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Changes in spatial structure of commercial activity in Central European towns - case of southwest Poland (1990-2010). Traditional shops vs. modern shopping structures

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Changes in spatial structure of commercial activity in Central European towns. Case of south-west Poland (1990-2010). Traditional shops vs. modern shopping structures.

1. Introduction

The direction of retail development in Poland is in line with its evolution in the world. The result of the economic transformation is fragmented, privatized network of local shops supplemented by strong modern shopping structures. Since the beginning of the 1990's trade was one of the fastest growing sectors of the Polish economy, undergoing constant ownership, economic and spatial changes (KLOSIEWICZ-GÓRECKA, NOWACKI ROBERT;2007). The number of traditional shops as Central Statistical Office of Poland reports has declined over the past few years, while modern shopping structures are very popular among customers and their number is growing. Currently in Poland, new investments are already being undertaken in cities of several thousand inhabitants.

This article aims to define the changes that have occurred in the spatial shaping of commercial tissue of southern Polish towns in the years 1990-2010. The objects of studies are small towns¹ in south of the country located in Lower Silesia region. Due to the small number of inhabitants and a relatively simple spatial arrangement the emergence of a new investment in a small town is an important event and the smaller scale of the city helps to understand the social and spatial transformations that occur (BESSER, RECKER, AGNITS, 2009). The paper discusses mainly small towns with medieval traditions, but to be able to accurately assess the changes that have occurred in them, studies have been complemented by analysis of the changes that have occurred in county towns and in small towns where there are no modern shopping structures.

¹ The definition of a small town was accepted as defined by the Central Statistical Office of Poland, as an individual settlement with the overwhelming compact development and non-agricultural functions, having a town or city status granted in the manner specified in other regulations, while the number of people in a small town defined by Central Statistical Office does not exceed 20'000 inhabitants, an average town – 100'000 inhabitants, large settlements with more than 100'000 inhabitants are considered as big towns.

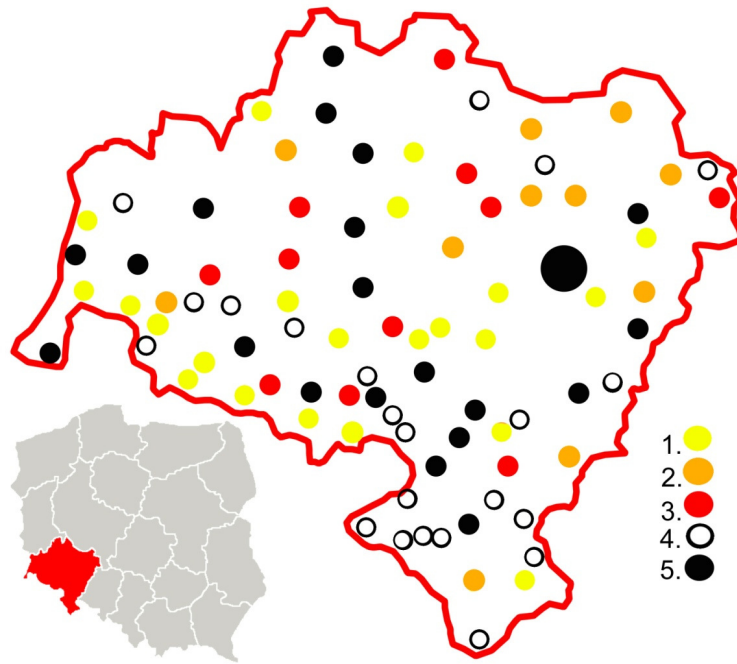
Apart from small towns that grow rapidly and developers are interested in new investments, there are cities that have lost their functions. This applies to cities that served as the centers of agricultural services and they are not currently attractive in terms of tourism or communication. In such cities, modern shopping structure is often the first new investment in many years. It gives people not only access to new products but also brings them mentally closer to the big city.

2. Towns of Lower Silesia

Lower Silesia region is situated in south-western part of the country and has 68 small towns (MASZTALSKI, 2005). In these towns in the last quarter of 2010 there were 94 modern shopping structures operating. The average plot size of a modern shopping structure is 5601 m². All modern shopping structures were built in the years 1999-2010², therefore, over 10 years in the small towns of Lower Silesia retail space has increased by about 56 hectares. It's a huge amount, especially when taking into consideration the decreasing number of traditional shops in Polish cities.

The diagram presented below shows the location of modern shopping structures in the cities of the region. In most cases it is true to say that the bigger the city the more modern shopping structures there are in it. It should be noted that the spa towns - regardless of their size in the vast majority do not have a modern shopping structure.

² The homeland of modern forms of trade is the United States. In Europe, the development started a bit later, due to World War II and war damage. The development of modern forms of trade in the United States, European countries and Poland had a similar course. The word similar should be emphasized because those countries share cultural, historical, mental and other differences. In the U.S. commercial buildings developed smoothly mostly in suburban locations. In Europe, the development of new forms of trade was slowed down by war damage. Their location more often than in the U.S. included urban areas (COLEMAN, 2006)
The development of modern shopping structures in Poland was associated with market liberalization and took place after 1989, so it started about 80 years later than in Europe. When economies of countries of Central and Eastern Europe were opened and liberalized almost all major European trading companies have started-up in Poland in the 1990`s, which led to a rapid increase in foreign-owned stores (SLIWINSKA, 2003). They had practically no competition and the potential and interest of customers was enormous.



IMG 1. LOCATION OF MODERN SHOPPING STRUCTURES IN CITIES OF THE REGION

1. Small towns with one modern shopping structure; 2. Small towns with two modern shopping structures; 3. Small towns with three to five modern shopping structures; 4. Small towns with no modern shopping structures; 5. Medium and big cities

3. Economic transformation and the changes in the spatial structure of cities

The transformation in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the late 20th century was a phenomenon unique in the world. For Poland the breakthrough was the year 1989 when a dynamic growth in the service sector had started. In connection with the change of political system in the country a competition from foreign trade networks has appeared (Nicholls 2001).

Transformation in Central and Eastern Europe was the core of the commercialization process, it contributed to the development of suburbs and improved the quality of urban areas. Socialism has left a mark on the urban layout of Central European cities. Large residential units were created in peripheral areas while in urban centers prosperous industrial areas were located next to historic buildings (CHOUCH, LEONTIDOU, PETSCHER-HELD, 2007). Capitalism has helped to change the spatial structure. These changes were associated with new functions in urban areas. Lack of space for commercial use has caused the development of commercial properties.

The development of trade was an important force that had contributed significantly to the huge reorganization of use of property in Central Europe. This development had been recognized as a tool for local economic regeneration and was supported by government and

local business. Local governments in most former socialist countries facilitated the development of commercial real estate. Currently, representatives from the services sector are a significant force in Central Europe. Suburban shopping centers were financed mainly by foreign investors.

After the expansion of huge modern shopping structures in the larger cities of the region smaller investments now appear in towns of several thousand inhabitants. Such structures are located in downtown and suburbs in modern buildings, or they replace no longer needed urban functions.

4. The spatial development of modern shopping structures and traditional forms of trade

Analysis of the distribution of traditional shops and modern shopping structures in the years 1990-2010 was conducted in 16 cities in the close neighborhood of Wroclaw. The study was possible thanks to data related to individual stores provided by the Central Statistical Office of Poland. The database contained the following information on three thousand traditional shops (641 of which ceased operations by 2010): start date of business, end date of business and the store's address. The information on modern shopping structures were provided by the county authorities. The database covered 39 modern shopping structures. The figures have been supplemented with information published by commercial corporations and conclusions from on-site visits.

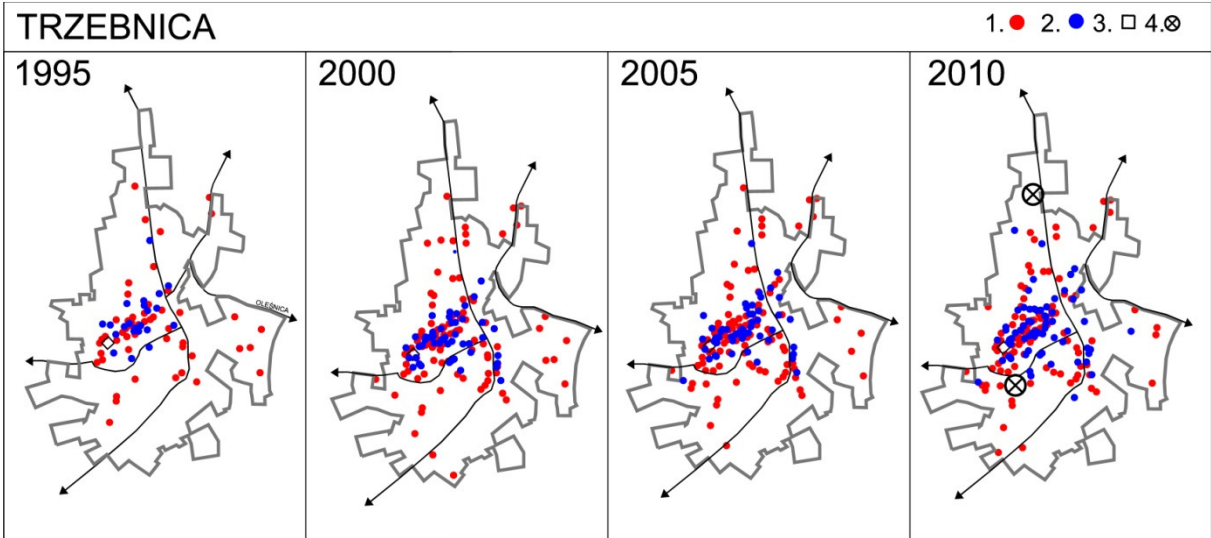
4.1 Traditional trade in a small town of medieval traditions

Designated commercial activity areas were created within the city in the Middle Ages. This was an important area because it provided the largest incomes for the town. Market was usually located in the central part of town, at the intersection of routes. In many cities lots for the wealthiest and most prominent merchants were drawn around the market. Throughout the whole Poland and in neighboring countries plots were being drawn alike, they were narrow, deep and came out on one of the frontages of the market (SAMSONOWICZ, 2006). The planned location of the main square had the following meaning: it controlled the trade and was an attractive advertisement of the city's capabilities. This made the market the busiest place (SAMSONOWICZ, 2006).

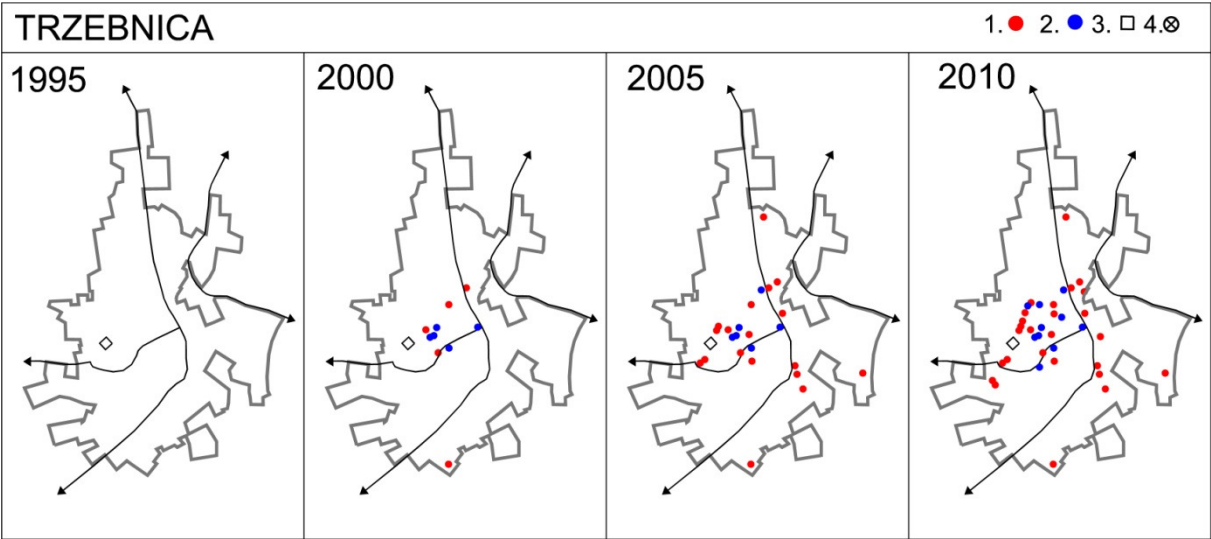
Despite the war damage the traditional urban layout remains legible. The market still is an important element of the city. Determinant of trade development in small towns is its urban layout. In all of the studied cities the area in which the largest number of stores began

operations coincides with the downtown. There are of course a group of shops in residential areas, but downtown is the heart of the city. It is worth noting that the area where the largest number of stores cease operations also coincides with the downtown. Downtown is therefore an area of greatest activity in the city.

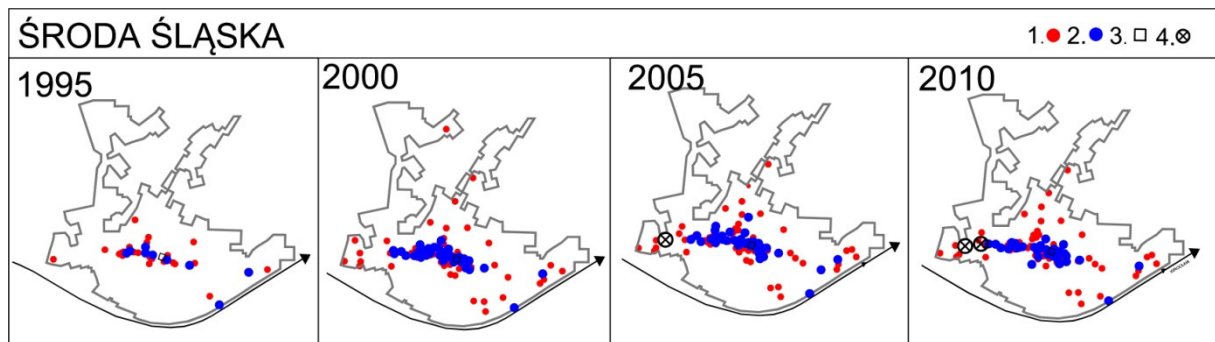
Also important is the communication system. Towns well connected with the region capital are of special interest, where the largest number of stores is located on the route from city center to railway station. Also there are almost no shops in such locations that would cease operations. This is the part of the city that is commercially best equipped.



IMG 2. LOCATION OF TRADITIONAL SHOPS AND MODERN SHOPPING STRUCTURES IN TRZEBNICA, IN THE YEARS 1995-2010
 1.Traditional grocery stores; 2. Traditional non-grocery stores; 3. Town market; 4. Modern shopping structures.

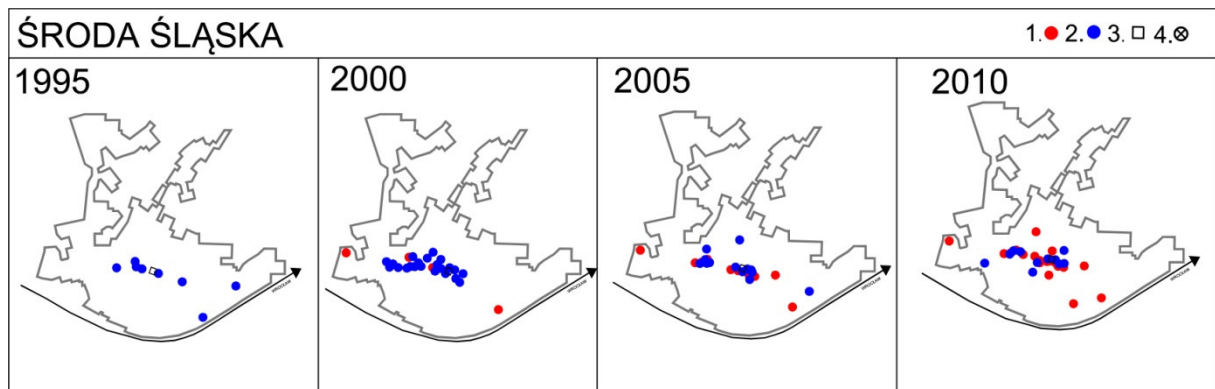


IMG 3. LOCATION OF TRADITIONAL SHOPS AND MODERN SHOPPING STRUCTURES THAT HAVE CEASED OPERATIONS IN TRZEBNICA, IN THE YEARS 1995-2010
 1.Traditional grocery stores; 2. Traditional non-grocery stores; 3. Town market; 4. Modern shopping structures.



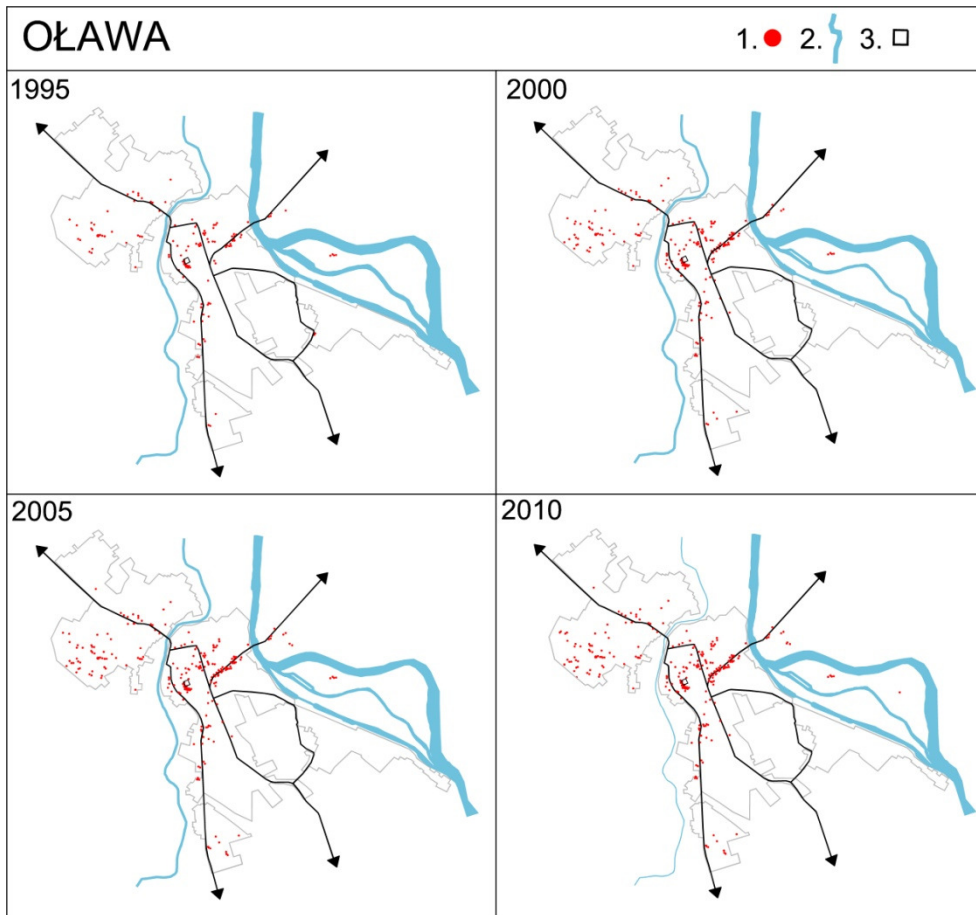
IMG 4. LOCATION OF TRADITIONAL SHOPS AND MODERN SHOPPING STRUCTURES IN ŚRODA ŚLĄSKA, IN THE YEARS 1995-2010

1.Traditional grocery stores; 2. Traditional non-grocery stores; 3. Town market; 4. Modern shopping structures.

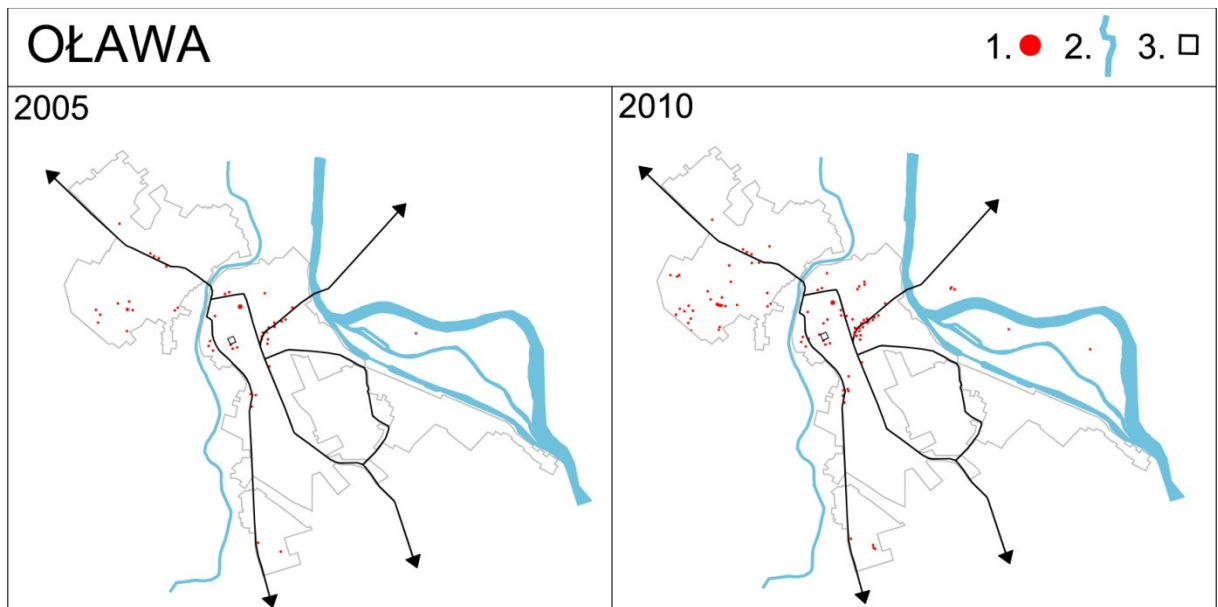


IMG 5. LOCATION OF TRADITIONAL SHOPS AND MODERN SHOPPING STRUCTURES THAT HAVE CEASED OPERATIONS IN ŚRODA ŚLĄSKA, IN THE YEARS 1995-2010

1.Traditional grocery stores; 2. Traditional non-grocery stores; 3. Town market; 4. Modern shopping structures.



IMG 6. LOCATION OF TRADITIONAL SHOPS THAT HAVE STARTED OPERATIONS IN OŁAWA, IN THE YEARS 1995-2010 1.Traditional grocery stores; 2. River; 3. Town market.

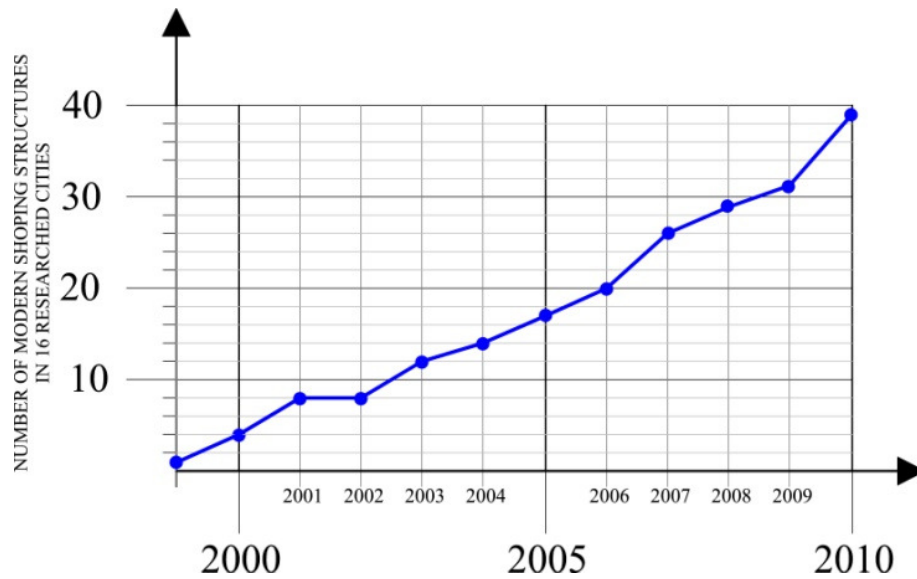


IMG 7. LOCATION OF TRADITIONAL SHOPS THAT HAVE CEASED OPERATIONS IN OŁAWA, IN THE YEARS 2005,2010 1.Traditional grocery stores; 2. River; 3. Town market.

There is a relationship between the functional and spatial structure of the city and the shape of a traditional commercial tissue. While in the cities of medieval traditions the greatest number of shops accumulates in the center - in post-industrial cities it is not the case. Towns that have developed at industrial plants are lacking the city center. In many cases, the heart of the city is a settlement located near industrial plants and when an industrial plant shall cease to exist the city is developing in the other direction and the center moves with it. An example of such a city could be Siechnice with several thousand inhabitants, where a dozen years ago most of the shops operated near the power plant and currently with the development of the city, shops that are near the plant cease operations and trade in the city moved to the estate areas.

4.2 Modern shopping structures in small towns

The first modern shopping structures began appearing in small towns later than in large ones, it took place around the year 2000. Developers were looking for land with a lot of traditional trade nearby, especially in downtowns. This trend was particularly visible in the early years of the process. Due to lack of free downtown land commercial buildings started occupying existing buildings by upgrading or adapting them to their needs. There were storage facilities (Żmigród 2000) located in industrial areas, service areas (Sobótka 2006) as well as those of cultural features (Twardogóra). Starting from the year 2007 in the small towns of the region mostly new modern shopping structures are being built. Total investment is enormous. In 16 cities, over 11 years almost 40 modern shopping structures started business. This phenomenon can be explained by economic factors, pleading for the construction of a new object or just by a limited number of buildings that can be adapted. Most modern shopping structures located in the small towns of the region belong to the representatives of the food industry. Half of the researched investments have additional service points (florist, bakery, ATM, etc.) located near the entrance area.

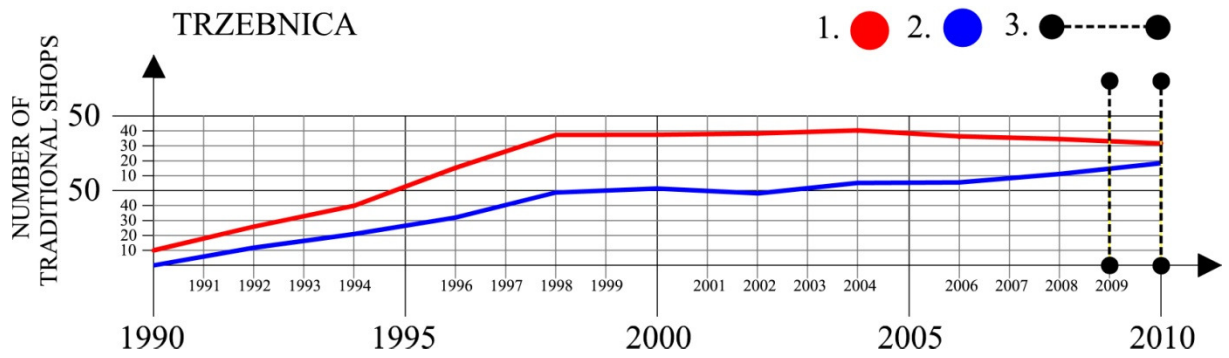


IMG 8. GRAPH ILLUSTRATING CHANGES IN THE NUMBER OF MODERN SHOPPING STRUCTURES IN 16 CITIES OF WROCLAW SUBREGION

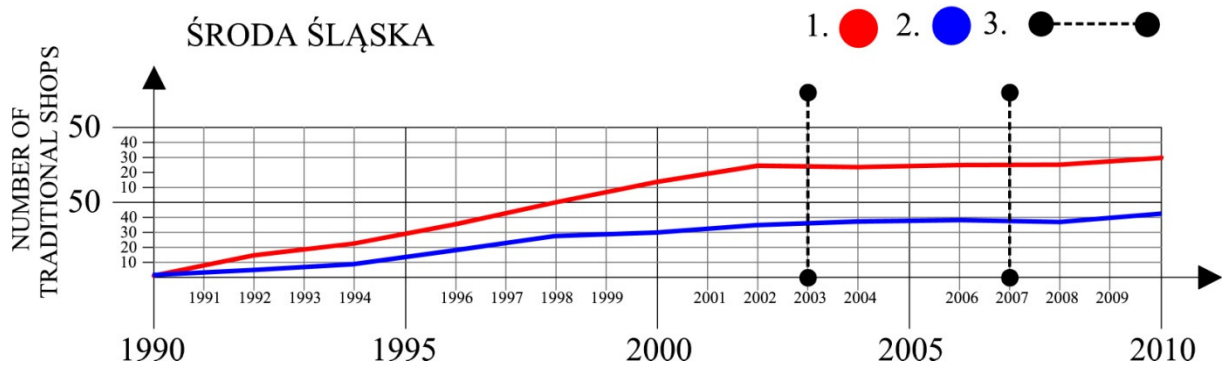
4.3. The relationship between a growing number of modern shopping structures and traditional commercial tissue

According to Central Statistical Office data, the number of traditional stores in recent years has dropped by a few percent and at the same time the number of modern shopping structures has increased greatly. These objects are heavily advertised and we can simultaneously observe in the media that local small traders are protesting against the founding of a modern shopping structure. Despite the concerns of local businesses, there are no scientific studies that clearly demonstrate the impact of modern shopping structures on decreasing number of shops in Polish cities.

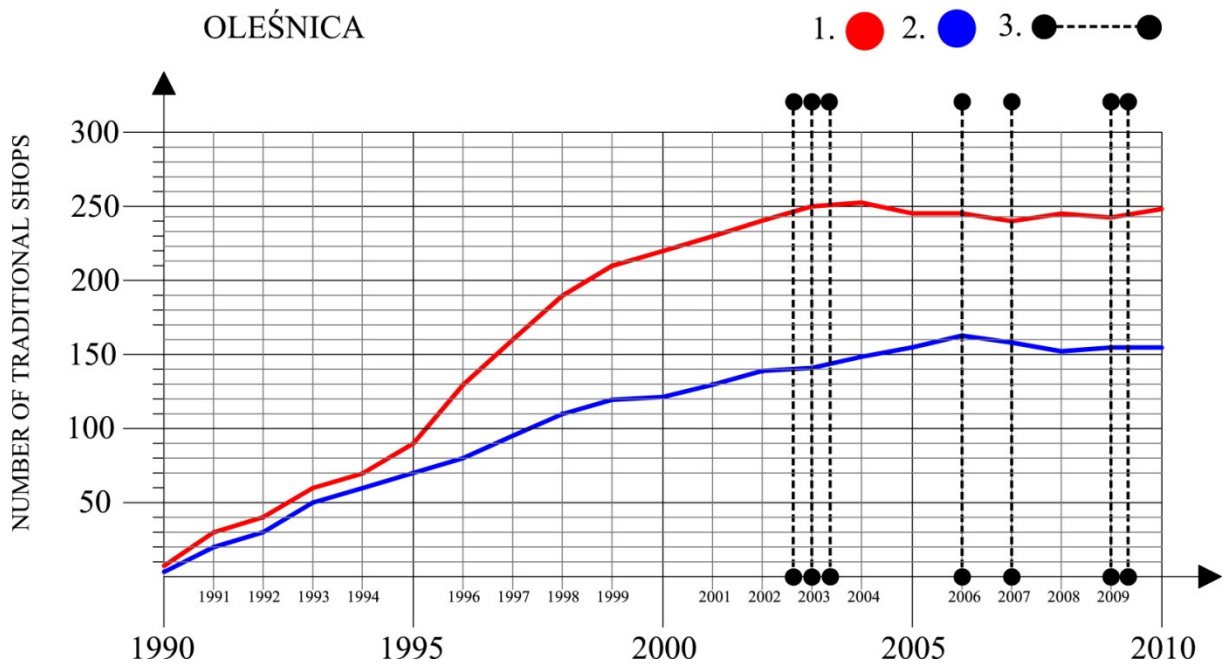
For the purpose of this work the author has analyzed the dynamics of traditional shops development in several small towns. Then the result was confronted with the development of modern shopping structures in those cities. Separately the development of grocery and non-grocery stores was analyzed. In addition, the changes that have occurred in the development of traditional trade tissue in medium-sized cities (Oława and Oleśnica) and small towns of the region where there are no modern shopping structures (Międzybórz, Prusice) was examined.



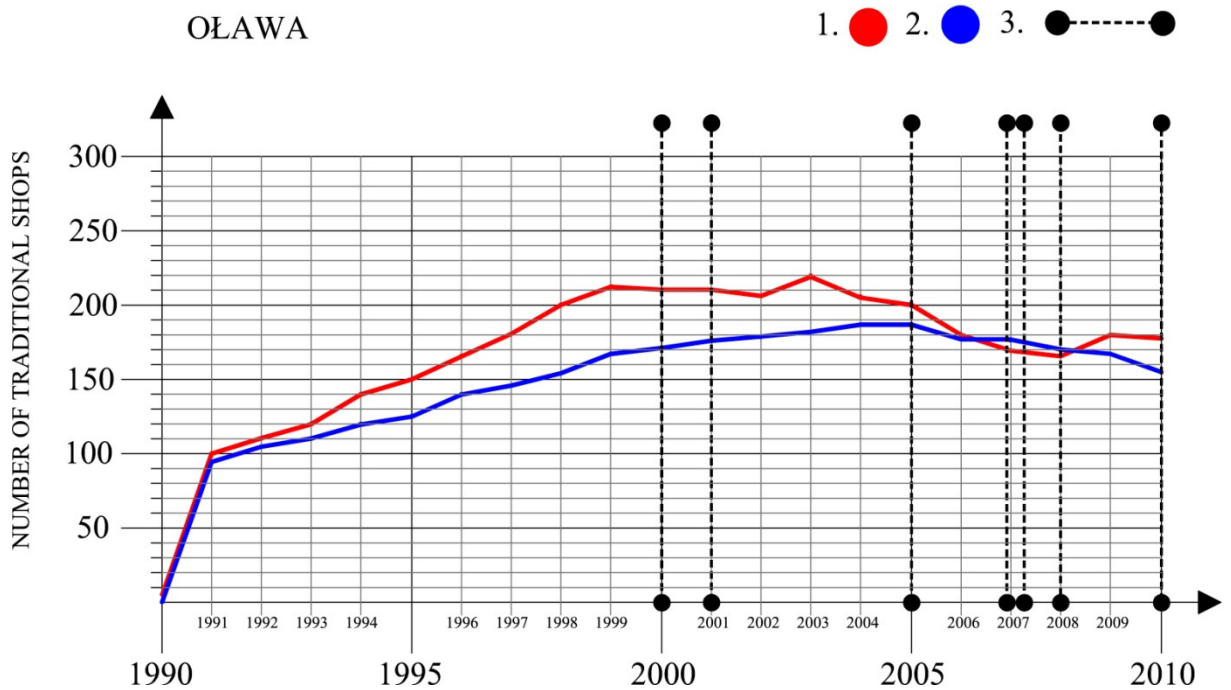
IMG 9. GRAPH ILLUSTRATING CHANGES IN THE NUMBER OF TRADITIONAL SHOPS AND MODER SHOPPING STRUCTURES IN SMALL MEDIEVAL TOWN – TRZEBNICA. 1.Traditional grocery stores; 2. Traditional non-grocery stores; 3. Modern shopping structures.



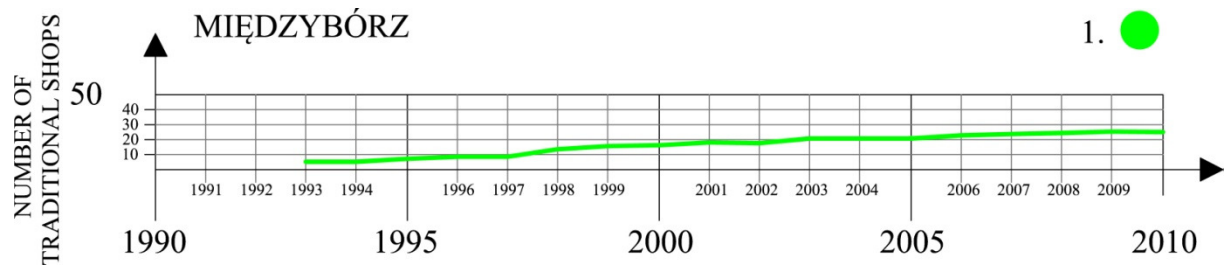
IMG 10. GRAPH ILLUSTRATING CHANGES IN THE NUMBER OF TRADITIONAL SHOPS AND MODER SHOPPING STRUCTURES IN SMALL MEDIEVAL TOWN – ŚRODA ŚLĄSKA. 1.Traditional grocery stores; 2. Traditional non-grocery stores; 3. Modern shopping structures.



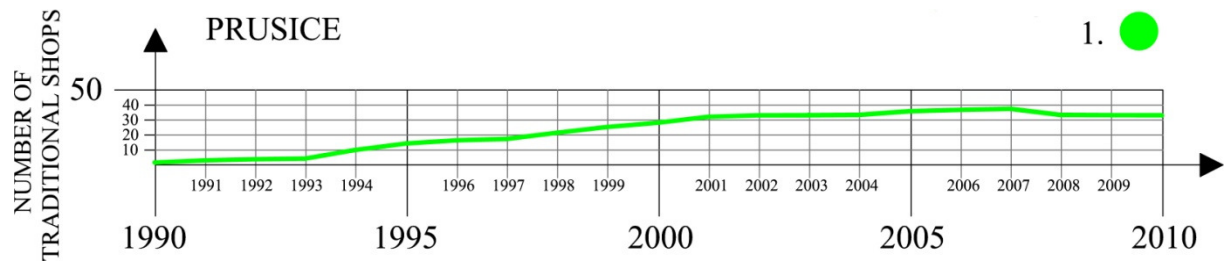
IMG 11. GRAPH ILLUSTRATING CHANGES IN THE NUMBER OF TRADITIONAL SHOPS AND MODER SHOPPING STRUCTURES IN MEDIUM TOWN – OLEŚNICA. 1.Traditional grocery stores; 2. Traditional non-grocery stores; 3. Modern shopping structures.



IMG 12. GRAPH ILLUSTRATING CHANGES IN THE NUMBER OF TRADITIONAL SHOPS AND MODER SHOPPING STRUCTURES IN MEDIUM TOWN – OŁAWA. 1.Traditional grocery stores; 2. Traditional non-grocery stores; 3. Modern shopping structures.



IMG 13. GRAPH ILLUSTRATING CHANGES IN THE NUMBER OF TRADITIONAL SHOPS IN TOWN WHERE THERE ARE ONLY TRADITIONAL SHOPS – MIĘDZYBÓRZ. 1. Traditional grocery stores and non-grocery stores.



IMG 14. GRAPH ILLUSTRATING CHANGES IN THE NUMBER OF TRADITIONAL SHOPS IN TOWN WHERE THERE ARE ONLY TRADITIONAL SHOPS – PRUSICE. 1. Traditional grocery stores and non-grocery stores.

5. Summary

In all of the researched cities an enormous growth in traditional stores in the first years after the transformation is visible. Around the year 2000 the number of stores has stabilized in all of the studied cities. After the year 2000 the number of shops remained at a similar level or decreased slightly. This is a feature common to all of the researched cities, regardless of when modern shopping structure was built. In Środa Śląska and Trzebnica – small medieval towns modern shopping structures appeared respectively in the years 2003 and 2009, therefore there is no relationship between the stabilization or even slight decline of traditional shops and the location of modern shopping structure. Moreover, in Międzybórz and Prusice the number of traditional shops has been more or less the same for the last 10 years, although modern shopping structures do not operate in those cities.

Nielsen Market Research conducted a study on shops disappearing from the market in Polish cities. Indeed small shops are disappearing from the market but they are mostly grocery, grocery-industrial or multi-brand shops and newsstands. The total number of such objects dropped in the last five years by 20`000. Also the share of traditional shops selling

food products has dropped by 3% over the last two years. Nielsen also traced the details of the structure and type of shops disappearing from the market. The research shows that the shops disappearing from the market have only one employee (in the years 2004-2010 the number of such shops declined by 22%). While the number of stores that have two employees remain at a constant level and the number of shops employing a minimum of 3 workers is growing.

It is hard to blame modern shopping structures for changes in the existing services system in the country, especially that in small towns they have emerged during the period of time when the number of traditional shops in a city has stabilized. Reasons for stopping the growth rate of the number of traditional shops can be found in the fact that the market is saturated. While foreign networks of modern shopping structures introduced an element of healthy competition, which outcome will be decided by future consumers.

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