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Mirosław Hanulewicz[1]

Educational Potential of Polish Borderland of Nysa, Prudnik, and Głubczyce Districts – Quantitative Changes in 1995–2019

ABSTRACT

The article describes quantitative changes in the educational area of the Polish borderland, based on the examples of Nysa, Prudnik, and Głubczyce districts. The demographic data, unfavorable for entire Poland, in the borderland regions are additionally burdened with migration from peripheral communes. It is reflected in the functioning of educational institutions. The analysis of the educational potential of the border areas based on data from the three districts indicates alarming demographic forecasts announcing their depopulation. Breaking that process seems impossible without external support. Thanks to co-financing under efficiently implemented EU projects, and, above all, the work of local leaders, many interesting initiatives were implemented to improve the quality of life in the border areas and their tourist attractiveness, which also gives hope for an economic revival. A positive aspect is that with the decreasing number of students, the number of departments also decreases, which gives hope for a better quality of care, upbringing, and education. However, the data show that reversing the negative trends requires great commitment.

Keywords:

education, borderland, educational potential, educational transformations, Nysa district, Prudnik district, Głubczyce district

1 Faculty of Economics and Pedagogy, Academy of Management and Administration in Opole, Poland.

e-mail: m.hanulewicz@poczta.wszia.opole.pl orcid: 0000-0003-1119-8297

INTRODUCTION

In the common understanding, borderlands are areas located in a line up to several dozen kilometers on both sides of the state border. However, border areas are areas of one country, located near the state border and limited by this border on one side (Opioła & Trzcielińska-Polus, 2013, p. 7). Jerzy Nikitorowicz (1998, p. 167) defines borderland as the "area between centers, a place where a specific type of coexistence of two or more cultural groups (ethnographic, linguistic, religious, national) takes place".

Wojciech Opioła (2014, pp. 35–43) introduces a thesis about great freedom in using the term "borderland" in scientific studies and seven arguments proving that the borderland should be understood as a broader category than just the area lying on the state border. The conclusion introduces borderland's typology, based on their relationship with the national border: frontier, relict, migration, and mixed borderlands (Opioła, 2014, p. 42). In these considerations, the author wishes to look at the Polish-Czech borderland according to this typology.

Mirosław Sobecki (2007, p. 159) perceives borderlands as a "giant chance for building fundaments based on the respect of the freedom of others and responsible usage of one's own freedom". It is a natural field for building partnership, dialog, and openness, breaking stereotypes.

Due to the distance from large centers, borderlands are characterized by a lower level of economic development. It is also associated with the political and social marginalization of the inhabitants of these areas (Opioła & Trzcielińska-Polus, 2013, p. 8). The European Union specially supports the borderlands as peripheral, often neglected areas. Cross-border programmes and Micro-project Funds are attempts to reduce the distance of border areas in relation to other regions. The goal is also to integrate local communities by breaking historical and cultural barriers (Hanszke, 2019, p. 32). The money from the Microprojects Fund is spent mainly on cultural exchange and residents' meetings as part of theater and film projects, majorettes festivals, Christmas markets, knight camps, etc. They are used to overcome negative stereotypes and cultural and mental barriers (Hanszke, 2019, p. 32).

Euroregions are cross-border agreements of local governments created to implement European rapprochement ideals across borders and strengthen contacts between partners. There are 16 Euroregions ("Euroregions in Poland") in Poland, 6 of which are located on the Polish-Czech border. This article focuses on three districts of the Opolskie Province (Nysa, Prudnik, and Głubczyce), which directly border with the Czech Republic. Districts Nysa and Prudnik belong to the Pradziad Euroregion, while Głubczyce is part of the Silesia Euroregion ("Euroregions in Poland").

One should also refer to the meaning of the phrase 'educational potential' to clarify the subject of the study. According to the dictionary of foreign words, 'potential' is defined as efficiency, possibility (especially of a country, a state) in some field (Kopaliński, 1991). Thus, the educational potential is understood here as a certain resource, opportunities in education. We mean the base necessary to conduct the education process in material and personal terms.

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology used to elaborate this article was taken from the research conducted under the project 'Style and quality of life, life plans and identity of the inhabitants of the Polish-Czech border after the accession of Poland and the Czech Republic to the European Union'. The project was implemented in cooperation with two centers, which are: the Academy of Management and Administration in Opole on the Polish side and Vysoká Škola Sociálně Správní, z.ú. IČ in Hawirzów[2] on the Czech side. The research in this project covered only a fragment of the Polish-Czech borderland, i.e., the Polish part of the Pradziad Euroregion and the Czech part of the Beskid Euroregion (Jasiński & Nowak, 2020, p. 13). The author of that article participated in the above work in a chapter devoted to the socio-cultural potential of the area in question. In order to increase the cognitive value of this work, the research area was extended to cover the entire Polish-Czech border of the Opolskie Province. Hence, the Głubczyce district was included in the analysis. However, due to the breadth of the topic, the focus was only on the numerical changes taking place in education. The research problem of this study is contained in the question: what changes in 1995–2019 did the educational potential make in the described area in quantitative terms? Although it is very interesting and could constitute an in-depth reflection, the qualitative aspect of these changes was consciously not touched upon in this study due to the breadth of the topic.

The method of document analysis was used in the research. These were existing documents – contained in the Local Data Bank[3]. The author collected and compiled the data in the tables or charts presented in this work. In many cases,

2 Project number 11_16_009 implemented as part of the call for micro-projects in the Pradziad Euroregion.

3 Data from the Central Statistical Office – available in the so-called Local Data Bank at: https://bdl.stat.gov.pl/. Providing all data in the article, this database was used. It is not possible to provide a more precise page with links to specific numbers, because all data is presented dynamically on the page – depending on the selected filters

several tables generated by the Local Data Bank had to be reviewed to present data on the area in question. It was because, in 1995–2019, the methodology of presenting data by the Central Statistical Office changed, which made it available in various compilations.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESEARCHED FIELDS

According to data from the Central Statistical Office ("Local Data Bank"), at the end of December 2019, 236,737 people lived in the researched area. Out of these people, 48.5% were men, and 51.5% were women. This distribution of the population division does not differ from the data for the entire country – in 2019, men constituted 48.4% and women 51.6% of the population.

As can be noticed in Chart 1, the saucer trend continues in the given period. Between 1995 and 2019, the population of the described territory decreased by nearly 12%.

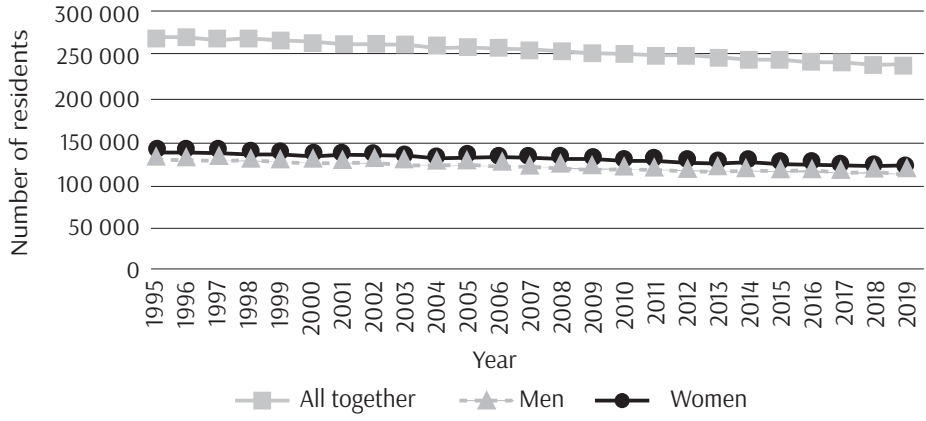

Chart 1. Number and gender of residents in 1995–2019

Source: own study based on CSO data, as of 2019-12-31.

Relating to the forecasts of the Central Statistical Office ("Local Data Bank"), this tendency will continue in the upcoming years. It is estimated that in 2050 the discussed area will be inhabited by 168 534 inhabitants. The proportions between men and women will also be changed. The difference, which was almost 3 per-

centage points in 2019, will decrease to 0.8 percentage points in 2050 (49.6% of men and 50.4% of women). On the scale of the whole country, this difference will amount to 2.4 percentage points (48.8% of men and 51.2% of women). For comparison, in 2019 in Poland, it was 3.2 percentage points.

The number of borderland residents has its own dynamics. It is reflected in the data related to the outer and inner migrations. In 1995–2019, the region's population decreased by approximately 12%. Before Poland joined the UE (May 1, 2005), in 1995–2005, the decrease of population in this region was on the level of 4.2%, while in the same ten-year period after accession, in 2006–2016, this decrease was already at the level of 5.8%. As shown in Table 1, the maximum number of check-outs, both in domestic and foreign traffic, is in 2006. Even though this year also shows a slightly larger, but not the largest, number of check-ins in this area, it did not compensate for the population decline. Thus, 2006 is characterized by the largest negative net migration in the discussed period.

Table 1. Number of migrations in 1995–2019

Year	Registrations			Registrations out			Balance of migration
	From abroad	Inward movement	All together	Abroad	Ward movement	All together	
1995	51	2 898	2 949	580	3 274	3 854	-905
1996	107	2 830	2 937	401	3 272	3 673	-736
1997	84	2 807	2 891	452	3 162	3 614	-723
1998	89	2 934	3 023	324	3 384	3 708	-685
1999	122	**2 980**	**3 102**	328	3 251	3 579	-477
2000	119	2 733	2 852	492	3 132	3 624	-772
2001	133	2 475	2 608	488	2 790	3 278	-670
2002	110	2 449	2 559	825	2 881	3 706	-1147
2003	100	2 368	2 468	837	2 779	3 616	-1148
2004	137	2 525	2 662	522	2 926	3 448	-786
2005	135	2 217	2 352	499	2 677	3 176	-824
2006	143	2 798	2 941	**996**	**3 442**	**4 438**	**-1497**
2007	178	2 738	2 916	837	3 233	4 070	-1154
2008	199	2 555	2 754	655	2 937	3 592	-838
2009	**243**	2 397	2 640	401	2 876	3 277	-637
2010	174	2 277	2 451	313	2 946	3 259	-808

Year	Registrations			Registrations out			Balance of migration
	From abroad	Inward movement	All together	Abroad	Ward movement	All together	
2011	154	2 358	2 512	416	2 914	3 330	-818
2012	121	2 371	2 492	318	2 848	3 166	-674
2013	94	2 559	2 653	571	3 069	3 640	-987
2014	134	2 433	2 567	375	2 903	3 278	-711
2015	Lack of data*	2 250	2 250	Lack of data*	2 719	2 719	-469
2016	93	2 051	2 144	164	2 587	2 751	-607
2017	88	2 268	2 356	118	2 741	2 859	-503
2018	119	2 563	2 682	178	2 988	3 166	-484
2019	137	2 515	2 652	163	3 087	3 250	-598

* This item in the tables of the Central Statistical Office is empty, which also affects the value of „total" and „net migration"; hence, they are marked in italics. According to the Central Statistical Office, due to the insufficient quality of data on international migration for permanent residence for 2015, these data, as well as data on long-term migrations, have not been published. Data on internal and international migrations for permanent residence come from the Ministry of the Interior and Administration

Source: own study based on CSO data, as of 2019-12-31.

The decline in the population of a given region is influenced not only by migration but also the balance of the decreasing number of births and the increasing number of deaths. The birth rate has been negative since 1999 – more people die than are born. In 2019, when the birthrate was (minus) 1,075–1,828 people were born, and 2,930 died. Compared to 1995, there are 1,093 fewer people born and 257 more deaths. The Public Opinion Research Center's (CBOS) report of 2007 shows that the procreation plans of the inhabitants of the Opole region are determined primarily by the number of children they already have (65% of the province inhabitants already have children and are satisfied with their number, so they do not plan further ones) and age of the respondents (53% of the inhabitants do not plan to have more children because they think that they are too old for it) (Cybulska, 2008, p. 9).

The average age of residents of the described border area is 43.5 years in Nysa district, 43 in Prudnik, and 43.6 in Głubczyce, which is slightly higher than the average age measured throughout Poland – 41.9 years.

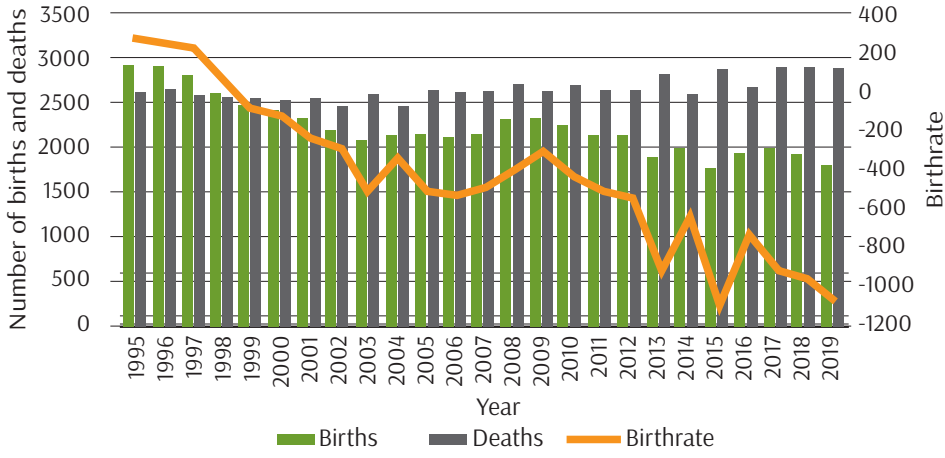

Chart 2. Number of births, deaths, birthrate in 1995–2019

Source: own study based on CSO data, as of 2019-12-31.

According to statistical data from December 2019 ("Local Data Bank"), 2/5 in these three districts are people of non-working age: 16% in pre-working age and 23% in post-working age (Chart 2). There are 144 394 people of working age, which is 3/5 of the population of this area. In this group, 61% are people of the mobile working age. These are people between 18 and 44 years of age "who can easily find a new job, are still learning and are open to new opportunities, business trips, mobile workplaces or possible complete retraining" (Wasilczyk & Rajzer, n.d.). The second part is people of non-mobile working age – 39%. This age range begins after 44 and continues until retirement age (currently 60 for women and 65 for men). This group consists of people "who are specialized in a given field, so they are no longer willing to change their character or place of work, further education, take new courses, and in particular, complete retraining in order to change their job" (Wasilczyk & Rajzer, n.d.).

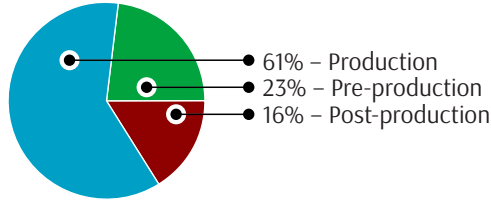

Chart 3. Population by productive age

Source: own elaboration based on GUS data, state on 2019-12-31.

Socio-economic indicators of the researched area have a negative influence in relation to the district's average.

The ratio of the number of registered unemployed to the number of the economically active population, i.e., the unemployment rate in the studied area, is higher than the unemployment rate in Poland. In 2019, it was 7.2% in the Nysa district, 8.9% in Prudnik, and 9.1% in Głubczyce. For comparison, in the same year in Poland, it was at the level of 5.2% and in Opolskie Province 5.8% ("Local Data Bank").

At least since 2002, all three districts have seen a clear upward trend in gross wages (Figure 4). However, it has remained at a similar level of about 80% for almost 10 years in relation to the national average. In 2019, it was 81.4% in the Nysa district, 79.1% in Prudnik, and 83.8% in Głubczyce ("Local Data Bank").

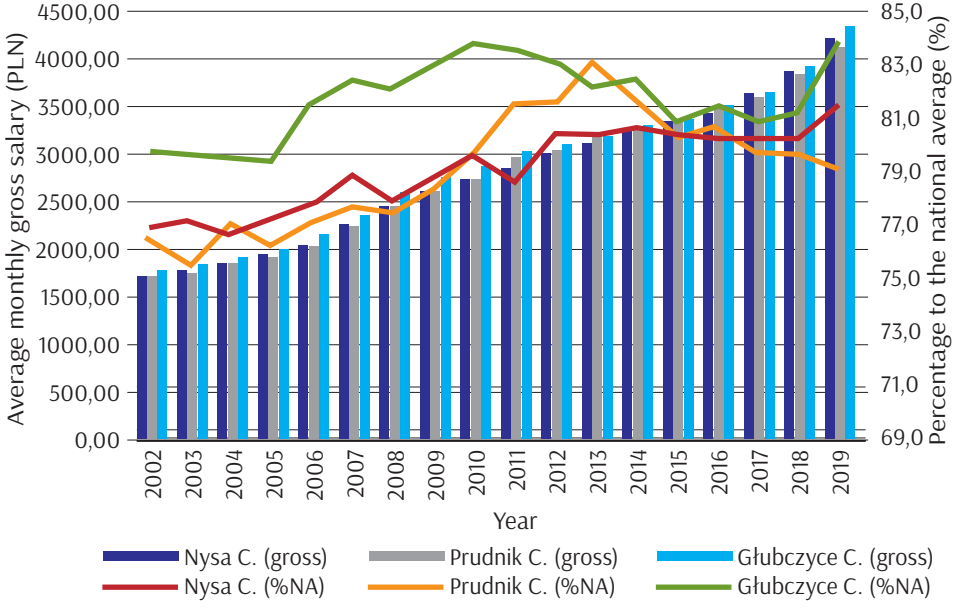

Chart 4. Average monthly salary and its relation to the national average in 2002–2019

Source: own study based on CSO data, as of 2019-12-31.

According to the CSO data ("Local Data Bank"), 1/3 of people living in the border area have secondary education (65,045 people). It includes people with general and technical education and people who graduated from post-secondary schools. The next numerous groups are people with vocational (27%) and primary (22%)

education. People with higher education account for 12%. About 2% of people living in this area have not graduated from primary school (Chart 4). The biggest differences in comparison to the national data can be noticed at the level of higher education. It is a difference of almost 6 percentage points in favor of the entire country – the percentage of people with higher education in Poland is 17.9%. This difference may be due to the lack of diversity in the educational offer at the level of higher education. There is one university of higher education in these three districts. People who decide to study in more distant centers do not necessarily decide to return to their hometowns after graduating. The second noticeable difference is the percentage of people with basic vocational education. In the whole country, these people constitute 22.9%, which is lower by 4.2 percentage points in relation to the border area.

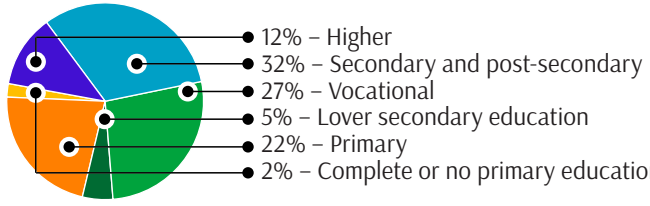

Chart 5. The level of education of the citizens

Source: own study based on CSO data, as of 2019-12-31.

CHANGES IN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

Demographic data ("Local Data Bank") show negative population growth since 1999. The negative net migration from the border areas further worsens the forecasts for the region. The average monthly salary has remained at the level of 80% in relation to the national average for years. In the light of these data, the outlook for the young generation is unfavorable. As E. Hałaburda (2020, pp. 110–122) claims, the most important factor determining school achievements is the economic and social status of the family in which the student grows up. It has been confirmed by many Polish and international studies, although the determinants of this status were understood differently. "The future, individual development of each person and the development of societies depend on good education" (Hałaburda, 2020, p. 112).

In 2019, there were 116 pre-school education institutions in the studied districts. It was only 54% of the state in 1995 (Table 1). In 379 departments, 6,287 children

were provided pre-school education, which means 16.6 people per department. It is easy to notice that the number of available places in this area always exceeded the number of children attending kindergarten with a slight margin (Chart 3).

Table 2. Number of kindergartens, branches, places as well as the number of children and the average number of children per one branch in 1995–2019

Year	Number of kindergartens	Number of branches	Number of places	Number of children	The average number of children per branch
1995	216	394	8 831	7 922	20,1
1996	203	382	8 687	7 731	20,2
1997	197	371	8 437	7 457	20,1
1998	193	367	8 247	7 224	19,7
1999	175	353	8 031	6 995	19,8
2000	166	337	7 587	6 522	19,4
2001	159	351	7 326	6 299	17,9
2002	140	387	7 009	6 090	15,7
2003	132	317	6 657	5 773	18,2
2004	128	315	6 674	5 655	18,0
2005	126	315	6 467	5 626	17,9
2006	127	317	6 487	5 561	17,5
2007	123	321	6 214	5 579	17,4
2008	122	329	6 156	5 667	17,2
2009	120	329	6 145	5 874	17,9
2010	121	337	6 541	6 015	17,8
2011	119	358	6 779	6 209	17,3
2012	118	355	6 814	6 340	17,9
2013	119	362	7 054	6 491	17,9
2014	119	350	7 024	6 126	17,5
2015	119	327	6 812	5 474	16,7
2016	121	352	7 022	6 212	17,6
2017	119	354	7 280	6 300	17,8
2018	119	357	7 362	6 294	17,6
2019	116	379	Data not available	6 287	16,6

Source: own study based on data from the CSO, as of 2019-12-31.

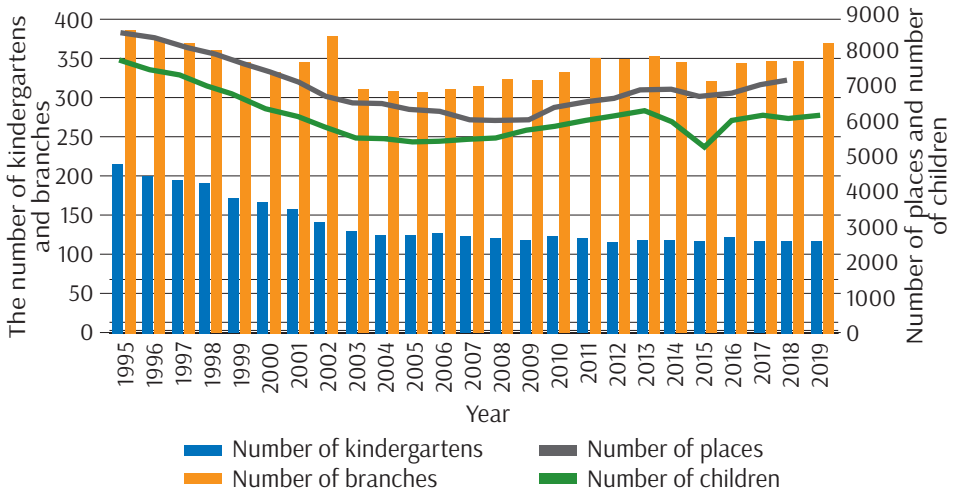

Chart 6. Number of kindergartens, departments, places, and children in 1995–2019

Source: own study based on data from the CSO, as of 2019-12-31.

Pre-school education conducted in the border area (apart from special kindergartens) has created over 500 jobs for teachers. As shown in Table 2, the number of jobs in pre-school education has increased by nearly 24% since 2011, which creates more favorable care and educational space in kindergartens. For comparison, in the Opolskie Province, at the same time, there was an increase by about 14%, and in Poland as a whole – by 29%.

Table 3. Number of teachers in kindergartens per full-time employment in 2011–2019

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Number of teachers on a full-time basis	404,32	410,16	409,32	415,94	397,40	434,71	458,17	474,55	501,41

Source: own study based on CSO data, as of 2019-12-31.

As shown in Table 3, in 2019, there were 103 primary schools with 16,023 students in 1,133 departments in the studied border area. Compared to 1995, the number of schools decreased by approximately 46%, and the number of students decreased by almost 56%. The average number of students per one class in 2019 was 14.1 – 6.2 better than in 1995 (in 1995, there were 20.3 students per class).

Table 4. The number of primary schools, classes, the number of students, and the average number of students per one class in 1995–2019

Year	Number of primary schools	Number of branches	Number of pupils	Average number of pupils per class
1995	192	1 742	3 5311	20,3
1996	185	1 691	3 4552	20,4
1997	174	1 641	3 3844	20,6
1998	178	1 615	3 2873	20,4
1999	149	1 368	2 7257	19,9
2000	130	1 120	2 2041	19,7
2001	124	1 063	2 1094	19,8
2002	117	1 014	2 0097	19,8
2003	115	990	1 9037	19,2
2004	111	955	1 7927	18,8
2005	111	928	1 7000	18,3
2006	111	904	1 5998	17,7
2007	108	883	1 5073	17,1
2008	108	864	1 4318	16,6
2009	105	836	1 3706	16,4
2010	106	829	1 3070	15,8
2011	104	795	1 2661	15,9
2012	103	780	1 2241	15,7
2013	103	778	1 1907	15,3
2014	103	805	1 2516	15,5
2015	103	841	1 3319	15,8
2016	103	777	1 2082	15,5
2017	106	914	1 3968	15,3
2018	105	1 060	1 5953	15,1
2019	103	1 133	1 6023	14,1

Source: own study based on data from the CSO, as of 2019-12-31.

It should be mentioned that the period presented in the tables covers two educational reforms. The first was carried out in 1999 by the government of Jerzy Buzek, and the second in 2017 by the government of Beata Szydło. The reform of the school structure implemented on September 1, 1999 transformed the two-tier school system into a three-tier one: a 6-year primary school, a 3-year lower secondary school, and a 3-year upper secondary school (6 + 3 + 3). The reform aimed

at adjusting education to the requirements of the present day, such as flexibility and mobility, has become the "basis for stiffening the system and a very quick (often premature) professional pre-orientation of students" (Franicka & Liberska, 2014, p. 48). Another educational reform initiated in 2017 restored the two-tier education structure (6 + 4).

As shown in Table 3, in 1999, the number of primary school students decreased. It is due to the September introduction of three-year lower secondary schools, which students begin to attend after the 6th grade of primary school.

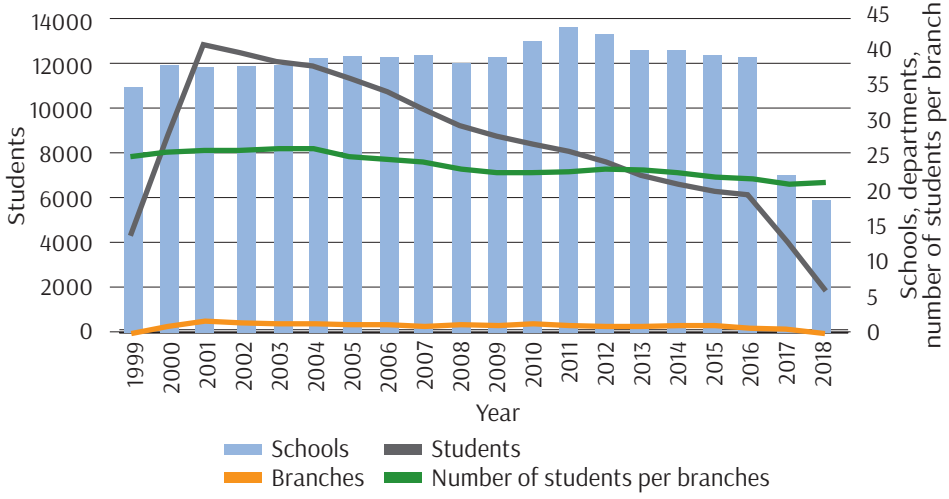

Chart 7. The number of lower secondary schools, divisions, students, and the average number of students per one division in 1998–2018

Source: own study based on GUS data, as of 2019-12-31.

Lower Secondary schools operated for 20 years. As shown in Chart 7, the decrease in the number of students has been visible since 2002. It was the first year of full occupancy in lower secondary schools in all three years of education. A sharp drop in the number of students took place in 2017. It was caused by the closing of junior high schools. The last recruitment to the first class took place in September 2016. In June 2019, the last students completed their education in the 3rd grade of lower secondary school. In the first year of operation of this type of institutions, there were 34 in the border area in question, and in the last year, 19. The highest number of junior high schools, as many as 42, was in 2011.

Another discussed type of schools is general secondary schools, of which in 2019 there were 11 in the Polish-Czech border area. At that time, they educated students in more than 85 branches. The student population in 2019 is less than

half of the population 24 years ago. The sharp drop in the number of students in 2001 was caused by the education reform, which extended the pre-high school education from 8 to 9 years. It is worth noting here that the number of institutions remains at a similar level, while the average number of students per one class is decreasing – it was over 33.8 in 1995 and over 23.7 in 2019.

Table 5. The number of general secondary schools, classes, the number of students, and the average number of students per one class in 1995–2019

Year	Number of secondary schools	Number of branches	Number of students	Average number of students per branch
1995	12	139*	4 697	33,8*
1996	12	141*	4 786	33,9*
1997	12	142*	4 981	35,1*
1998	12	144*	5 163	35,9*
1999	14	155*	5 555	35,8*
2000	14	167*	6 033	36,1*
2001	15	131*	4 663	35,6*
2002	14	153	5 067	33,1
2003	15	164	5 011	30,6
2004	19	177	4 911	27,7
2005	20	177	4 791	27,1
2006	16	165	4 407	26,7
2007	16	159	4 272	26,9
2008	14	151	3 975	26,3
2009	14	140	3 657	26,1
2010	14	132	3 450	26,1
2011	14	124	3 264	26,3
2012	15	121	3 083	25,5
2013	15	109	2 809	25,8
2014	15	103	2 612	25,4
2015	15	96	2 351	24,5
2016	14	88	2 187	24,9
2017	13	83	1 999	24,1
2018	13	79	1 929	24,4
2019	11	85*	2 015	23,7*

* Incomplete data due to the lack of data from one district.

Source: own study based on data from the Central Statistical Office, as of 2019-12-31.

When discussing vocational-technical schools, it should be remembered that the naming of individual types of schools may differ depending on the data collection period as a result of educational reforms. However, in this study, it is not so crucial to provide specific data but to show the prevailing trends and the general scale of the phenomenon.

Table 6. Number of secondary vocational schools/technical schools, classes, number of students, and the average number of students per one class in 1995–2019

Year	Number of vocational/technical secondary schools	Number of branches	Number of students	Average number of students per branch
1995	42*	187*	5 467*	29*
1996	41*	184*	5 377*	29*
1997	43*	182*	5 338*	29*
1998	46*	185*	5 406*	29*
1999	44*	184*	5 433*	30*
2000	46*	185*	5 373*	29*
2001	44*	153*	4 296*	28*
2002	47*	166*	4 562*	27*
2003	42*	172*	4 731*	28*
2004	10	63	1 731	27
2005	11	90	2 362	26
2006	10	93	2 424	26
2007	12	104	2 553	25
2008	13	120	2 671	22
2009	14	119	2 819	24
2010	14	122	2 897	24
2011	14	118	2 802	24
2012	12	111	2 683	24
2013	13	109	2 640	24
2014	13	110	2 625	24
2015	13	113	2 688	24
2016	13	112	2645	24
2017	12	111	2614	24
2018	12	112	2676	24
2019	12	145	3316	23

* The number of vocational secondary schools in the tables of the Central Statistical Office in 1995–2003 is given jointly as all educational institutions at this level. They include, inter alia, vocational secondary schools, which were transformed into specialized secondary schools after the education reform of 1999, and art schools, which do not grant vocational titles. From 2004, only the technical schools were included in the table.

Source: own study based on GUS data, as of 2019-12-31.

As presented in Table 5, before and after the change in the methodology of recording data by the Central Statistical Office, the number of schools and students remained similar.

Vocational schools cannot be overlooked as a resource for this area. In this category, the data of the Central Statistical Office include basic vocational schools, first-degree industry schools, and schools preparing for professional work, including special ones. In 2019, 1,581 students were educated in 17 institutions of this type. They had the opportunity to study in one of 139 branches, so the average number of students per branch was 11.4. It should be noted that the number of students attending this type of facility has decreased more than threefold since 1995. The smallest number of students in these institutions was recorded in 2018: 1,272 people.

Table 7. The number of vocational schools, classes, the number of students, and the average number of students per one department in 1995–2019

Year	Number of vocational schools	Number of branches	Number of students	Average number of students per branch
1995	22	198	5 132	25,9
1996	20	189	5 025	26,6
1997	19	183	4 957	27,1
1998	18	183	4 906	26,8
1999	17	178	4 739	26,6
2000	17	169	4 441	26,3
2001	16	116	2 856	24,6
2002	17	88	2 095	23,8
2003	14	63	1 550	24,6
2004	13	69	1 837	26,6
2005	13	68	1 847	27,2
2006	13	68	1 783	26,2
2007	15	115	1 932	16,8
2008	18	86	2 016	23,4
2009	18	86	2 033	23,6
2010	19	94	2 002	21,3
2011	20	93	1 943	20,9
2012	20	91	1 789	19,7
2013	19	80	1 635	20,4

Year	Number of vocational schools	Number of branches	Number of students	Average number of students per branch
2014	19	83	1 608	19,4
2015	19	80	1 539	19,2
2016	18	73	1 473	20,2
2017	17	73	1 391	19,1
2018	17	72	1 272	17,7
2019	17	139	1581	11,4

Source: own study based on data from the Central Statistical Office, as of 2019-12-31.

One university in the discussed area also started its activity on June 1, 2001. According to the Central Statistical Office (CSO) data, 3,340 students were educated there, and in 2019 their number decreased to 1,773 students ("Local Data Bank").

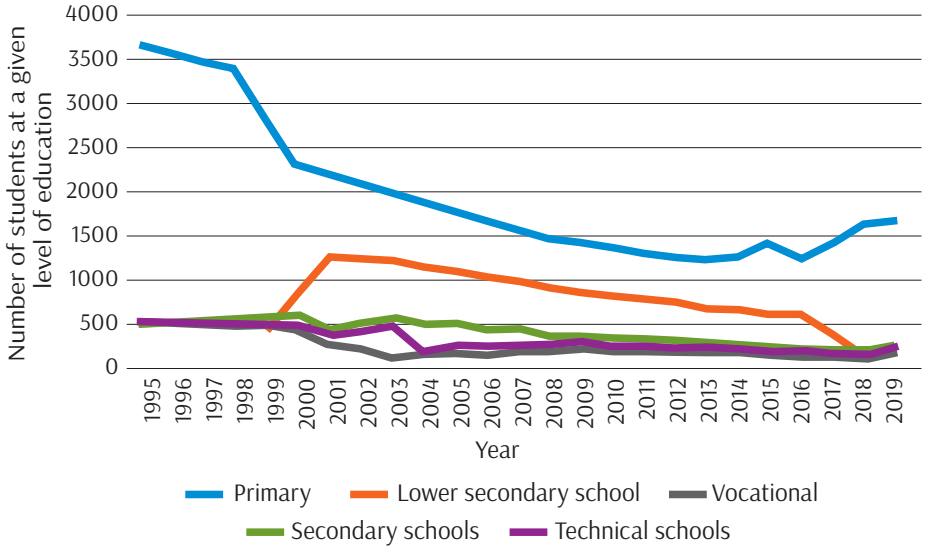

Chart 8. Number of students in each type of school in 1995–2018

Source: own study based on GUS data, as of 2019-12-31).

Compared to 1995, the number of primary schools has almost doubled. The number of general secondary schools and vocational schools remains at a similar level, although in all types of schools in the presented period, there are decreasing trends in the number of students, which is related to the demographic data presented earlier.

Pursuant to the educational reform, in September 1999, a new type of schools appeared – three-year lower secondary schools, attended by students after the 6th grade of primary school. Hence a clear drop in the number of primary school students in that year (Chart 6). A similar situation of an apparent "jump" in the number of students can be observed in 2017. This time the number of lower secondary school students decreases due to the increase in the number of primary school students. This year, lower secondary schools are closed down after another reform, and the primary school is again 8-grade. It is worth noting that the average number of students per class has been decreasing in recent years. It means that, on average, classes are smaller in this area than the average in Poland. In 2018, there were 15.1 pupils per 1 primary school unit in the borderland, while the figure for Poland was 17.3 pupils.

The number of full-time teachers in 2011–2019 remained at a similar level, except for the elementary and lower secondary level ("Local Data Bank"). In 2017, in these two levels of education, a shift of staff from lower secondary schools to primary schools can be observed, which results from the education reform (Chart 7). Teachers in primary schools constitute the most numerous group among teachers. In 2019, it was 1,570.3 full-time jobs. The least numerous group are jobs at the vocational education level.

Table 8. Number of participants per full-time job in 2011–2019

Year	Primary Schools	Lower Secondary Schools	Secondary Schools	Technical Schools	Vocational Schools
2011	1 140,9	669,5	245,4	209,8	110,4
2012	1 116,8	643,9	228,0	204,5	109,4
2013	1 107,0	611,0	216,3	204,9	107,6
2014	1 128,7	593,8	213,9	244,3	119,2
2015	1 171,3	563,2	196,3	259,3	113,9
2016	1 102,0	542,6	180,6	259,7	120,5
2017	1 299,8	388,4	169,4	247,8	114,5
2018	1 491,6	189,4	157,8	243,7	115,0
2019	1 570,3	-	189,6	282,5	127,0

Source: own study based on CSO data, as of 2019-12-31.

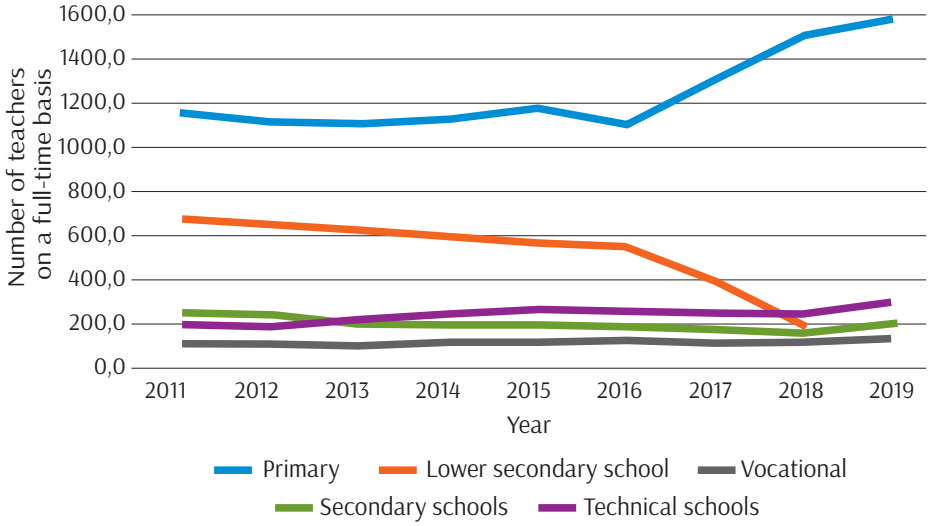

Chart 9. Number of teachers converted to full-time employment in 2011–2019

Source: own study based on CSO data, as of 2019-12-31.

CONCLUSION

Borderlands are always where different cultures, value systems, customs, and laws are confronted. At the same time, they are a natural space for dialogue and cooperation. However, the problems affecting communities on both sides of the border, in border areas, are often felt more acutely. The analysis of the educational potential of the border areas based on data from three districts – Nysa, Prudnik, and Głubczyce – indicates alarming demographic forecasts announcing the depopulation of these areas. Breaking the depopulation process seems impossible without external support. Thanks to co-financing under efficiently implemented EU projects, and above all the work of local leaders, many interesting initiatives were implemented to improve the quality of life in the border areas and their tourist attractiveness, which also gives hope for an economic revival. Promoting the landscape values of the studied areas attracts tourists from Poland and abroad (Hanulewicz, 2020, pp. 40–41). The research conducted by Sławomir Śliwa (2020, pp. 153–167) shows that opening borders does not significantly affect the life decisions of pupils and students. The vast majority of them associate their life plans with their homeland. However, they see great value in the possibility of

free movement, relaxation, and taking advantage of their neighbors' cultural and sports offers (Łangowska-Marcinowska, 2020, pp. 135–151).

The observations made in this article are consistent with the forecasts presented by Zenon Jasiński (1999, p. 137) when describing education in the Opolskie Province at the end of the 20th century. He highlighted the relationship between the level of education and the risk of unemployment. On the other hand, the discrepancy between education and the guarantee of future employment was already visible then.

A positive aspect is that with the decreasing number of students, the number of departments also decreases, which gives hope for a better quality of care, upbringing, and education. Small schools are places not only for acquiring knowledge, but also for regional education understood as returning home, to the sources of the life of every human being, to the sources of his ethics and his language, and thus to the sources of domestic, local and regional, national and universal culture (Kossak-Główczewski, 1996, p. 115), i.e., they are centers for the preservation and transmission of culture characteristic of a given region. However, the obtained data indicate that the opportunities received by border communes in connection with European integration were well used, but reversing unfavorable trends requires even greater commitment and increased efforts.

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