

HOW DOES A METROPOLIS COME INTO EXISTENCE?

Cities have always had a magnetic attraction, since they offered more opportunities for improving the individual's educational, professional, material, social, or personal situation. Despite the fact that life in the city, in addition to numerous opportunities, is also associated with risks and disadvantages, and many "city people" often decide to spontaneously leave for a place in the middle of nowhere, the attraction of cities is not decreasing: quite the contrary. It is estimated that by the end of this century nearly 90% of all people will live in cities or within their reach. The importance of metropolitan areas will systematically increase, since the population will most likely concentrate around them.



Text: Tomasz Płosa

A metropolitan area or simply a metropolis? As emphasized by Assoc. Prof. Robert Pyka, researcher at the Institute of Sociology of the University of Silesia in Katowice and Head of the Observatory of Urban and Metropolitan Processes, the first term is more precise, since from the European perspective, only Paris and London could be considered fully-fledged metropolises, whereas the term “metropolis” is used mainly in journalistic debates, usually in an institutional context.

A metropolitan area has, of course, its own characteristics (such as the status as the center of a given region, high level of urbanization, well-developed land and air transport, the presence of an advanced service sector, and the ability to host events of international significance), but the model of its spatial organization (monocentric with one city as the dominant core and weaker peripheries, or polycentric with several urban organisms as the core) is, in Prof. Pyka's opinion, a secondary issue – the metropolization process taking place in a given area is more important. It consists in gaining importance on an international scale, incorporating a given urban area in the global flow of resources, and becoming a junction point in this system, which accumulates economic, scientific, business, and cultural potential.

“It is about the emergence of an area that has fully developed functions of higher order, for example, employment in the knowledge economy sectors. The metropolis is a specific product of globalization influences and holds a position in the transnational economy. Of course, we can support this process and create good conditions for its occurrence, but actually it is a phenomenon that can be controlled to a small extent,” Prof. Pyka argues.

Katowice is the center of the GZM Metropolis (Polish: Górnośląsko-Zagłębiowska Metropolia), comprising the Upper Silesia and Zagłębie Dąbrowskie, the only metropolitan area in Poland

sanctioned by law (as of 2017), with a total of 41 municipalities, some of which are located outside the strict core. The metropolization process taking place in this region demonstrates several important developments. One of them is the increase in the number of passengers served by the Katowice-Pyrzowice airport. In 2003, before Poland joined the European Union, it was 257,000 people per year, whereas in 2019 the number reached almost 5 million. Another important factor is the accumulation of “metropolitan jobs,” i.e., employment in the FIRE (Financial, Insurance, Real Estate) sectors as well as in the technical, scientific, administrative, and support services sectors. According to Eurostat data, seven Polish metropolitan areas concentrate 54.5% of all metropolitan jobs in the country, of which 18.4% are in Warsaw, and 9% in the GZM Metropolis (for comparison, metropolitan areas concentrate 65% of metropolitan jobs in Europe).

In line with the concept of collaborative governance by Chris Ansell and Alison Gash, four factors are particularly conducive to effective management of a metropolitan area: (1) appropriate institutional architecture, (2) incentives for cooperation of the municipalities in a given metropolitan area, (3) balance of power between them, and (4) mutual trust. According to Prof. Pyka, within the GZM there is a problem mainly with the last aspect, a fact manifested in the lack of readiness to put the common interests of the metropolitan area above the particular interests of communes. The process of metropolization in this region is influenced by institutional issues (GZM is in a dilemma whether to remain a technostructure, an institutional “overlay” with no causal potential, or to evolve into a fully-fledged local government unit with the power to actually influence the lives of its residents), demographic factors (negative migration balance, low birth rate, old

age index), and environmental concerns (pollution, spontaneous suburbanization inside cities, i.e., erecting new buildings on every available piece of land, and outside of them in the form of uncontrolled urban sprawl of cities as far as possible from their centers).

In his work, the researcher analyzes the metropolitan processes taking place in France and Canada, and concludes that there is virtually no possibility of transferring foreign solutions to Poland. However, it is possible to observe what not to do and learn from the mistakes of others. As an example, he mentions the solutions applied by the authorities of the Québec Province on the island of Montréal. In 2002, a decision was made to merge the urban organisms located there into one large city, as a global metropolis. It seemed to be a logical solution that would facilitate the management of this urban area, and the merger was pushed through despite the objections of, particularly, Anglo-Saxon communities, which perceived the merger as an attack on their cultural and linguistic distinctiveness. The next election was won by politicians who promised referendums to revise the forced merger, as a result of which several cities separated from the metropolis. Consequently, Montréal looks like Swiss cheese, and instead of facilitated governance, new institutions had to be established to handle the relationship between Montréal and the disconnected entities.

“Everyone has to build their own path of the metropolization process, and GZM has to offer an amazing story of a place which has come a long way from an area based solely on heavy industry to a modern metropolitan region that attracts global events and allows its residents to enjoy all the benefits of living in a metropolis while preserving the advantages of a medium-sized city,” Prof. Robert Pyka emphasizes.



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