabitants in Poland remain one of the lowest in the EU. Such a problem overlaps with the large demand for modernisation and renovation of the old housing stock.

The last set of challenges concern environmental issues. In spite of the basic improvements since 1989 and particularly after EU integration in 2004 the basic problems still include wastewater treatment, air pollution, and the lack of energy efficiency initiatives.

Conclusions

The question posed at the beginning of the socio-political transformation in the last decade of the 20th century “What should be done with the socialist cities in Central and Eastern Europe?” to a high extent has been answered in practice. The last twenty years of political, social and economic development has brought, in general, the substantial modernisation and improvements of living conditions in urban areas. The numerous former industrial cities, however, are still in a stagnant or crisis situation.

Currently the most important challenge is making urban areas less vulnerable to political, economic and environmental changes. One of the best examples of a field where such change is needed is that of environmental issues, particularly energy saving.

The dominant neoliberal approach to the role of local government at the district or city level needs some consideration. In general, a simple minded or naive application of market theory to the functioning of local communities remains too radical and insensitive because local governments cannot be treated like markets, particularly in the European context, where cities have followed historically diverse paths of development which have fostered and enriched their cultural diversity and local distinctiveness or uniqueness. The latter diversity is the outcome of constant interactions between the state, the market and local cultural traditions, which in the case of the cultural heritage of post-socialist cities have both positive and negative consequences.

The EU regional policies, particularly the cohesion policy including its urban dimension, will be a sort of “soft neoliberalism” which reminded me of the attempts in the deep past to create “socialism with human face”, which in the end failed. What will happen now in EU cities depends to a large extent on progress in the development of democratic institutions and particularly on whether a strong and effective civil society is formed and fostered.