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AN OVERVIEW OF THE DEMOGRAPHIC SITUATION IN UKRAINIAN SMALL TOWNS

Small cities are a popular subject in the literature on the geography of Poland. These include both important theoretical and research-based works, with the latter focused mainly on socioeconomic issues. The situation is different, however, in Ukraine, where conducting research on socioeconomics is especially difficult. The basic problem faced by researchers there is obtaining statistical data; although these difficulties may not be so serious when studying a specific region or the country as a whole, they have led to a lack of analyses of local areas, and especially of small cities. The purpose of this article is to present the diversity in the demographic potential of Ukrainian small cities; it does not provide a comprehensive analysis on the subject, but rather, offers an overview of the current state of affairs, and as such, is intended as an introduction to more extensive research. The research here will be thus focused on a comparative analysis of Poland and Ukraine.

Key words: *small cities, Ukraine, demographic situation*

1. Introduction

Small cities are a popular subject in the literature on the geography of Poland, as evidenced by the enormous body of work dedicated to the topic, totalling several hundred works over the past two decades (cf. Kwiatek-Sołtys 2011). These include both important theoretical and research-based works, with the latter focused mainly on socioeconomic issues.

The situation is different, however, in Ukraine, where conducting research on socioeconomics is especially difficult. The basic problem faced by researchers there is obtaining statistical data; although these difficulties may not be so serious when studying a specific region or the country as a whole, they have led to a lack of analyses of local areas, and especially of small cities. Some studies classify cities according to size or population, but even these are selective. Statistical yearbooks, which are sporadically published for specific provinces, portray the socioeconomic situation of urban areas more comprehensively, but these are only available for certain cities, mainly the larger ones.

A lack of access to statistical data translates into a lack of interest in the issues facing Ukrainian small cities. Over the last two decades, only a few studies were published on the spatial and socioeconomic development of small cities from a national perspective (cf. e.g.: Kovalenko 1992; Tkach 1995; Habrel 2006). Research that is regional in scope is also rare, and includes, for example, works by S. Petruk (2009, 2010, 2011, 2012). Similarly, studies on regional or national planning policies are very general, and their conclusions are not based on detailed analysis of current data (cf. *Zahalnoderzhawna programa...* 2004, as well as *Monitoryng...* 2010).

The purpose of this article is to present the diversity in the demographic potential of Ukrainian small cities; it does not provide a comprehensive analysis on the subject, but rather, offers an overview of the current state of affairs, and as such, is intended as an introduction to more extensive research. The research here will be thus focused on a comparative analysis of Poland and Ukraine.

2. Ukrainian small cities – the basic facts

Small cities are a crucial element in the Ukrainian settlement network and its socioeconomic structure. Presently, out of approximately 1 250 urban communities, more than 90% have less than 20,000 residents. These cities also comprise the vast majority of the urban settlement network – about 93% overall. They can be divided into two kinds, the first of which are those with town privileges. These number 355, and are roughly equivalent to what is known as small cities in Poland. They will be discussed later in the paper.

The number of small cities in particular regions of Ukraine varies greatly; the number is highest in the Lviv (40) and Donetsk (36) Regions. On average, a given province will have several small cities (Fig. 1).

The other type are “urban-type villages” (SMT). According to Ukrainian law, these communities have town privileges, but are not granted the legal status of towns. They are more like large villages with a rate of development high enough to aspire to becoming cities. These communities, are a relic of Soviet times, and served as a way to elevate the status of large villages within their settlement network. In comparison to small cities – with an average of several thousand residents – urban-type settlements are often smaller, though not as a rule, since there are communities with the legal status of a town, but which have only one or two thousand residents.

Most small cities are the capitals of their provinces (which are equivalent to the Polish “powiat”).

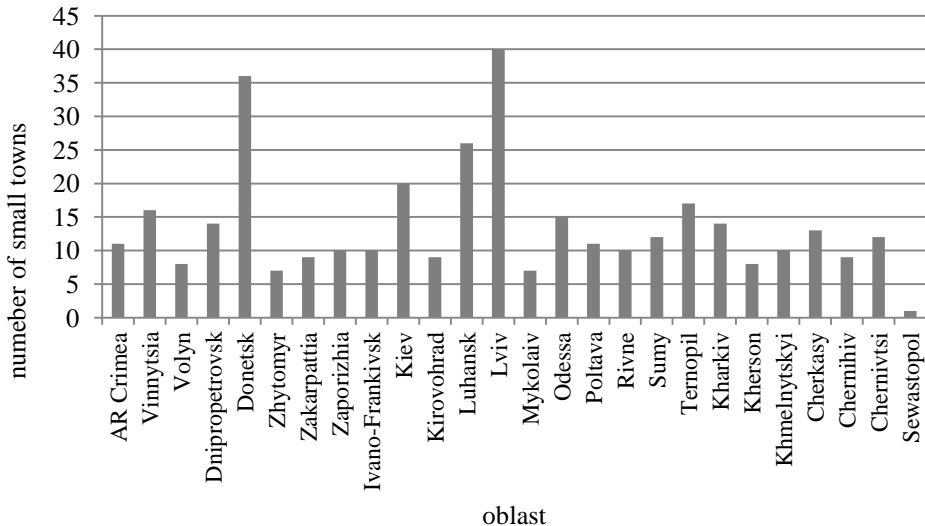


Fig. 1. The number of Ukrainian small cities per province

S o u r c e: author's analysis of *Monitoryng socialno-ekonomichnoho rozvytku...* (2010)

The most commonly used Ukrainian classification system defines a small city as a settlement of no more than 50,000 residents (Horew 1968). They are further divided into:

- “very small cities” [poselky], with no more than 10,000 residents;
- “small cities”, with 10,000 to 20,000 residents;
- “small mid-sized cities”, with 20,000 to 50,000 residents.

“Small mid-sized cities” are most commonly found in the eastern provinces of Ukraine. They combine the features of small and medium-sized cities and have a relatively high level of socioeconomic development. This is because, in comparison to smaller cities, they have better access to the state and private sectors, as well as a more well-developed social and technical infrastructure. What is more, thanks to the concentration of industrial plants in them, the local labour markets are often important regionally. This type of community is also characterized by intensive migration: whereas many residents leave for bigger cities, this loss is well compensated for by new arrivals from rural areas and smaller cities.

Small cities of the other type, those with no more than 20,000 residents, dominate in traditionally industrial regions: mainly in the east and south of the country, as well as in provinces that are of great importance to the settlement network (e.g. Lviv and Odessa Regions). Until recently, one large state industrial plant or several smaller specialised plants dominated the local economies of such communities. Most of these facilities have closed down, which has brought

about a number of negative consequences for these areas, including a general economic decline, a negative net migration rate, and a decrease in the population due to high mortality rates. In addition, these areas suffer from a lack of essential social services and from insufficient investments in the technical and social infrastructure. These negative phenomena also affect neighbouring rural areas, for which the cities were the main source of services and social activity, which were often previously provided directly through local industrial plants. One of the main problems here is the state of Ukrainian farming. Since the decline of the so-called *sowkhoz* and *kolkhoz*, or state agricultural farms, farming in Ukraine has not been restructured. Many farms lie fallow, and rural inhabitants often migrate to cities or run economically inefficient micro-farms.

The last type of small city, the so-called *poselky*, is the most numerous in terms of its demographic potential. Nearly 30% of them are located in two provinces [oblasts] in the East of Ukraine: the Donetsk and Lugansk Provinces. Many *poselky* started as villages and later grew as the result of nearby coal and iron ore mines. Like the previous kind of city, these are primarily mono-functional, often with one coal- or ore-processing plant in the vicinity.

These smallest cities have limited options for socioeconomic growth, but they still tend to enjoy well-developed state services, such as health care facilities or community centres. Nevertheless, living conditions in them are similar to those in rural areas, which is visible in lacks in the basic infrastructure (waterworks and sewage systems), and limited access to retail establishments.

Unlike larger communities, the smallest cities are defined by physical characteristics and an urban structure like those found in villages.

With their dairies, bakeries, and relatively well-developed craftsmanship, the smallest cities are often the chief suppliers of agricultural goods to their respective regions. Despite this, they suffer from socioeconomic problems similar to those found in other cities. Due to their number, however, they still hold an important position in their socioeconomic environment and settlement network. In the future, these cities should grow in significance, alongside changes in the agricultural sector, which will promote economic mobilization among the inhabitants of rural areas. This should help spur entrepreneurship and, consequently, help expanding the labour market.

3. Selected socioeconomic features of Ukrainian small cities

Nearly 69% of the Ukrainian population lives in cities. More than 9 million of these people live in urban settlements and small cities, with the latter being inhabited by about 6 million people, or 12% of the entire population.

The concentration of the population living in small cities relative to their region varies significantly and oscillates between 25% for the Kiev Province and less than 8% for the Chernivtsi Province (excluding the municipality of Sevastopol) (cf. Fig. 2).

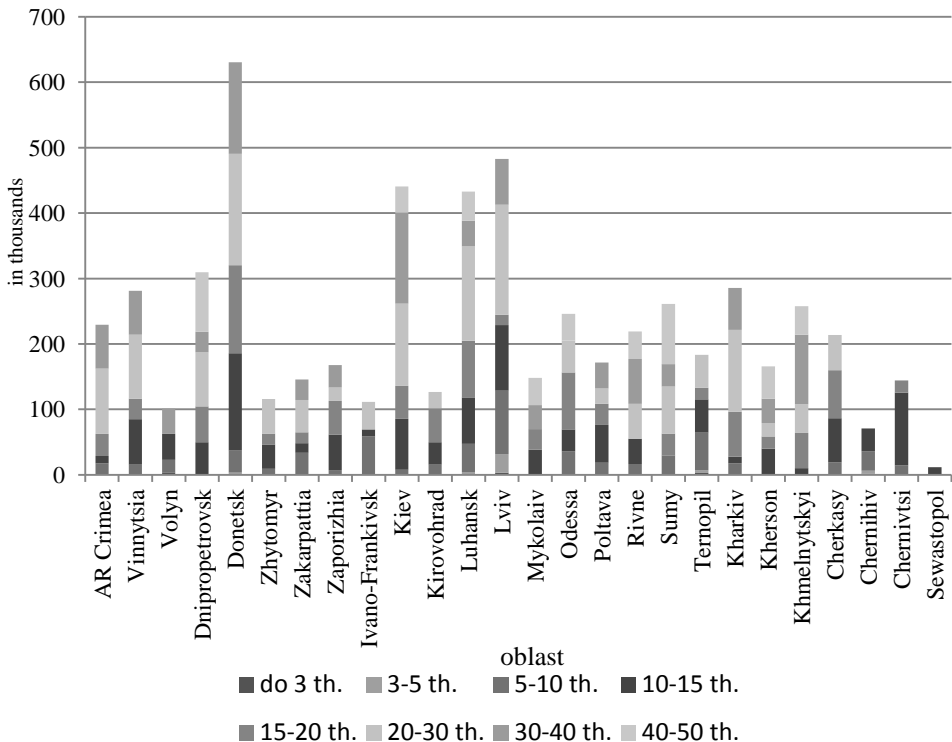


Fig. 2. Number of residents in Ukrainian small cities per unit size

S o u r c e: author's analysis of *Monitoryng socialno-ekonomichnoho rozvytku...* (2010)

Cities with 10,000 to 15,000 residents constitute the largest percentage (28%), while cities with 40,000 to 50,000 residents – the smallest percentage (3%).

Cities with 20,000 to 30,000 residents dominate in terms of the population distribution, encompassing 25% of the entire small city population. In Ukraine, unlike in Poland, cities with less than 3,000 residents (only 7 communities overall) are of marginal significance, mainly due to the division between cities and urban-type settlements.

The structure of the economic age in small cities is similar to that across the country. Nearly 20% of the people are not yet of working age, while 23% have already retired. From a regional perspective, the provinces in the West are relatively young, with more than 20% of the people being of pre-working age,

while in the Odessa, Kherson and Kharkiv Provinces, more than 30% of the residents are of retirement age (cf. Fig. 3).

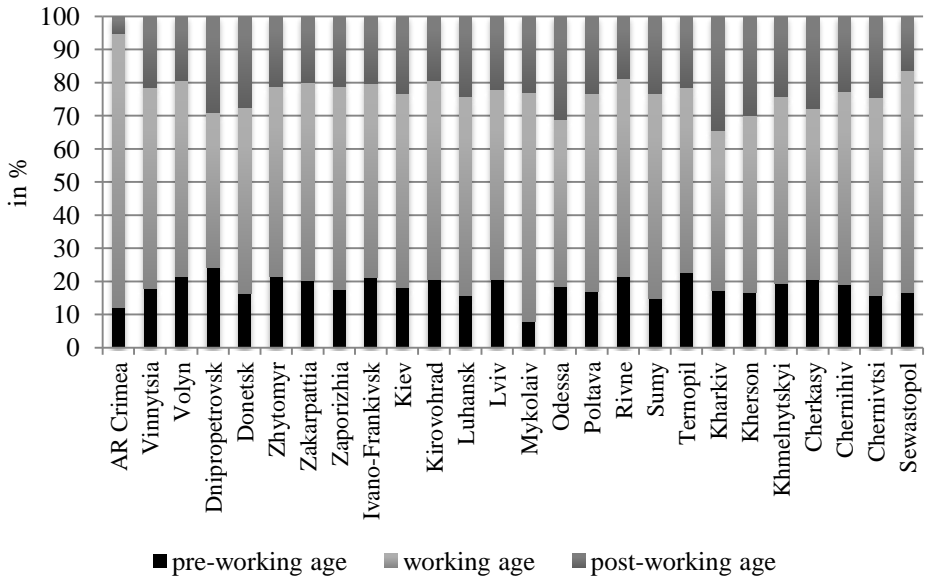


Fig. 3. Regional diversity of economic age in Ukrainian small cities

S o u r c e: author's analysis of *Monitoryng socialno-ekonomichnoho rozvytku...* (2010)

Regardless of their size, Ukrainian small cities have similar rates of migration and population growth. The average birth rate is about 11.2 a year, which is lower than average death rate. This results in a negative rate of population growth, which, depending on the city size, can range from -0.24 to -0.43 . At the same time, average net migration rate is positive, although after considering all kinds of small cities presented, it is still close to zero (cf. Table 1).

In comparison with the country overall, small cities have slightly higher birth rates and slightly lower death rates, which results in an 0.1 increase in the population growth. At the same time, the analyzed cities have a lower net migration rate than the average of 0.35 for the whole country.

Regional analysis of the data reveals a distinct division between the West and the East of Ukraine. The West has the highest birth rates and the lowest death rates in the country; while in the East it is the opposite. Population growth rates in western small cities are generally positive, with a growth rate of up to 3.3‰ in Rivne Province; while in the east they are negative, with the lowest rate of $-8.7‰$ in Luhansk Province.

Table 1

Average values of selected demographic indices for Ukrainian small cities

Measure	Small city								
	3 th.	3–5 th.	5–10 th.	10–15 th.	15–20 th.	20–30 th.	30–40 th.	40–50 th.	Total
Birth rate (per 1000 residents)	10.6	9.8	12.1	11.3	11.0	11.5	11.8	11.2	11.2
Death rate (per 1000 residents)	13.6	13.0	15.1	15.3	15.3	14.5	14.2	13.9	14.4
Population growth (in percentage)	-0.30	-0.32	-0.30	-0.40	-0.43	-0.30	-0.24	-0.27	-0.32
Net migration rate (per 1000 residents)	0.41	-0.12	0.01	0.05	0.11	0.15	0.00	0.26	0.11

S o u r c e: author's analysis of *Monitoryng socialno-ekonomichnoho rozvytku...* (2010).

Net migration rates are equally diverse, but do not display any clear geographical divisions. The lowest rates were registered for Luhansk Province (-3.5%), and the district of Kryvyi Rih (-3.2%). The highest rates were registered for Dnipropetrovsk Province (6.4%).

In contrast to the demographic analysis presented herein, there is no precise data concerning the socioeconomic situation of small cities. This is because most statistical data is collected across whole provinces (equivalent to Polish “powiats”), and local statistics are not available.

In terms of social issues, there is a lack of information on the educational or occupational structure, as well as on the structure of the economy as measured by the diversity of its business entities. The only means available for describing the economic situation is to present variable indicators from the business diversity index. For small cities as a whole, this figure is 77, but it varies greatly region per region. It is highest for cities in the south (cf. Fig. 4) and for the Kiev Province (120). In the case of the latter, the index is higher due to the proximity to the capital, while in the case of the south it may be influenced by the tourism potential of the regions and their maritime location, which spurs the development of many types of business, particularly in the service sector.

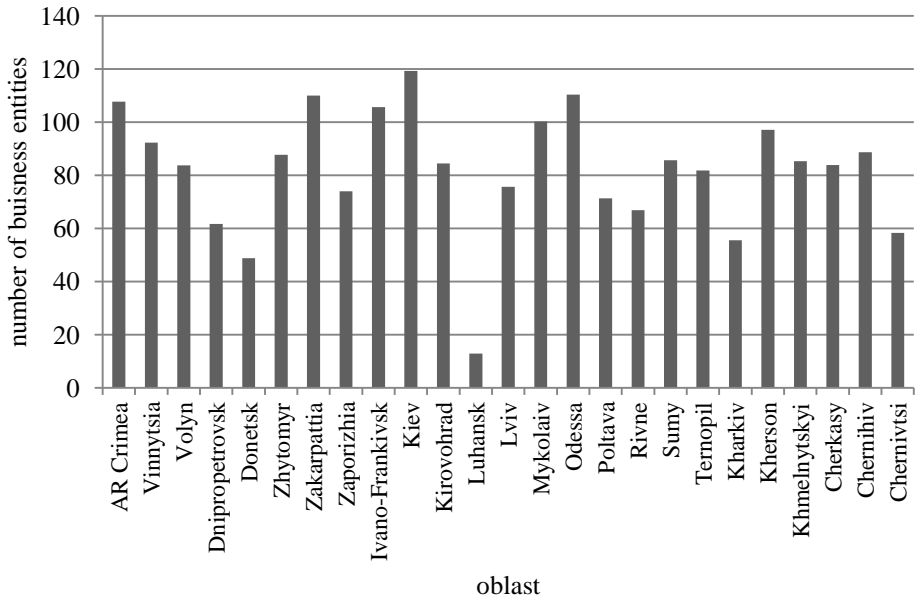


Fig. 4. Business diversity indices per region for Ukrainian small cities

S o u r c e: author's analysis of *Monitoryng socialno-ekonomichnoho rozvytku...* (2010)

The lowest indices were recorded for small cities on the outskirts of the western provinces (Luhansk, Donetsk, and Kharkiv). Especially the first one – Luhansk Province – exhibits a very low index of just 15. The area is dominated by traditional industry and agriculture, where monofunctional industrial plants have decisive influence in the settlement networks.

4. Summary

The summary will present a comparison between Poland and Ukraine in terms of selected demographic features of small cities (cf. Table 2).

Even though there are almost twice as many small cities in Poland, both countries have a similar demographic potential. They differ, however, in their age structure and demographic characteristics. In Ukraine, small cities exhibit a higher degree of ageing: 6% more people have already entered retirement age. At the same time, they have a lower rate of population growth, resulting mainly from a much higher death rate.

Table 2

A comparison of selected demographic features of small cities between Poland and Ukraine¹

Measure		Poland	Ukraine
Number of small cities		685	355
Percentage of small cities relative to each country's settlement network (in %)		75	93
Number of residents		5 mln	6 mln
Percentage of residents of small cities relative to each country's relative population (in %)		13	12
Age structure	pre-working	18.2	18.3
	working	64.8	58.8
	retirement	16.9	22.9
Birth rate (per 1000 resident)		9.2	11.2
Death rate (per 1000 residents)		9.8	14.4
Population growth (w %)		-0.1	-0.3
Net migration ratio (per 1000 residents)		-2.3	0.1

S o u r c e: author's analysis of *Monitoryng socialno-ekonomichnoho rozvytku...* (2010).

The situation is reversed, however, in the case of the net migration ratio; unlike in Poland, in Ukraine it is slightly positive. The difference may result from at least three factors. In the 1980s, the average net migration ratio in Poland was also positive, but has decreased to below zero since then. This change was triggered by a number of causes, mostly related to the political transformations of the late 1980s. These included:

- the collapse of many national industrial plants in 1990. The plants were often very large and incompatible with the size of the cities. Their disappearance, though, decreased the appeal of local and regional labour and real estate markets;

¹ Data source for the analysis: cities of up to 20,000 residents for Poland; cities of up to 50,000 residents for Ukraine.

– little access to state services, such as secondary and higher education, which prompted many young people to migrate to big cities;

– the development of the automotive industry, and consequently a decrease in then costs and time involved in travelling, which made commuting daily to work, school, etc. much easier.

In the coming years, small cities in Ukraine will most probably undergo processes similar to those that occurred in Poland. The average lifespan will expand and the average birth rate will drop, resulting in an age structure close to that in contemporary Europe. At the same time, small cities, except those with much more than 20,000 residents will lose their appeal in terms of migration to the benefit of medium and large cities. Like in Poland, this process will be facilitated by the improvement and expansion of transportation.

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ZARYS SYTUACJI DEMOGRAFICZNEJ W MAŁYCH MIASTACH UKRAINY

Małe miasto to popularny przedmiot zainteresowań w polskiej literaturze zarówno geograficznej, jak i ekonomicznej, czy społecznej. Odmienna sytuacja ma miejsce na Ukrainie, gdzie możliwości badań z zakresu geografii społeczno-ekonomicznej, czy też szerszej badań przestrzennych są bardzo trudne. Podstawową barierę stanowi dostęp do danych statystycznych. Brak takich danych przekłada się z kolei na mniejsze zainteresowanie problematyką małych miast na Ukrainie.

Celem artykułu jest zaprezentowanie zróżnicowania potencjału demograficznego małych miast Ukrainy na tle sytuacji krajowej. Zadaniem autorów nie jest szczegółowe rozwinięcie powyższej problematyki, a jedynie zarysowanie istniejącej sytuacji, co stanowi wprowadzenie do szerszych badań, które docelowo prowadzić będą do analiz porównawczych pomiędzy Polską i Ukrainą.

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