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## The Influence of the Ethnic Diversity on the Regional Development as Exemplified by the Silesian Autochthonous Population in Poland

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Katarzyna Łukaniszyn-Domaszewska<sup>1</sup>, Romuald Jończy<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:**

**Purpose:** The paper aims to show that different characteristics of the Silesian autochthonous population resulting from unique cultural and civilizational roots and different values have a positive impact on the regional socio-economic development.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** The innovative approach establishes the relationship between the presence and activity of the Silesian autochthonous population and regional development. The first subject of analysis concerned the comparison of migration behavior of two different ethnic groups residing in Silesia, namely the autochthonous Silesian population and the Polish population of immigrant origin, using mainly the micro census method. The second research study was a comparative socio-economic analysis of areas inhabited by the Silesian population and typologically similar areas inhabited by the Polish people of immigrant origin. Finally, the third research area concerned a survey among representatives of local authorities, who assessed the role of Silesians in the process of regional development.

**Findings:** The paper's main finding is that the location of the Silesian autochthonous population in the Opole Province has had a notable positive impact on several economic and demographic features, in addition to a very positive assessment of the population by the local authorities. Furthermore, the Silesian population has been recognized as a significant and positive development potential of the Opole Province.

**Practical Implications:** The results of the analysis might be used in determining a suitable development strategy. They also highlight the need for proper management of ethnic groups in regional development and diversity as economic and social potential.

**Originality/Value:** Research results can contribute to constructing theoretical models regarding ethnic groups and their role in sustainable regional development.

**Keywords:** Ethnic diversity, regional development, Silesian autochthonous population, migration.

**JEL Classification:** O1, R1.

**Paper Type:** Research study.

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<sup>1</sup>Department of Regional Policy and Labor Market, Opole University of Technology, Opole, Poland, [k.lukaniszyn-domaszewska@po.edu.pl](mailto:k.lukaniszyn-domaszewska@po.edu.pl);

<sup>2</sup>Department of Economics and Development Studies, Wrocław University of Economics and Business, [romuald.jonczy@ue.wroc.pl](mailto:romuald.jonczy@ue.wroc.pl);

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## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, especially in Europe, a renaissance is associated with ethnic, national, cultural, and religious minorities. These are both activities aimed at independence or autonomy and activities not intended to do so, often supported by the state level. Hence, mainly due to depopulation and ever-increasing mobility of the population, especially in the context of immigration and refuge, the ethnic factor plays an increasingly important role in research studies focused on development processes.

The particular period for international discourse was the so-called "long summer of migration" in 2015 related to the migration crisis. It was associated with the view that migration, from the perspective of the highly developed countries in the influx of immigrants, is an inevitable reality in the 21st century. It is particularly evident in the resurgence of populism and nationalist anxiety in Europe and North America and the reinvigorated focus on borders and exclusion manifesting in its wake (Carling and Collins, 2018; Crawley and Skleparis, 2018; Owen, 2020).

## 2. Literature Review

The critical turnaround in migration studies coincided with populist anti-immigration mobilization in Europe and the United States, where violations of anti-populist norms of nondiscrimination are no longer avoided (Freeman, 1995). While group-based arguments against immigrant admission and inclusion are once again becoming naturalized in public debate, migration scholars need to take seriously the claim that group-based discrimination remains an integral part of the migration and citizenship policy (Saeys *et al.*, 2019; Ellermann, 2020; Fitzgerald, 2020; Noja, 2018; Noja and Cristea 2018). It is also related to recent studies on the contemporary "politics of belonging" (Yuval-Davis *et al.*, 2005; Gedalof, 2007; Schmidt, 2011; Adamson *et al.*, 2011) that have examined ways in which immigration and citizenship policies influence the social group membership, taking into consideration the ethnic diversity. According to these concepts, rather than thinking of an "us/them" dichotomy, ethnic groups can be considered "more part of us" or "less part of us" (Block, 2016: 1435).

Because the desirability of immigrants has come to correspond to their rank in the labor market hierarchy, the accompanying process of invasion of the market has led to an increasing blurring of long-term normative and political differences between economic and non-economic immigrations (Ellermann, 2020). Increasingly, governments focus on skilled immigration to fill labor market gaps and a perceived political preference for such a migration (Marcu *et al.*, 2018; Boswell, 2007; Elrick and Elke, 2018; Boucher, 2020; Thalassinou *et al.*, 2019).

However, there is still a question of how urban governments should implement diversity policies in a broader backlash against multiculturalism. The starting point is the conceptualization of multiculturalism as institutional arrangements for ethnic minority group representation and recognition (Colombo, 2015; Saeys *et al.*, 2019).

Looking at ethnic diversity from an economic perspective, it can be concluded that, on the one hand, the ethnic bond has become a driving force for achieving common political, economic, and social goals. On the other, the ethnic factor or diversity and ethnic group characteristics can influence regional development disparities. The presence of national and ethnic minorities in each area can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, it can be understood as a threat to national integrity and the maintenance of national security and undermine the process of sustainable development. Secondly, minorities can also be perceived differently as a significant, positive development factor, as exemplified by the Silesian autochthonous population in Poland.

The starting point for such a treatment of the Silesians are the sociological research works by Jałowicki (1975), Szmeja (1997), which indicate that the Silesian population is distinguished from other Polish residents by their unique cultural and civilizational characteristics, distinctive ethos, or work, unprecedented attachment, and identity to the region of origin, and local and regional economic and social activity as well.

Researchers emphasize that, on the one hand, ethnic diversity leads to a decline in social confidence, while on the other, the ethnic factor may have a positive effect on development. According to Putnam (2007), increased ethnic diversity leads to a fall in trust between social groups and within them. However, the negative impact of ethnic diversity reduces with the duration of such ethnically diversified communities. In turn, Laurence (2011), analyzing the example of the United Kingdom, has noted that while ethnic diversity lowers social trust, it also leads to increased cooperation between ethnic groups and contributes to a better perception of other groups. The ethnic diversity of each community is a real challenge for shaping social capital, and thus regional development, which should be supported based on targeted, planned, and long-term action. Ethnic diversity may be interconnected with hierarchically unequal social positions among communities (Kandyliś *et al.*, 2012).

Researchers presenting and analyzing various factors of regional development commonly do not consider the ethnic conditions of economic development. Ethnicity was a neglected dimension in the development theory (Hettne, 1993). However, over the years, modern economics is increasingly focusing its research on new categories of capital, including intellectual, human, and social capital, and cultural capital (Cooke *et al.*, 2005; Gerring *et al.*, 2015). Social capital has become the subject of research on development (Woolcock, 1998; Easterly *et al.*, 2006; Malecki, 2011; Seferiadis *et al.*, 2015; Nanetti and Holguin, 2016) and innovation (Fountain, 1998; Cooke and Wills, 1999; Oezdemir and Bergmann, 2011) as well as political participation of ethnic minorities (Jacobs and Tillie, 2004).

Putnam (1993) carried out the study among public administration in Italy, in the relation between the prosperous north and impoverished south, were of crucial importance for the development of the theory of social capital. This study has led to introducing a definition of the efficiency of achieving social goals through networks,

standards, and trust. Fukuyama (1995) also emphasized the essence of trust, who observed the strength of the community in social capital while emphasizing the role of the value of the congregation of entire nations and communities. Also, the abovementioned innovations show a strong correlation with the level of social capital, which allows cooperation and exchange of information (Cooke *et al.*, 2005). The significance of social capital is vital in regional development conditions as one of the elements determining endogenous, internal factors. It should be noted that local social capital results from local conditions and is specific for each territorial unit and all endogenous development factors.

Researchers indicate that supporting and respecting the rights of minorities is reflected in regional development, i.e., it serves the state supporting the minority. Support for minorities means support for the region, as confirmed by Baumann's (2018) synthesis of the situation of Sorbs in Germany. The study shows the effects on the German-Danish borderland resulting from the presence of a minority and the associated support policy for minorities. In addition to effects in typical areas such as culture and education, it has been established that there was a much smaller decrease in population in the area occupied by Sorbs than in the neighboring area. This is confirmed by observations from recent years regarding the Opole region and the Silesians of German origin, who, as a group with a solid regional identification, are distinguished by their formal and legal situation in Poland and Germany's particular attachment region origin. This means that they are less willing to leave the region of origin in a nondiscrimination situation than its other inhabitants (Dolińska *et al.*, 2020; Jończy *et al.*, 2013). In addition, like the Sorbs, they are characterized by mutual solidarity and economic independence, and cooperation resulting indirectly from the work ethos. Researchers emphasize that among the Silesian autochthonous population living in the areas of the Upper Silesia, a different attitude towards work has developed than in the rest of the society, mainly due to the German culture and work patterns and because of technical and civilization innovations taken from Germany (Szmeja, 1997).

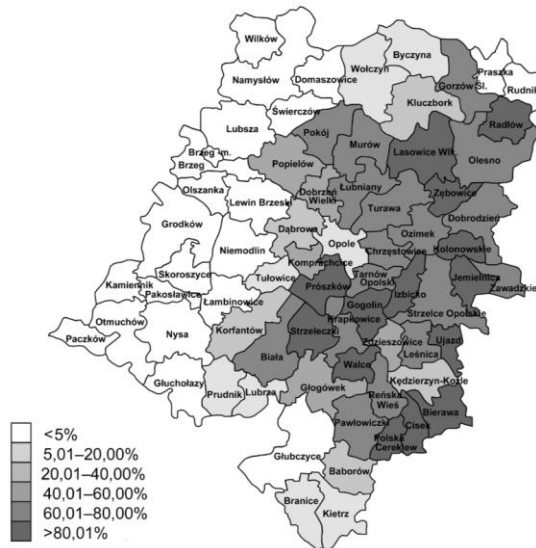
The presence of ethnic groups in the territory of a country may, mainly when some specific features characterize these groups, constitute a particular force. However, some governments often disregard and discredit minorities or ethnic groups (Ruedin, 2009; Gerring *et al.*, 2018) unless an ethnic group can create opportunities for tourism development or affect the attractive image of the region (Cao, 2009). The situation of discrediting ethnically diverse groups is caused by the fact that before 1945, many liberal democratic states used to practice citizenship-stripping in ways informed by gender, race, national origin, and mode of citizenship acquisition. It is so-called denationalization, which is currently making a revival across a range of liberal democratic states as a way of responding to 'homegrown' terrorists (Gibney, 2020).

### **3. Research Subject and Research Methods**

In Poland, the region in which ethnic diversity is the most noticeable is the Opole Silesia. After the post-war changes in borders, a large concentration of the Silesian

autochthonous population has remained in this area. This group is ethnically different from other populations of Poland but previously was remaining in a different cultural and civilizational sphere, distinguished by a different system of values and different behavioral patterns. After World War II, the remaining population of Upper Silesia received Polish citizenship, but they and their descendants also had the right to receive the German one. Poland de facto accepted the right for dual citizenship in 1990 (Kamusella, 2003). This kind of citizenship is held by those inhabitants of the Opole region, who have German origin associated with the German state within the borders of 1937. The political breakthrough in 1989 caused a massive wave of definitive migration associated with the so-called late resettlement. It should be mentioned that this emigration has not been legally registered. Thus, the population in areas inhabited by Silesians is overestimated by about 1/4 of its population. The majority of people who had left Poland permanently during 1988-1992 did not leave their place of residence in Poland, creating the so-called category of suspended emigration or unregistered permanent emigration. At present, the Silesian population of German origin in the Opole region amounts to approx. Two hundred thousand persons (Rauziński and Szczygielski, 2013) constitute about one-fifth of the province's inhabitants, living mainly and predominating in rural areas of the Eastern Opole region (Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Silesian autochthonous population among the total population of communes of the Opole Province.



*Source: Jończy, 2010.*

It should be emphasized that the shares of the autochthonous population presented in Figure 1, communes of the Opole Province, relate to the registered autochthonous population but not residing there. Considering the unregistered permanent emigration requires that the shares of the autochthonous population be on average about 25% less

than those indicated in Figure 1 (Jończy and Łukaniszyn-Domaszewska, 2014). To analyze the impact of the Silesian population on regional development, it is significant that in the past, its share in the structure of the population of the current territory of the Opole Province was more significant. Immediately after the post-resettlement processes, the share of the population was about 1/2 and currently amounts to about 1/4 of the total population of the Opole Province (Rauziński and Szczygielski, 2013). The reduction of this share was mainly influenced by emigration processes, which was supported by the fact of having German citizenship, which before Poland acceded to the EU, allowed going to Germany. This fact determined the lively migratory movements among this group of people throughout the entire period after World War II.

Apart from its cultural diversity, the Opole Province has been characterized by a variety of other crucial features, such as intensive economic emigration to the West, relatively low level of unemployment, higher than average standard of living, well developed economic and social infrastructures, as well as high levels of urbanization and industrialization, relatively higher prices of some goods and services, and diversification of the market offer in the sphere of local trade and services. Those features have been related to the Silesian population and have had a significant impact on both the socio-economic diversity and development of the whole Opole region.

Taking the above issues into consideration, the overall aim of the study was to determine the impact of the Silesian autochthonous population on the regional development of the Opole region. The analysis of the literature on the subject has led the authors to hypothesize that the presence and activity of the Silesians have had a positive impact on the socio-economic development of the Opole region, resulting in several economic and socio-cultural consequences.

The first subject of analysis concerned the comparison of migration behavior of two different ethnic groups residing in Silesia, namely the autochthonous Silesian population and the Polish population of immigrant origin, using mainly the micro census method. This study aimed to determine, on the one hand, the scale of unregistered final emigration and the employment structure of the population in the country and abroad and, on the other, preferences of high school graduates regarding education, employment, and their future residence.

The second subject, complementary to the first one, was a comparative analysis of areas inhabited by the Silesian people and typologically similar areas inhabited by the Polish people of immigrant origin. This analysis was carried out comparing selected communes of the analyzed areas in terms of some socio-economic indicators. The purpose of this analysis was to show that communes inhabited mainly by the Silesian population are generally more favorable compared to other typically Polish communes according to the analyzed socio-economic indicators.

The third empirical subject of the study was an analysis of the social assessment of the role of the Silesian population in the Opole Province. To make arrangements in this regard, a questionnaire survey was carried out, which included representatives of the local government of the Opole Province. It was considered that the responses of this group of respondents regarding the assessment of the activity of the Silesians would well reflect the assessment prevailing in the entire regional community.

The questionnaires were sent to all 183 local governments of the Opole Province, out of which 124 questionnaires, 68%, were completed and returned. This study aimed to gain knowledge about the opinions and assessments of local authorities about the Silesian population. One of the hypotheses for this study was the assumption that local government officials positively assess the role of the Silesian population and its activity as an essential factor in regional development.

#### **4. Effects of Labor Migration in Terms of Disposable Income and Standard of Living**

The introduction of regulations by the Germans in 1993 (Kriegsfolgenbereinigungsgesetz) enabling the Silesians to obtain German passports without leaving the country meant that, instead of permanent migration, this population began to prefer to work abroad, being then the only so privileged population group in Poland. This was at the time when unemployment increased in Poland, the profitability of working abroad was still extremely high, which resulted in excellent wage and currency conditions. The amounts earned and transferred in 1988-2013 were estimated based on data on the scale and structure of economic migration of Silesians.

These estimates, excluding inflation, indicated an amount of PLN 36.5 billion in earnings and over 25 billion in spending in the region. Including inflation and estimation in prices from 2013, it gave PLN 171 billion in earnings and 128 billion in spending in the region (Jończy and Łukaniszyn-Domaszewska, 2018). These funds, which constituted then as high as about 1/3 of disposable income in the Province, ranked this region first in terms of real disposable income per capita and contributed to the best living conditions in the Opole Province across the entire country. Economic migration of Silesians thus became for the Opole Province a key factor determining the high standard of living.

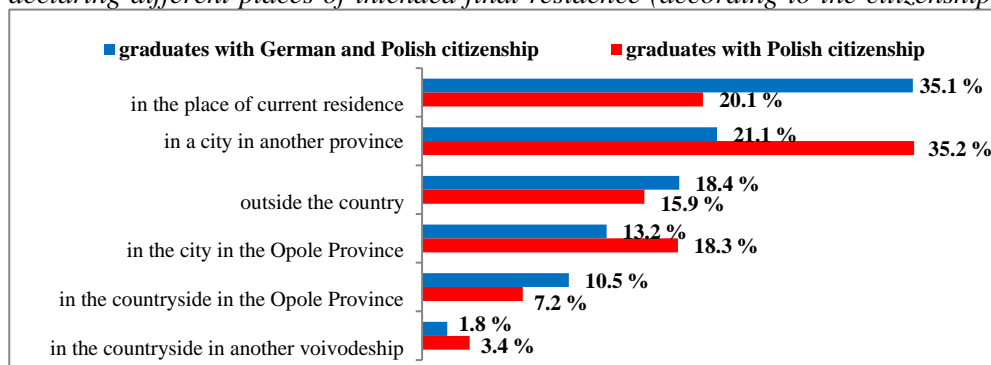
#### **5. Differences Between Migratory Attitudes of the Autochthonous Silesian Population and the Polish Population of Immigrant Origin on the Example of the Upper Silesia**

After Poland acceded to the EU, people of Polish origin could also freely work abroad. Thus, when comparing the migrations of both population groups, it was established that from the regional perspective, migration of the Silesian population of German origin is more beneficial than the migration of Poles (Jończy, 2010). First, it is because

labor migrations of the population of German origin usually concern people more strongly related to the area of origin because of the circular nature of migration. Secondly, positive features of migration of people of German origin are also a relatively more minor share among migrant youth and young women, which are more likely to emigrate permanently. Unlike Silesians, Poles migrating abroad are more often characterized by a young age, higher level of education, equal participation of both sexes, lack of factors attracting them back to the country (property, housing, family, work).

Moreover, they are also characterized by good adaptation abroad, high aspirations related to relatively higher education, no short-term earning opportunities, and a lack of prospects for obtaining satisfactory work in Poland. These features make the post-accession migration of Poles less favorable to the area of origin and make it worse for the re-emigration process. Whereas the population of German origin has more positive features from the regional development perspective than the Polish population of immigrant origin. As proved in the study on intentions of high school graduates in Opole (Jończy *et al.*, 2013), young people of German origin are less likely to live outside the region (Figure 2) and more inclined to study there (Figure 3) than the young Poles. These features are essential in a solid depopulation of the region, recently caused mainly by internal migration, especially towards the Wrocław metropolis. These conclusions also coincide with Baumann's findings regarding East Germany, indicating the demographic stability of areas inhabited by the Sorbian minority (Baumann, 2018). Similar conclusions are also confirmed by the latest research conducted among high school students of the Opole region (Dolińska *et al.*, 2020).

**Figure 2.** Shares of surveyed graduates from high schools in the Opole Province declaring different places of intended final residence (according to the citizenship).

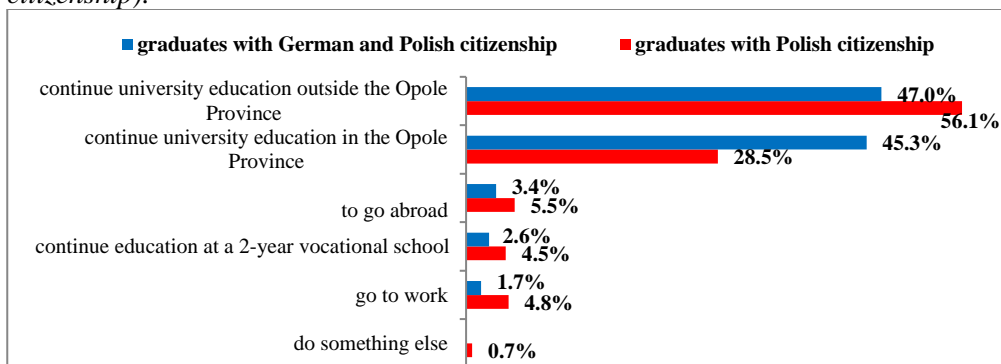


*Source:* Own elaboration.

This limited propensity to move to other regions of the country was also proved by other studies on the conditions of re-emigration of people of German origin working abroad. They indicate that the population of German origin would be willing to return to the region and take a job in it for a relatively lower salary than the Polish population of immigrant origin (Table 1).



**Figure 3.** Shares of surveyed graduates from high schools in the Opole Province declaring different intentions after graduating from high school (according to the citizenship).



Source: Own elaboration.

**Table 1.** Minimum wage (average minimum monthly re-emigration wage - MRW) net in PLN, declared by economic emigrants from rural areas of the Opole Province as necessary to return to the country and work in Poland (according to gender and citizenship).

Citizenship	Minimum net salary accepted in the country of origin	
	among men	among women
Polish and German	3 176	2 720
Only Polish	3 611	3 121

Source: Own elaboration.

These studies also bear out that the Silesian population would also be, after returning and starting work in the region, willing to commute to work in the region more distant than the incoming Polish population (Table 2). At the same time, however, the population of German origin is less willing to move permanently from their place of residence in the Opole Province to other regions of the country.

**Table 2.** Shares of surveyed economic emigrants from the Opole Province declaring maximum travel distances to work in Poland and readiness to move from their place of residence (according to citizenship).

Acceptable distance to work in Poland	percentage of respondents' answers with:	
	Polish and German citizenship	only Polish citizenship
up to 5 km	8.3	10.7
up to 10 km	15.1	14.5
up to 20 km	27.2	33.3
up to 30 km	32.2	18.9
further than 30 km	12.1	8.2
acceptance of permanent relocation to the workplace	5.0	14.5
altogether	100.0	100.0

Source: Own elaboration.

The decisive factor diversifying the behavior of both analyzed groups of the population is the ethnic and cultural difference affecting preferences, the structure of needs, and values. Nevertheless, the different behaviors of Silesians with German origin and Poles with immigrant origin are also influenced by other factors, such as the moment when freedom of migration took place. It is also significant that the Silesians, who have been primarily an incumbent regional community for hundreds of years, constitute a group less inclined to definitive dislocations than the Polish migrant population, which is less attached to their place of residence.

The above-presented comparison shows several noteworthy differences in both these groups' behavior and migration preferences, including a lower tendency of Silesians to emigrate definitively outside their area of residence, a stronger preference for circular migration, and redistribution of a more significant part of their income in the Opole Province.

#### **6. Comparative Analysis of Communes Inhabited by the Silesian Population of German Origin and those Inhabited by the Polish Population of Immigrant Origin**

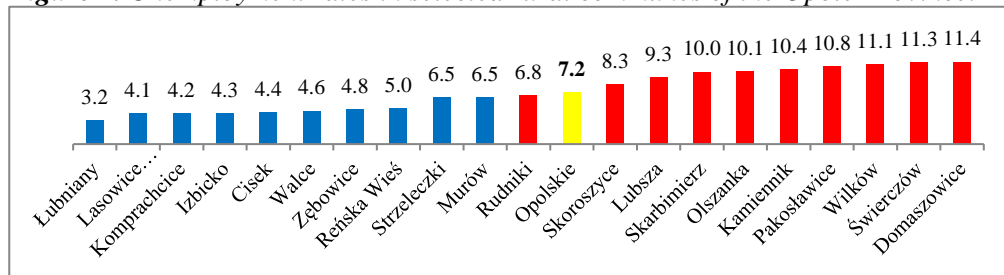
A comparative study of selected "minority" and "Polish" rural communes in the Opole Province is another analyzed aspect related to the migration of Silesians. This analysis complements or extends the migration research. It was made based on available statistical data from the labor market, including the unemployment rates, the percentage shares of the employed, and economic entities within the total working-age population. In addition, the comparative analysis also involved percentage shares of foreign capital companies within the total number of companies. The purpose of the analysis was to determine divergences in socio-economic development resulting from the presence of the Silesian population in the Opole Province. To make comparisons, ten rural communes were distinguished, with the most significant shares (over 27%) of the population declaring German citizenship and ten typologically similar rural communes with zero or negligible (below 0.65%) shares of this population.

The comparison of unemployment rates in selected communes of Opole Province (Figure 4) confirmed a strong negative correlation (-0.9) between unemployment and the shares of the population declaring German citizenship in the demographic structure of selected rural communes of the Opole Province. Thus, it can be concluded that the impact of large shares of the population of German origin on low unemployment rates in the Eastern Opole region is evident and still large.

In the new conditions analyzed by the authors, both people with German and only Polish citizenships had the same opportunities to work abroad, yet there are considerable differences in terms of the unemployment rates. Moreover, the results cannot be explained by more significant German origin opportunities to work abroad as it was before 2004. This fact is confirmed by another research work (Jończy, 2017)

on rural areas conducted at the turn of 2015 and 2016 that showed that the share of people working abroad was still higher in communes inhabited by Silesians than in communes inhabited by Poles, even though higher unemployment rates still characterized the Polish communes. The considerable variations in unemployment rates can be partly explained by the worse employment opportunities in the Western part of the Opole region. However, lower unemployment rates among the Silesians are also influenced by different cultural conditions and different perceptions of both work and the phenomenon of unemployment. Probably a higher work ethos by the Silesian population (Jałowicki, 1975; Szmeja, 1997) results in a different approach to unemployment. This may cause that the Silesians are more eager to take up work in identical conditions, or from the other side, that the Polish population of immigrant origin is less inclined to foreign economic migration despite an objectively worse financial situation.

**Figure 4.** Unemployment rates in selected rural communes of the Opole Province.



■ - Rural communes in which the percentage of population declaring German nationality is largest

■ - Rural communes in which the percentage of population declaring German nationality is lowest

■ - Opole Province

**Source:** Own elaboration.

In addition, the comparative analysis has shown that low unemployment rates in "minority" communes are not related to high employment rates in Poland. There is an apparent lack of inverse correlation between the shares of the employed and unemployed, characteristic for normally functioning labor markets. The specified "minority" communes, distinguished by even several times lower unemployment rates, are generally characterized by lower shares of working people. However, this is mainly because there is a much higher volume of those above unregistered permanent emigration in the case of the Silesian population. The number of the working-age population is about 1/4 lower for Silesians, while it is only 5-10% lower among the Polish population.

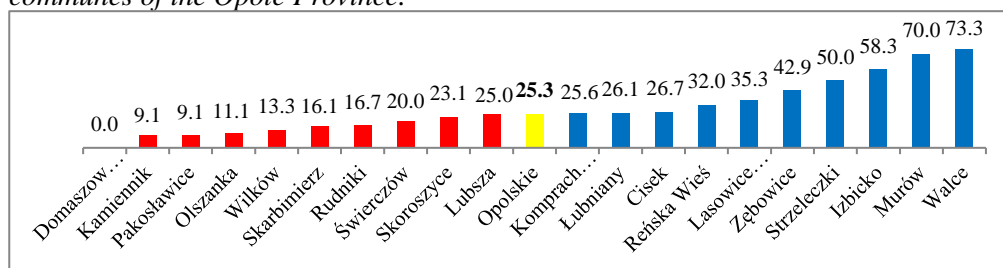
Therefore, in the case of Silesians, the number of working-age population should be reduced by 25%, while in the Polish population by 5-10%. The second necessary correction is to include people working abroad, whose share in the case of Silesians is significantly higher. Taking this share into account means that "minority" communes

achieve higher employment rates (at home and abroad) than communes inhabited by the Polish population (Jończy, 2010). Generally, the Silesian autochthonous population is more willing to work abroad, while the Polish population of immigrant origin is more passive in migration and more often does not take up a job either at home or abroad.

Similar conclusions can be drawn from the comparative analysis of the shares of economic entities in the total working-age population. It turns out that the higher the percentage of people declaring German nationality in a given commune, the fewer business entities operate in its territory. However, similarly to employment rates, it should be considered that the actual working-age population is significantly lower in the case of minority communes than the official one. Considering the differences causes that the indicators of economic activity in "minority" communes assume values similar to other typologically similar communes. It should be added that the shares of economic entities do not adequately inform about the state of local entrepreneurship. Research and observations carried out by the authors in the rural areas of the Opole region suggest that generally, small business entities in communes inhabited by Silesians are characterized by higher stability (economic, employment), which is undoubtedly influenced by the demand generated by migrants, but also by the fact that in the Silesian community they are more often family businesses based on capital accumulated and operating in the Opole Province.

The comparative analysis has also shown that the population of German origin is also associated with the inflow of foreign capital to the region, especially the German one. A comparative analysis of percentage shares of foreign capital companies (Figure 5) has shown a significant positive relationship between the share of the population declaring German nationality and foreign capital located in their area. All the selected communes inhabited by Silesians were characterized by higher shares of foreign capital shares than Polish communes.

**Figure 5.** Percentage shares of foreign capital companies in selected rural communes of the Opole Province.



■ - Rural communes in which the percentage of population declaring German nationality is the largest

■ - Rural communes in which the percentage of population declaring German nationality is the lowest

■ - Opole Province

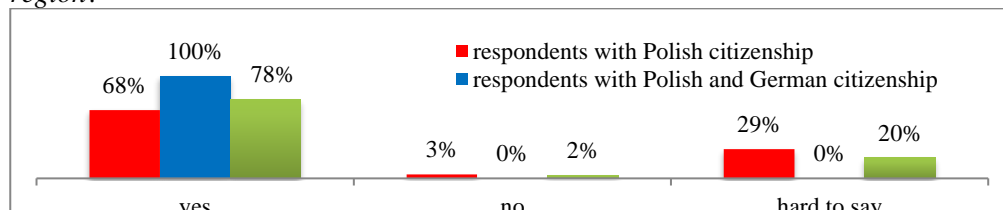
Source: Own elaboration.

## **7. The Role of the Silesian Autochthonous Population in the Regional Development**

The last component of the analysis is devoted to the social assessment of the role of the Silesian population by representatives of the local authorities of the Opole Province. Presentation and analysis of research results were made by dividing the self-government respondents into German origin and the remaining respondents representing communities not related to the autochthonous Silesian population. This division was necessary for two reasons firstly, because the respondents from the German minority group were not able to objectively assess their environment and its activities. Secondly, in the surveyed group that completed the questionnaires, the share of people associated with the German minority (32%) was more significant than the estimated share of these people among the total local government officials to whom the questionnaires were sent. As a result, treating the entire surveyed group as representative for all local government officials would be unauthorized because the minority community would be over-represented in the research sample. It should be clarified that the smaller share of people not associated with the German minority in the group that returned the questionnaires was mainly because of local government officials from the communes, where the presence and impact of minorities were negligible or none.

The first of the examined issues was a general assessment of the impact of the Silesian autochthonous population on regional development (Figure 6). Respondents assessed this impact positively (78% of all respondents), although there were some differences in the respondents' assessments, both related and unrelated to the German minority. Among local governments declaring only Polish citizenship, two-thirds (68%) answered that the autochthonous Silesian population had had a positive impact on the development of the Opole region; only 3% of the respondents gave a negative answer 29% of respondents had no opinion on this issue. On the other hand, among the surveyed representatives of local authorities related to the German minority, i.e., having Polish and German citizenships, all gave an upbeat assessment.

**Figure 6.** Respondents' answers to the question: Does the Silesian autochthonous population have a positive impact on the socio-economic development of the Opole region?

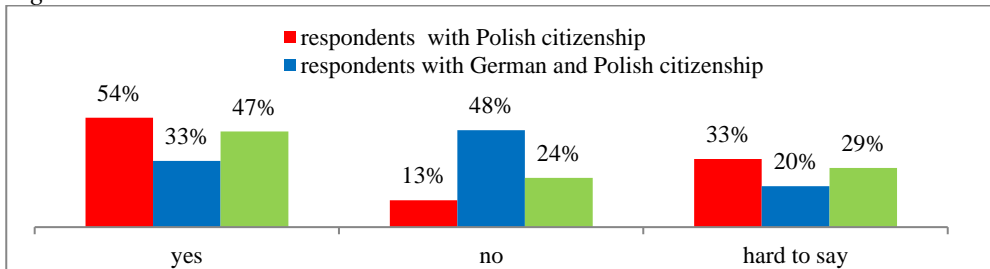


*Source:* Own elaboration.

Another examined problem was the respondents' assessment of the promotion of the ethnic specificity of the Opole region by the regional authorities. Respondents were

asked whether regional authorities sufficiently promote and emphasize Silesia as a distinctive factor in the Opole region? The answers in both distinguished groups of citizenship were different (Figure 7). Among local self-government officials having only Polish citizenship, around half affirmatively answered the question (54%). In turn, in the group of respondents with German citizenship, almost half of them believed that regional authorities had not sufficiently promoted and emphasized Silesia as a factor distinguishing the region. The responses of the surveyed self-government representatives show that less than half of the self-government officials consider the promotion and accent of Silesia in the region as sufficient. On the other hand, the perception of deficits in this area, although more common in the group of local government representatives associated with the German minority, is also quite common among local government authorities not related to it.

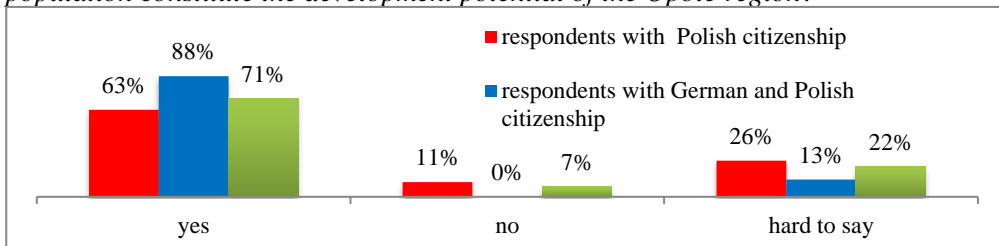
**Figure 7.** Respondents' answers to the question: *Do the regional authorities sufficiently promote and emphasize the Silesia as a distinctive factor in the Opole region?*



*Source:* Own elaboration.

Another question related to the previously examined problem was whether, in the opinion of the respondents, the ethnic distinguishing feature should be treated as a regional development potential (Figure 8). Regardless of this question, respondents were also asked to identify areas where the region's ethnic potential could be turned to the best advantage (Figure 9). The obtained answers regarding the first of these issues prove that in assessing the majority of local self-government officials, the autochthonous Silesian population constitutes a significant development potential of the Opole Province.

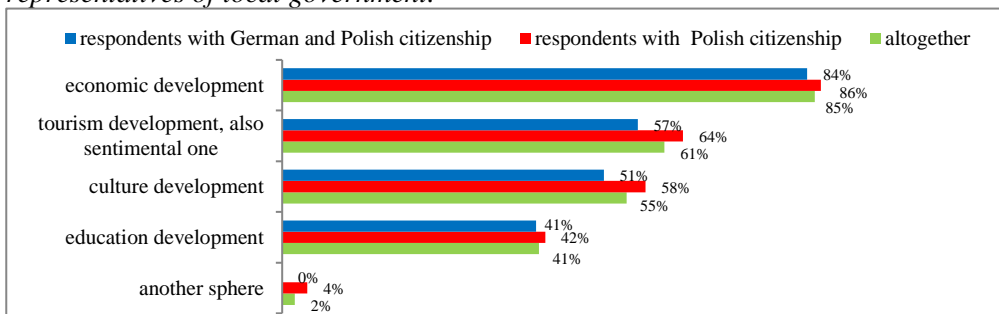
**Figure 8.** Respondents' answers to the question: *Does the Silesian autochthonous population constitute the development potential of the Opole region?*



*Source:* Own elaboration.

In turn, in the last question concerning the postulated spheres in which Silesian-German ethnic capital should be used, the respondents most often mentioned economic development (approx. 85% of respondents), then tourism (also sentimental), indicated by approx. 60% of respondents, and the development of culture (approx. 55%). The least, though still quite numerous, indications concerned the development of education (41–42% of respondents). It is worth noting that the distribution of accents in the postulated activity of the population of German origin is similarly perceived by local government authorities, regardless of whether the respondents came from the German minority or did not.

**Figure 9.** *Spheres in which Silesian-ethnic capital could be used in the opinion of representatives of local government.*



*Source:* Own elaboration.

## 8. Concluding Remarks

The main conclusion resulting from the conducted analyzes has verified the hypothesis that the Silesian population has a remarkable positive impact on the socio-economic development of the Opole Province. The significant research achievement has been, on the one hand, the verification that both the presence and activity of this population were associated with several economic and socio-cultural contributions occurring only in this region of Poland. On the other hand, the critical achievement of the paper has also been establishing that the role of Silesians in the socio-economic development of the region was assessed positively. Furthermore, the examined local authorities indicated that the existence and activity of this group of people should be treated as a significant development potential of the entire Opole Province.

The conducted research study has shown that the area inhabited by the Silesian population is distinguished by relatively lower unemployment, higher professional activity, especially in the context of working abroad, a more pro-regional way of spending income, a more significant share of companies with foreign capital, as well as a higher quality of life. Moreover, the undertaken research study has emphasized noteworthy features of the Silesian population that are beneficial in the context of the depopulation of the region, such as the lesser willingness of young people to study and live outside the region.

Although the role of migration and labor activity of the Silesian autochthonous population in the Opole region has changed after Poland's accession to the EU and openness to all Polish citizens to travel and work abroad, nevertheless throughout the time, the migration behavior of Silesians has had such a huge positive impact on Polish regional development. Two reasons mainly caused it. Firstly, the circular migration of the Silesian population has been more favorable to the Opole Province than in the case of (often definitive) post-accession emigration of Poles. The circular labor migration is commonly associated with a significant transfer of earnings to the region. Secondly, with the decrease in the profitability of migration after 2006, a significant part of economic migrants from the population of German origin returned to the region, taking up work or economic activity in it. In turn, the study conducted among economic migrants pointed to lower-wage requirements among the Silesians regarding work in the country, making them a relatively more flexible group on the labor market and willing to re-emigration than the Polish population.

The present study has shown that the case of the Silesian-German "otherness" of the analyzed Poland's area has been a significant and generally positive factor for its development, but at the same time, the ethnic diversity of the Opole region has not been, and is still not, fully used.

Although this paper verifies the research hypotheses, it still does not fully exhaust the subject matter. The need for further research regarding the Silesian population and other ethnic groups is indicated by the events currently taking place in Europe. It is about both reviving minority and separatist movements, but especially about the strategic problem of depopulation and gaps in the labor market, which can only be solved by joint actions to stop and use the potential of their minorities as well as to stimulate the inflow of people (Kälin, 2000).

Undoubtedly, the presence and expansion of ethnic groups are one of the challenges of the 21st century, which contributes significantly to all aspects of economic and social development anywhere. Thus, ethnic groups should constitute a permanent element of regional development and a key factor to achieving sustainable development.

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