

Article

Commercial Buildings in Town. The Influence of Discount Shops on the Trade Structure of a Small Town

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Abstract: Changes taking place in the spatial structure of trade in cities have been very dynamic in recent decades. The goal of the research was to determine the dynamics and direction of changes in shaping the traditional commercial structure of small towns, in the context of discount shops location. The subject matter of the research constituted more than ten towns in southern Poland. Traditional shops located there were analysed in terms of their location, the profile and length of their activity. Studies on global trade development processes are available, as well as detailed research results on individual trade assumptions. On the other hand, there is a research gap regarding studies involving the location of commercial buildings, especially in small towns. The research results are a valuable source of information for representatives of various scientific disciplines as well as city authorities. The presented research provides knowledge and constitutes the basis for further research for representatives of various research fields. The areas with the most intensive commercial activity in the last 30 years were correlated with the number of inhabitants. For a selected group of towns, their binding urban planning documentation was verified with respect to specifications facilitating or excluding the establishment of discount shops. The conclusions reached on the basis of the research do not confirm a popular view that discount shops have a negative effect on urban space. The performed analyses indicate that there is no simple relation between a discount shop location and the decreasing number of traditional shops in the investigated cities. The presented research results gain an additional advantage—they form an archive of the development of commerce structure in towns in the period starting with the fall of the centrally planned economy and finishing with the COVID–19 pandemic. The presented material forms a basis for further urban studies which will use the experience gained at this stage



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1. Introduction

While town functions underwent numerous changes at the turn of the centuries, trade remained an inseparable part of town activities. The development of towns and commerce should be treated as one entity [1]. With changes observed in contemporary cities, their development and the growing importance of individual transport, the exchange of goods was also modified. The structure of commerce in a town undergoes constant changes triggered by both local factors and spatial conditions, or a local policy in this respect. One should remember about the specific conditions of individual regions of Europe and the world. While processes related to the development of international trade can be considered globally, when analyzing specific locations, one should remember about local conditions. Designing buildings has always been associated with the features of the area, economy and city policy. Trade is different in India or China, different in the USA, and different still in Central European towns, which are the subject of the study. The planning documentation of towns, setting the directions of spatial development policies, may significantly influence the development opportunities for the commercial functions of a town and, hence, influence

also the functioning of existing commercial facilities. Simultaneously, global actions related to changes in the economic system, market globalization and the influx of foreign capital take place [2]. In the 21st century, in towns there are forms of trade which were completely unknown several dozen years ago. Commercial activity adapts to customers' requirements and market conditions [3]. The number of traditional shops decreases, while the number of supermarkets and discount shops continuously grows in Poland. The trade form steadily gaining importance is the discount shop, offering products at discount prices. Simultaneously, it promotes its own brands. Tens of thousands of discount shops in the structure of European cities have become available for numerous consumers and desired by both inhabitants and local authorities. Every newly opened discount shop introduces changes in the existing trade structure (changes in the structure of trade mean two main issues: functional changes and spatial changes). The changes in functions concern changes in the type and profile of the stores operating in the city. The spatial changes relate to the location of stores in the city structure and their relocation.) As shown by the qualitative data of one discount chain (Dino), in the years 2010–2020, the number of such shops in Poland grew from 111 to 1473, i.e., over thirteenfold. The total number of discount shops and supermarkets representing all chains in Poland in 2019 was 4148.

The presented research was inspired by a desire to investigate the relations between discount and traditional trade in a small town and its urban system, and also to answer the question whether the location of a discount shop influences the existing commercial tissue and if so, then what the nature of such an influence is. The research questions posted during the research are as follows:

1. Does the location of a discount shop influence a decrease in the number of traditional shops?
2. How did the commercial structure change in the nearly 30-year period after the economic transformation in Poland, a country located in Central Europe?
3. How the provisions of the local planning documents affect the preference or limitation of the development of discount shops?
4. Have the most economically active areas in towns been changed?

The value of the article is the documentation of changes taking place in the spatial structure of trade over 30 years. From the time when the political system in Poland changed (from a centrally planned economy to a free market economy) to the pandemic. An important factor influencing the future of trade is the current COVID-19 pandemic. Many stores are closing, and the importance of e-commerce is increasing. It can, therefore, be expected that after the pandemic, trade in small towns will look different. Our research will be a good starting point for further analyzes.

2. Materials and Methods

The purpose of the research was the determination of the dynamics and directions of changes in shaping the traditional commercial structure of a town (location of stores in the city space), in the context of discount shops' localization.

The investigations encompassed the analysis of localization, activity profile and its length (in years) of the business activity of shops in over a dozen small towns. The parts of town characterised by the highest level of commercial activity in the last 30 years were determined and correlated with the number of inhabitants. The spatial range of the research comprised over a dozen towns located in south-west Poland, in the Dolnośląskie Voivodehip. The population of the analysed towns was below 20 thousand inhabitants. The time specifications of range of the analysis encompassed the period of time following the economic transformation in Poland, i.e., the years 1990–2018. Both quantitative and spatial analyses were performed. An attempt to analyse the binding urban planning documentation, such as the study of land use conditions and directions of the analysed towns with respect to its influence on the distribution of commercial facilities in the towns, was also made.

A database, created for the purpose of the research used the data made available by the Statistics Poland and the Applied Computer Science Centre (Centrum Informatyki Stosowanej), contained information about 2,302 entities registered as of 31 December 2018 and removed from the REGON register between 1 January 1990 and 31 December 2018.

The business entities, catalogued and analysed at the consecutive stages of this work encompassed shops of the following business activity profiles, defined in accordance with the Polish Classification of Activities PKD 2007 and PKD 2004/EKD [4,5]:

- Retail sale in non-specialised stores with food, beverages or tobacco predominating;
- Retail sale of fruit and vegetables;
- Retail sale of meat and meat products;
- Retail sale of bread, cakes, flour confectionary and sugar confectionary;
- Retail sale of pharmaceuticals;
- Retail sale of cosmetic and toilet articles;
- Retail sale of clothing;
- Retail sale of footwear and leather goods.

The Statistics Poland possesses data on registered business entities which are assigned a customer number-Regon. The data on business entities made available by the Statistics Poland and the Applied Computer Science Centre was allocated to these towns. The location and time of activity of 2302 traditional shops were analysed. Spatial development maps of traditional shops were made for each town. All this formed the basis for the determination of streets with the highest level of commercial activity.

It should be mentioned that the research discussed herein was conducted based on the data collected after 1990 which was considered the starting point of the investigated period. Since 1990, Poland has enjoyed the capitalist economic system. Hence, one should bear in mind that the number of shops, its increase or decrease, relates to the year 1990. The authors decided to choose this way of presenting the subject for two reasons. Firstly, it shows to what extent the commercial sector changed in the 30-year period and how dangerously the number of small shops fell during that time. The second reason is the non-estimated database of entities which started their activity before 1989, when in Poland there still was the centrally planned economy system.

The analysis of the spatial policy in relation to discount shops was based on the analysis of basic planning documents at the local level, i.e., studies of the conditions and directions of spatial development of cities and local spatial development plans for selected six cities located in the zone of influence of a large city such as Wrocław. The provisions of the study and local plans were analyzed in terms of findings favoring or limiting the location of discount shops in various parts of the towns.

The methodological part is what differentiates this research from other works on similar topic. We have clearly documented the spatial development of stores over a period of 30 years. The research concept in the form of an urban analysis fills the gap between economics and architecture. We took into account exact locations in existing city structure. It should be noted that the research is part of an important problem: what is the future of small towns? The database created for this research can become a basis for further research in various fields.

The adopted research methodology can be repeated for Polish cities. It is possible to compare small, large and medium-sized cities. Data on the address, profile, etc. of the stores are public. These data are recorded by Statistics Poland. It is not available online, however, anyone interested can receive a database once he applies for it. Repeating the research method for other countries would require appropriate modifications to include the differences in spatial planning system and the availability of data on stores.

Pros of the methodology (Figure 1):

- The research method can be used to compare the processes taking place in various Polish cities (e.g., depending on population, function etc.);
- It can be used in research of small towns that do not appear as often in the literature as big cities;

- A database of data on small shops is available;
- It uses both planning practice and research.
- Cons of the methodology:
 - The Statistics Poland does not have a single database. The way data have been stored changed over the past 30 years. The database for this research was create by combining multiple databases provided by Statistics Poland.
 - Databases are paid and time-limited (only available since 1990).

1. Preparation of a database containing information about small shops

2. Cataloging data on discount commercial buildings

3. Spatial analysis of both commercial formats

4. Review of current planning documents in the context of the location of discount stores

5. Analysis of experiences of other countries on the basis of literature.

Figure 1. Methodological flow chart.

2.1. Discount Shop in a Town—Discount Shops in the Spatial Planning Policies of Polish Towns

Discount shops are not defined in the Polish spatial planning law. According to the Polish Classification of Types of Construction (Polish Classification of Types of Construction was introduced by the Regulation of the Council of Ministers of 30 December 1999 (Official Journal of Laws No. 112, item 1316) as amended in 2002 r.), due to the commercial activity conducted there, a discount shop is a sales and service building. This class of buildings encompasses commercial centres, department stores, independent shops and boutiques, halls used for trade fairs, auctions and exhibitions, indoor fairs, petrol and service stations, pharmacies, etc. The binding Act of 27 March 2003 does not specify the detailed principles of the location of such commercial facilities with one exception, namely commercial facilities with an area exceeding 2000 m². The very sales area is defined in this Act as “the part of publicly available area in a commercial facility, constituting a technically and functionally independent entity, used for retail sale in which the direct sale of goods takes place (excluding the area used for catering and other services, and a support area including storage facilities, offices, transport area, window exhibition, etc.). In the case of such facilities, there are also special requirements relating to their location, which must be clearly specified in the municipality study of land use conditions and directions. In addition, at the stage of establishing the land use designation in a local spatial development plan, the spatial planning system specifies a separate designation in compliance with the Regulation of the Minister of Infrastructure on the required scope of the local spatial development plan project of 26 August 2003. The regulation prescribes the identification of such land with the UC symbol, i.e., areas allocated for sales facilities above 2000 m². It should be mentioned that, as a result of the above-mentioned requirement to determine the possible locations of commercial facilities in planning documentation, it is not possible to make a new location for such a facility based on a development conditions decision. According to the Polish planning system, such a decision is a substitution tool allowing to establish the designation, development principles and the spatial development of land in a situation when there is no local spatial development plan. However, a decision such as this cannot be issued for a facility with a sales area over 2000 m², because the approval for such a location requires the development of the local spatial development plan.

In the majority of cases, the above-mentioned regulations limiting the uncontrolled development of large area retail facilities (this is the term commonly used to refer to commercial facilities exceeding the area of 2000 m²) does not encompass discount shops in which the sales area is not even close to the threshold value of 2000 m². The size of the sales area in discount shops in Poland is over 250 m², however, most frequently it does not exceed 1–1.2 thousand m² [6]. Due to the fact that the location of a discount shop is in most cases possible in places designated for services, in binding spatial development plans it is marked there with the letter 'U' (Polish 'usługa' means service). The Act specifies tools allowing to exclude the location of large retail facilities in a given area (e.g., by indicating the acceptable development parameters and land development conditions: maximum area, maximum or minimum height and the requirement to use sloping roofs), however, in practice municipalities do not frequently apply such tools.

2.2. Discount Shop in a Town—Influence of Discount Shops on Their Environment

The results of research on discount trade conducted in numerous countries referred to various aspects of this activity and also various research methodologies were used. This literature review presents only the research results essential from the perspective of urban planning. Special attention should be directed to work of a research team from Korea. The Korean retail trade sector [7] has experienced significant structural changes since mid-90 s as a result the expansion of modern trade formats, and in the years 1997–2010 the influence of the location of discount shops on the employment structure in retail trade was observed. The authors' analysis indicates that the appearance of a discount shop in a city zone leads to the creation of about 200 jobs. According to the authors, a new discount shop increases employment in other commercial sectors, such as bakeries, clothes and electronics shops. The discovery of these authors [7] suggests that opening a large discount type shop may have a positive influence on the local retail sector, which leads to employment growth in a given area. This statement about the positive employment effects remains in sharp contrast with the earlier findings on the influence of large retail chains on employment. According to the authors, new discount type shops may constitute anchors attracting new trade forms, providing modern commercial infrastructure and bringing new, small shops to the districts where they are located. Turkish researchers arrived at equally important, albeit unobvious, conclusions. They analysed how commercial streets functioned in cities in the context of the commercial centres' activity. Their findings show that sometimes commercial streets adapted to changes and became more resistant to the negative consequences of the location of a shopping centre. It is worth noting that neither relevant policies, nor legal regulations fostered the increase in the resistance of commercial streets to new trade forms. On the contrary, they facilitated the development of shopping centres and, for this reason, introduced flexible regulations related to development plans [8]. The results of the above-mentioned research are in line with the results of research presented in the further part of this paper, which do not directly indicate the negative influence of discount shops on the existing commercial structure. However, the research conducted in India demonstrated that despite the appearance of new trade forms [9], inhabitants still prefer traditional shops. These results showed that small shops are important for the inhabitants who value the human factor, 97% of the respondents claimed that they preferred shopping in small retail shops. The results indicate that for Indian people cultural factors play a significant role in the determination of preferences for a choice of shops. Thus, despite new trade forms offering a number of new opportunities, they still choose local shops. By contrast, in Finland [10], Germany [11], and Austria, discount trade was very well accepted. The fastest growing food retail trade sector in Finland are discount shops, their number tripled in a decade. The research on the German market shows that discount shops are the only consistently developing format [12]. Hence, it is not surprising that discount trade was also accepted in other countries, such as Poland [13].

Discount trade has also become a kind of commercial strategy which is well recognised by marketing specialists and psychologists. Internet applications, promotions, discount

codes and numerous other actions are taken to encourage the society to purchase more. The motivation of customers and the determination of their preferences were very important elements helping marketing experts to create brands [14]. Retail sale undergoes numerous transformations, for example the appearance of new large chains and the use of new sale technologies significantly changes retail trade [15]. It should be noted, however, that purchasing as such is an emotional experience gaining more significance every decade [16]. Purchasing power can limit or give a feeling of freedom to a consumer, depending on the nature of relation with themselves, others and the surrounding world. For us, urban planners, urban movements chosen by customers (regardless of their motivation) and the spatial consequences of locating more and more discount premises on smaller and smaller shop areas.

The issue of stores location in a town is an interdisciplinary problem, which is of interest to researchers in many fields: economics, management, administration, sociology, etc. In recent years, several papers on that matter have been published in the field of urban and spatial planning. The research concerned commercial areas in Romania [17], France [18], Germany [19], Turkey [20], The Czech Republic [21], England [22], Poland [23] and New Zealand [24]. These studies are particularly important as they relate to specific cities, streets and market squares. Additionally, in France, Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic, the authors focused on small and medium-sized cities. The authors of the above-mentioned studies agree that the way of shopping has changed in recent decades and the importance of streets has decreased [22], although the dynamics of the decline varies from city to city [18]. This phenomenon was influenced by a number of variables that can be divided into local and global

- Local, e.g., population size, location in an urban area, commuting, and urban sprawl.
- Global, e.g., retail sales in the mass market, the growing importance of individual transport and online shopping.

Small shop owners need to develop new strategies to strengthen their business and meet the customers' expectations [18]. Retail space should be modernized and offer an attractive shopping environment. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is also an important factor that has affected many areas of urban life. E-commerce services have gained in importance as a modern shopping alternative, especially now with increased social distancing rules and customers habits [25,26].

3. Lower Silesian Towns' Profile

The spatial range of the research encompassed towns in the Dolnośląskie Voivodeship, in the south of Poland (Figure 2). It is one of the most urbanised regions in Poland. In 2018, the share of city inhabitants in the overall voivodeship population was 68.8%. Until 2000, this value was systematically growing to reach 71.0%, and since the beginning of the 21st century it has been decreasing.

1. Town located in the direct influence zone of the capital of the region: Oborniki Śląskie, Środa Śląska, Kały Wrocławskie, Sobótka, Siechnice, Trzebnica;
2. Peripheral towns: Wojcieszów, Wąsosz, Międzybórz;
3. Spas: Łądek Zdrój, Duszniki Zdrój, Jedlina Zdrój.

The reason was the progressive suburbanization of urban areas, which results in the exodus of city inhabitants to rural areas. In effect, the number of the inhabitants of rural areas in the Dolnośląskie Voivodeship grew in the last two decades. However, the number of towns constituting the settlement system in Lower Silesia remains invariably high. As of 31 December 2018, there were 91 of them, i.e., one more than in 2000 [27]. This trend results from a decrease in the population of Poland which affects also Lower Silesia. Quantitatively, these are the medium-sized towns to lose the largest number of people. Altogether small towns, i.e., the ones with a population below 20 thousand, lose fewer inhabitants than larger centres. As of 18 December 2018, there were only two large cities with a population exceeding 100 thousand in Lower Silesia: Wrocław and Wałbrzych. This

decreasing trend in the population size is also visible in the statistics with a division into city size groups. The group of very large cities (over 100 thousand inhabitants) became smaller in 2018 when one city, Legnica, had to be excluded from it. In consequence, only Wrocław and Wałbrzych was left in the group. The group of very small towns (with a population below 5 thousand) grew as 4 towns Duszniki-Zdrój, Karpacz, Jedlina-Zdrój and Bierutów were added to it. The group of small towns with a population between 5 and 10 thousand was increased by 2 towns. However, our group of towns with a population between 10 and 20 thousand remained unchanged. The number of medium-sized towns, with a population between 10 and 20 thousand, shows the highest stability. There are 17 towns, so some dynamics can be observed. For instance, in Zgorzelec the number of inhabitants fell from 34 to 30 thousand, in Kłodzko from 29 to 26 thousand, in Nowa Ruda from 25 to 22 thousand and in Lubań from 23 to 21 thousand, and as result this town was moved from the group of medium to small towns. Another observed regularity is the fact that the towns located in the area of influence of a large metropolitan city such as Wrocław have more opportunities to achieve sustainable growth and use the benefits of the state revitalization policy. This is convincingly presented in the demographic analysis clearly demonstrating the demographic benefits resulting from the proximity of a large voivodeship centre. This phenomenon concerns such small towns as Siechnice, Trzebnica, Oborniki Śląskie, Środa Śląska, Kąty Wrocławskie, and Sobótka, which benefit from their location as Wrocław's satellites.

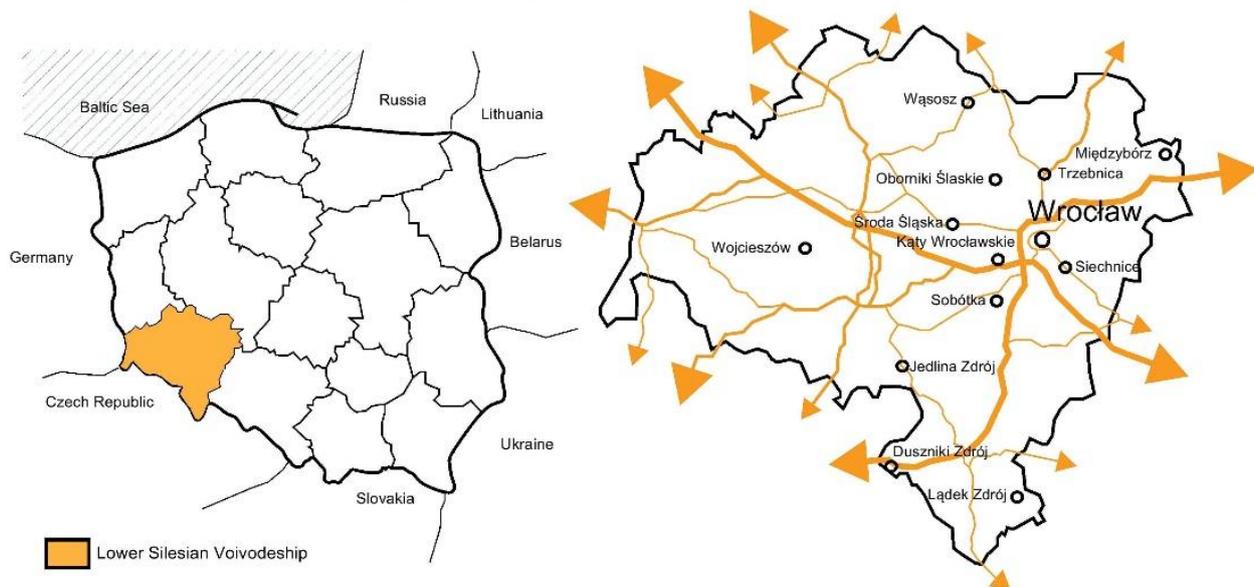


Figure 2. Dolnośląskie Voivodeship located in southern Poland. Analysed towns.

Planning Conditions for Discount Shops Development in Lower Silesian Towns

A possibility to erect a building, so consequently also develop land, is conditioned by the provisions of binding planning documentation, which can determine the assigned locations for service facilities and specify the parameters and indices of land use. The basic planning document at the municipality level in Poland is “the study of conditions and directions of spatial development”. Each municipality is obliged to have such a document specifying the spatial planning policy.

For the purpose of evaluating the possibility of locating a discount shop in the region of Lower Silesia, the studies of land use conditions and directions of the selected towns included in Group 1, i.e., the ones under the direct influence of the regional capital (Oborniki Śląskie, Środa Śląska, Kąty Wrocławskie, Sobótka, Siechnice, Trzebnica), were analysed (Table 1). The analysis of the provisions included in the studies for the existing locations of discount facilities was conducted for the purpose of determining to what extent they limit the location of such premises in cities. As mentioned above, the location of commercial

facilities with a sales area above 2000 m² requires a clear specification in the study, while the location of smaller facilities of the same type, including supermarkets and discount shops, requires only a permit actually being a part of the land designation for sale services. However, the limitation of discount shop locations may be introduced by other provisions in the study which refer to the parameters and indices of land use and the development and infrastructure of a site. By introducing this to the study, the limitations of service facilities characterised by a given parameter, e.g., prohibition on the location of service facilities exceeding the area of 400 m², municipality authorities exert a considerable influence on the exclusion of the location of new types of facilities. The objective of the below presented analysis of the provisions included in the studies in this respect was the verification to what extent municipalities exercise this right.

Table 1. The number of traditional shops and discounts in small towns. Authors' own study based on data made available by Statistics Poland Data Applied Computer Science Centre.

Town Name	Population in 2018	Number of Discount Shops	Number of Inhabitants per One Discount Shop
Kąty Wrocławskie	6561	3	2187
Oborniki Śląskie	9122	4	2280
Siechnice	7245	2	3622
Sobótka	6966	3	2322
Środa Śląska	9428	2	4714
Trzebnica	13,252	5	2650

Oborniki Śląskie. In the binding study of conditions and directions of spatial development of the Oborniki Śląskie municipality (adopted by Resolution No. XV/140/19 of the City Council in Oborniki Śląskie of 29 November 2019), encompassing both the rural areas in the municipality and the town itself, no area was assigned for the location of commercial facilities with an area above 2000 m². Only the service designation 'U' was taken into account, where commercial facilities can also be located. In this area there are no limitations on the location of commercial facilities with a sale area below 2000 m², which means discount facilities can be located there. However, the study introduces specific restrictions on the land use of a plot with an area exceeding 100 m² designated for commercial and service activity. Namely, it is necessary to provide parking spaces with an area twice as large as the area allocated for business activity. In the provisions of the local development plans for the places where discount shops are located, the situation in this respect varies. Two of the discount shops are located near the town centre in area designated for services. However, one of them (Dino, Trzebnicka St.) is located in an area designated for housing and services (MN/U), which is quite far away from the town centre (Tables 1 and 2).

Table 2. The number of traditional shops in small towns. Authors' own study based on data made available by Statistics Poland Data Applied Computer Science Centre.

Town Name	Population in 2018	Number of All Small Shops Which Were Opened after 1990 and Are Still Continuing Their Activity	Number of All Small Shops Which Were Opened after 1990 But Finished It before 2018	Year When the Number of Traditional Shops Was the Largest	Date When a Discount Shop Was Located
Kąty Wrocławskie	6561	89	48	2012	2001
Oborniki Śląskie	9122	145	88	2006	2006
Siechnice	7245	57	41	2010	2010
Sobótka	6966	102	60	2002	2005
Środa Śląska	9428	174	83	2010	2008
Trzebnica	13,252	323	226	2010	2009
Łądek Zdrój	5682	71	100	2002	2013
Międzybórz	2359	53	31	2008	2013
Międzylesie	2621	53	32	2012	2013
Wąsosz	2714	54	41	2012	2015
Wojcieszów	3723	66	49	2002	2014

Trzebnica. The study of conditions and directions of spatial development of Trzebnica (The Study of Conditions and Directions of Spatial Development of Trzebnica Municipality, adopted by Resolution No. XVIII/195/2000 of City Council in Trzebnica as of 29 June 2000) does not determine the location of commercial facilities with an area exceeding 2000 m² either, which results in the lack of a possibility to locate a shop of that size or larger. However, commercial facilities, including discount shops, are accepted in numerous locations, both in the urbanised part of the town and those which are still waiting for investments. The land designated for service facilities is marked with the letter 'U', however, the provisions of the study allow to locate service facilities also in other areas designated for family housing (MW), cultivated green areas and services (ZP/U), business activity areas (P/U), and even one of the areas designated for single-family housing (MN). Despite such freedom of locating service facilities, currently all four discount shops are located in the area allocated for services 'U'. The reason may be the provisions of local development plans providing the details of land use and parameters on the basis of the general agreements presented in the study. They impose prohibitive requirements in areas other than the service ones and, hence, discourage investors from commercial and service investments in these places (Tables 1 and 2).

An interesting complex is composed of two discount shops located next to each other and also directly neighbouring the old town in Trzebnica. Together with a few other commercial and service facilities, they make a local commercial complex which can compete with offer of facilities located in the town centre.

Środa Śląska. The spatial planning policy defined in the study of conditions and directions of spatial development of the Środa Śląska municipality (the Study of Conditions and Directions of Spatial Development of Środa Śląska, adopted by Resolution No. XXI/206/19 of City Council in Środa Śląska as of 23 December 2019) allows for the location of service facilities in areas with a few various designations. However, the document differentiates between their location as a dominant and supplementary designation, where the area allocated for the supplementary function cannot exceed 30% of the total area of the premises. The provisions of the study state that it is possible to locate service facilities as a dominant function (without the limitations of the share of a particular type of area or the size of commercial facilities) in the areas marked with symbols MWU-C—down-town built-up areas in the city centre, MWU—multi-family housing and service development, MW—multi-family housing and development, MWA—multi-family housing development in accordance with uniform architectural and urban design, MNU—single-family housing and service development, U—service facilities, PP/U—production facilities, warehouse and storage, and service facilities, KS/U—transport facilities and equipment, service facilities, KK—rail facilities. Such a wide variety of areas where commercial activity is allowed offers favourable opportunities for the development of discount shops in areas with various types of designation in the study. Certain limitations discouraging investors from locating this type of facilities were introduced directly by imposing specific rules of development types. The analysis of land development indicated that in areas encompassed by conservation protection there was a requirement that buildings have steep-sloped roofs. In areas located outside Zone B of conservation protection, such restrictions are not imposed, which allows to choose any roof slope, including flat roofed buildings. No limitations outside Zone B in the town make an essential factor supporting the location of discount shops there and directing the interest of potential investors to areas located outside the down town areas under conservation protection (Tables 1 and 2).

Kąty Wrocławskie. In Kąty Wrocławskie the binding study adopted a liberal approach to the issue of locating service facilities in the town, including discount facilities. Each facility of this type is located in the area with different change directions in their designation. One of them is located in an area marked with dominant service function U, another one in an area marked with symbol MM, i.e., with the dominant housing function, while the third one, the most distant one from the centre, in an area allocated for the dominant business activity function, marked with AG. The provisions of the study allow to locate commercial

services in each type of these areas without any limitations with respect to a sale area. In the rural municipality, even in an area located on the border of two different zones, the location of a commercial facility with an area above 2000 m² gained approval (Tables 1 and 2).

Siechnice. The study of conditions and directions of spatial development for the Siechnice municipality was adopted in 2010 (Adopted by Resolution No. XXXIX/291/10 of the City Council in Siechnice as of 19 August 2010), its provisions specify certain limitations in the location of commercial facilities with an area above 1000 m². In the municipality, no area for commercial facilities was provided, however, the location of small commercial facilities is allowed in various types of areas determined in the study. Currently, there are two discount facilities in the municipality. Both of them are located in the close neighbourhood of National Road No. 94 leading to Wrocław, encompassing Siechnice with its influence. One of the discount shops is located in an area designated for services marked with symbol U-Si2. In the provisions related to this area, there are no specific limitations connected with, e.g., sale area. Apart from the service function, also the multi-family housing development with services is allowed. Such discretion in shaping development was assigned to area U-Si17, where the other discount facility is located. The development parameters, such as maximum height, are based on the parameters of neighbouring single family housing areas (Tables 1 and 2).

Sobótka. In Sobótka there are three discount shops. All of them are located at a maximum distance of 400 m from the city centre (market square). Pursuant to the provisions of the binding the study of conditions and directions of spatial development of Sobótka municipality (adopted by Resolution No. Nr XLIII/445/14/of the City Council in Sobótka as of 28 March 2014), two discount shops are located within the limits determined on the chart of the directions in the study, the so-called functional areas of service concentrations—U, and there is one located in a housing area, marked with letters MN. The fact that in the areas with a dominant housing function, it was possible to build a discount shop indicates great discretion in the study provisions and no limitations imposed on the development of discount shops (Tables 1 and 2).

The above analysis of the provisions of studies of land use conditions and directions of selected towns clearly indicated that they allow a wide range of locations for discount shops in areas with various designations. Therefore, the conclusions drawn on the basis of these analyses may indicate that the town authorities are interested in limiting the location of discount facilities only to a lesser extent, despite the fact that the planning authorities predicted such solutions. Such an approach shows that discount facilities are perceived by the town authorities as entities with a per saldo positive influence and hence they open the local market to this type of investments as well as other small service investments. This approach may be fostered by the legal qualification of discount facilities in planning documentation where they are equal to other commercial facilities. No necessity to take decisions on the possibility of locating discount facilities at the stage of developing the study encourages leaving the issue open and hence practically giving a permit to build such facilities in study provisions.

4. Results of Detailed Research on Selected Small Towns

The economic transformation of Central Europe was a unique phenomenon on a world scale. On a day-to-day basis, borders were open, gradually travelling became possible, and new ‘western’ brands started to flow into the transformed countries [28]. The real spatial revolution was brought by the political change in 1989 [29]. The fast growth of the number of shops was practically immediately visible in the urban space. Ownership, quantitative and qualitative changes which were observed in the commercial sector in Polish cities in the last three decades encompassed a number of various phenomena [30]. In cities appeared advertisements, super and hypermarket chains, and also discount shops, in addition to this due to the advertisements and the Internet, ecommerce gained significance. Shops were erected not only in places designated for them, but also in basements, garages and street

stalls. The society hungry for western culture willingly accepted new forms of commerce, such as supermarkets, hypermarkets, commercial centres and finally also discount shops.

Contemporary commercial facilities appeared in small towns mainly in the form of discount shops. It is a popular form of trade investigated by Polish scientists representing various fields of study [13,31,32]. In small towns, contemporary commercial facilities appeared a decade later than in larger urban centres. The year 2000 was the time when in the investigated towns, the first discount shop started its activity. The first discount shops were located in buildings previously used as storage or cultural facilities, e.g., a cinema or a sport and entertainment arena [33]. The buildings adapted to their new function had a significantly smaller sale area than facilities designed according to investor guidelines. Their gross covered area and the plot area resulted from the former function of such facilities, not from investment needs. The number of adaptations of existing buildings to the commercial function was decreasing every year, and after 2007 it fell to zero. Discount shops which started to appear in small towns then were not related to any existing structure [34]. Numerous cities would benefit from such actions as the ones undertaken in Nijmegen, where the free flow of consumers was organised and streets were created in a way that allowed them to combine numerous functions unknown several decades ago [35,36].

The small towns selected for a detailed analysis were mainly located within the range of influence of the regional capital—Wrocław. The authors decided to extend the base of investigated towns by adding spas and peripheral towns, in which discount shops appeared in the last 5 years. The goal of these changes was to observe trends in small towns located in similar regional conditions, however, performing different functions.

In the space of small towns, traditional and modern commercial forms work in parallel [37]. Generally, the society supports the opinion that the latter have a negative influence on the traditional commercial structure. This feeling is only amplified by the media reports on the protests of petty shop owners or families whose livelihood depends on one small shop and who are forced to close it due to the location of a discount shop. The research question posed in this paper was:

- Does the location of a discount shop influence a decrease in the number of traditional shops?
- How did the commercial structure change in the nearly 30-year period after the economic transformation?
- How the provisions of the local planning documents affect the preference or limitation of the development of discount shops? Have the most economically active areas in towns been changed?

The charts (Figure 3) presented below show the number of traditional shops in the towns in the years 1990–2018. The beginning of discount shop activity is marked in each chart. In all towns located in the close neighbourhood of Wrocław (Oborniki Śląskie, Kąty Wrocławskie, Sobótka, Trzebnica, Środa Śląska, Siechnice), a dynamic increase in the number of shops was observed in the years 1990–2000, it was followed by a period of stabilization and a fall in the number of shops. This trend is visible in all towns of this type regardless of the fact whether a discount shop started its business activity there in 2001 or 2009. Peripheral towns, located outside the direct influence of the capital of the region, which are not municipalities (Międzybórz, Wojcieszów, Wąsosz, Węgliniec), also have one trend in common: the number of shops was gently rising until 2010–2012, then it stabilised or slightly decreased, regardless of the time of business activity beginning. The third distinguished group are spas (Łądek Zdrój, Duszniki Zdrój, Jedlnia Zdrój). In this group, a dramatic fall in the number of traditional shops has been observed since about 2002, currently the number of traditional shops in Łądek Zdrój and Duszniki Zdrój is lower than in 1990. It should be noted that discount facilities were established in these towns after 2015, hence they could not contribute to this difficult situation of small trade. The reasons for this situation can be more probably explained by the diminished significance of spas.

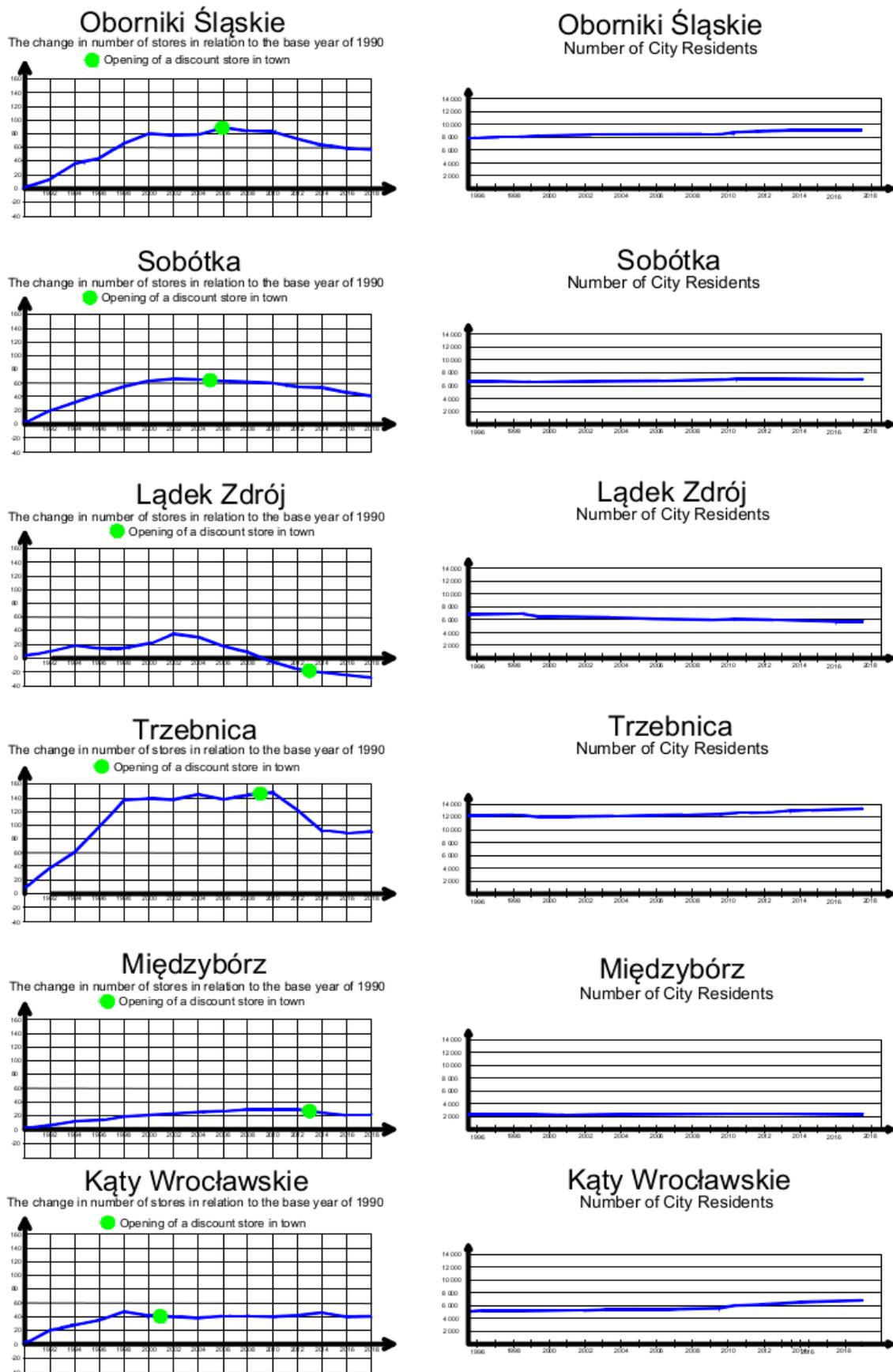


Figure 3. Cont.

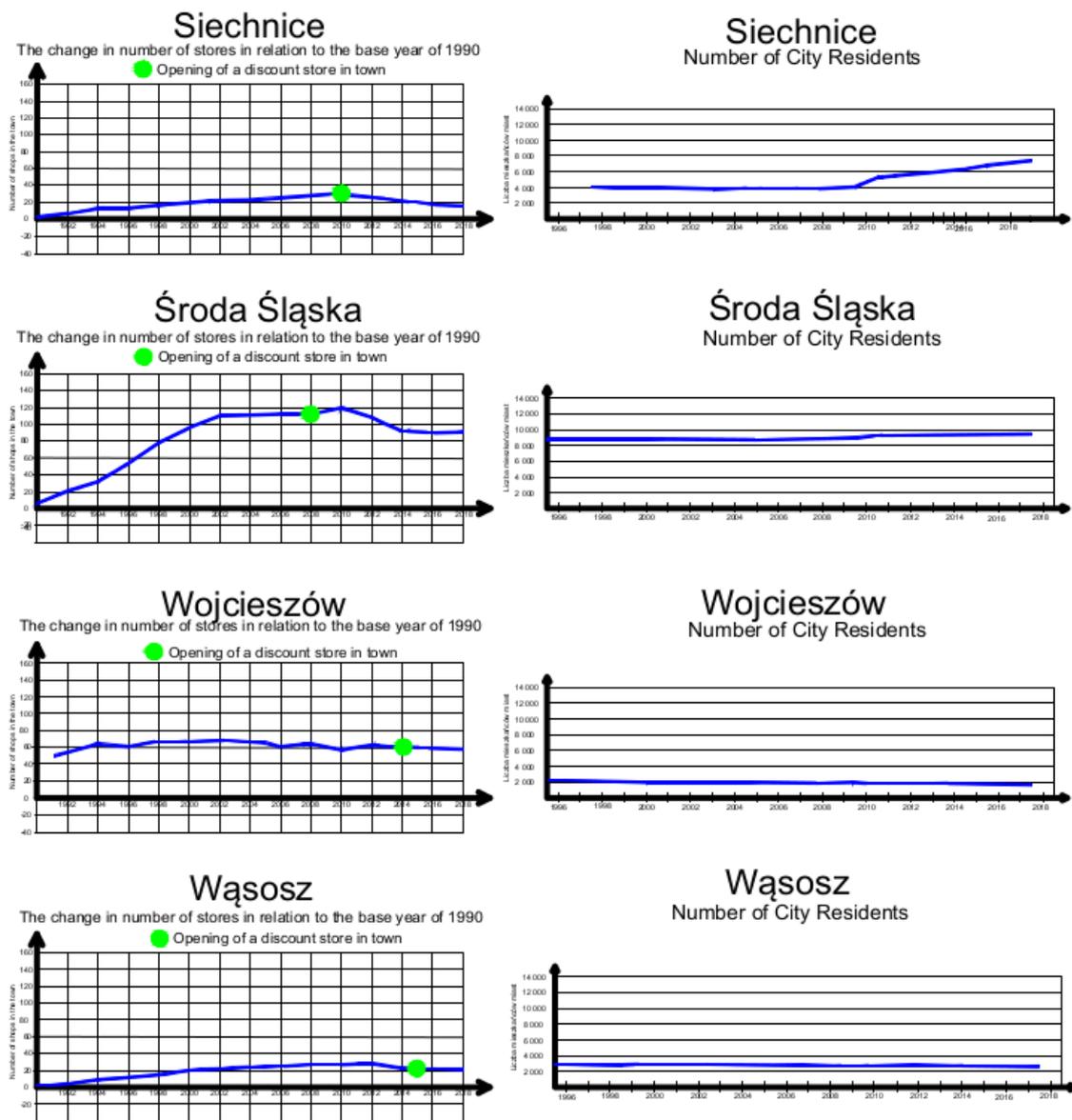


Figure 3. The change in number of stores in relation to the base year of 1990 date of opening of a discount store and the number of town residents.

The analysis encompassed also the distribution of traditional shops in the town structure in the last 30 years. The number of shops which started their business activity in the years 1990–2018 was 2302. On the basis of the analysis of their location, it is possible to determine areas with more intensive commercial activity and those where most shops have finished their business activity.

The main conclusion from the conducted research is as follows: the area where the largest number of shops finished their business activity overlaps the area where largest number of entities started it. This conclusion is true for all towns and confirms the dynamics of services in a given town area. It is inspiring, however, that the main commercial area in small towns is concentrated near a market square and the streets leading to it, frequently they are also important routes going to, e.g., a railway station, regardless of the location or the year of opening a discount shop. This means that the urban arrangement and the hierarchy of the urban space defend their position and still attract residents no matter what commercial innovations are introduced.

5. Discussion

On the basis of research, three major groups of conclusions have been distinguished, they are related to: relations between traditional commerce and discount shops, commercial streets in a town and discount trade in the spatial design system in Polish small towns.

The first group of conclusions encompasses the results of quantitative research determining the number of shops in particular years. The analyses have shown that there is no simple relation between the location of a discount shop and the decreasing number of traditional shops in the investigated towns. However, there are trends connected with the dynamics of the increase in the number of traditional shops observed in three types of cities:

1. Towns located in an area directly influenced the capital of the region;
2. Peripheral towns;
3. Spas.

It should be noted that the towns from first group are in the area of influence of the region's capital—Wrocław. These are cities with good communication with Wrocław by expressways and rail (Figure 2). The positive impact of a large urban center is reflected in the systematic increase in the number of people and economic indicators. Discount stores in this group of six small towns appeared the earliest, in the first decade of the 21st century. On the other hand, in other cities located outside the impact zone of large cities, where population declines are recorded, the first discount shops appeared a bit later, in the years 2013–2015. Despite the downward trends in the number of stores and population, which began in some of these cities even before the location of first discount shops, the places of concentration of traditional stores, i.e., historical city markets, and the main communication routes leading to the center have not disappeared. Rather, discount shops have influenced the emergence of new local shopping centers in areas located mostly outside the city center and operate independently of them.

The location of a discount shop in each of the three mentioned types of towns did not influence the determined trends. The trend related to the decrease in the number of small shops in towns should be considered a consequence of global changes: lifestyle changes in Europe in the 21st century, increased mobility, greater significance of car transport, internet shopping, and advertising. Moreover, the observed considerable increase in the number of shops after the economic transformations was bound to sooner or later face market saturation and competition (Figures 4 and 5). It was not possible that all shops spontaneously created at the beginning of the 1990s remained in the market for as many as three decades.

Another group of conclusions concerns spatial planning. Here, an important observation is distinguishing two types of streets, which are characterised by:

- The largest number of entities starting a business activity;
- The largest number of entities finishing a business activity.

The above-mentioned two types of streets overlap (Figure 6). Hence, it is justified to determine the type of business activity area in a town. It should be mentioned that these areas comprise the market square and its neighbouring streets, which means that the urban design of a town maintains the hierarchy of service centres regardless of the location of discount shops. No relation has been observed between the location of a discount shop and changes in the spatial design and the distribution of shops in the whole town.

The change in number of stores in relation to the base year of 1990
(three types of cities)

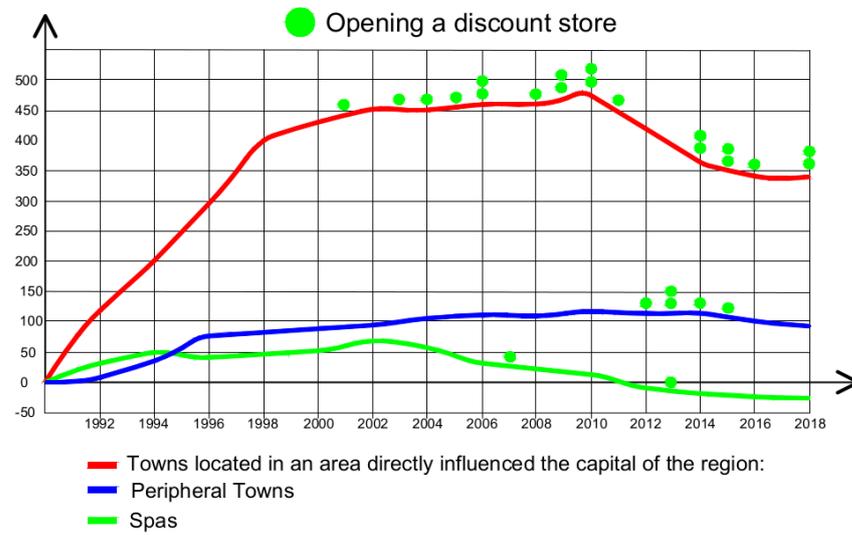


Figure 4. The change in number of stores in relation to the base year of 1990 in three types of cities.

The change in number of stores in relation to the base year of 1990



Figure 5. The change in number of stores in relation to the base year of 1990 in analyzed towns.

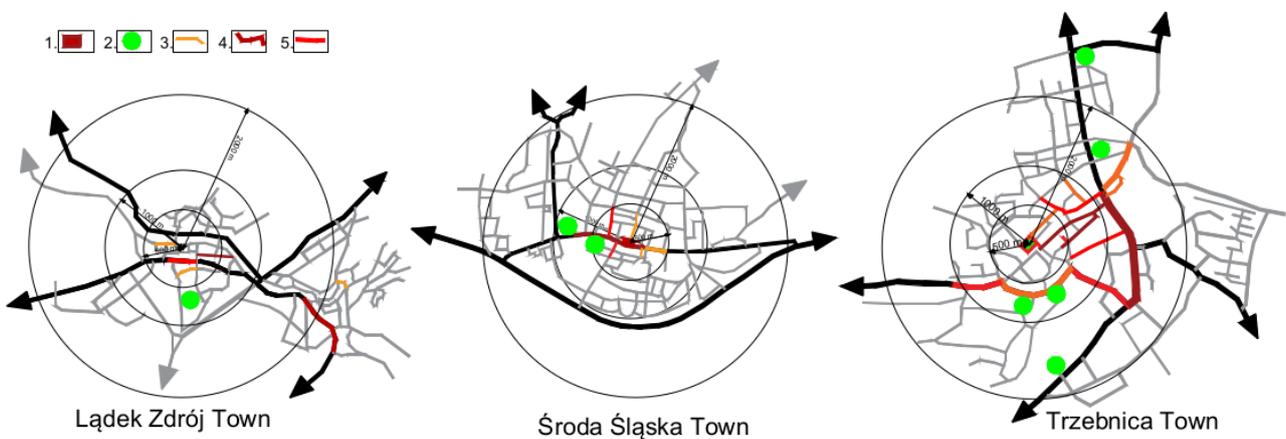


Figure 6. Commercial streets in small towns, 1—market square; 2—discount shop; 3–5—streets with the highest level of commercial activity.

The last group of conclusions encompasses the results of the analysis of planning documentation and urban design practices in the matter of discount shops location in small towns. The analysis clearly indicates that the provisions of the binding studies of land use conditions and directions allow the location of discount shops in a wide range of areas with different designations. Therefore, the conclusion drawn on the basis of these analyses is that the authorities are not greatly interested in limiting the opportunities for locating discount shops, despite the fact that there are planning devices which could be used to do so. This approach indicates that discount shops are perceived by the town authorities as *per saldo* positive elements and so they open the local market to this type of investments and similar smaller service facilities, too. This attitude may be fostered by the qualification of discount shops in planning legal regulations as any other commercial entity. No necessity to make decisions on the possible location of a discount shop at the stage of developing a study facilitates leaving the issue open and hence allowing such a location pursuant to study provisions.

The research conducted as part of this work constitutes the documentation and summary of thirty years of the capitalist system in Poland, from the perspective of the commercial structure of a small town. It was a period of time which changed the image of Polish cities and towns, in the structure of which gradually new brands appeared, followed by larger supermarkets and discount shops. The appearance of new investments in a town always evoked strong emotions and fears of its inhabitants. It should be noted that these research results are published at a very important moment. The year 2021 is another year of the struggle of the World, Europe and Poland with the COVID-19 pandemic. The significance of e-commerce is still rising, and the representatives of international commercial chains limit their expansion. Numerous shop owners were forced to suspend their business activity or even went bankrupt. After the pandemic the world will not be the same in some respects. Commerce and shopping will definitely change. Thus, the presented research results gain an additional advantage—they form an archive of the development of commerce structure in Polish small towns in the period starting with the fall of the centrally planned economy and finishing with the COVID-19 pandemic. The presented material forms a basis for further urban studies which will use the experience gained at this stage.

The directions of further research that we plan to conduct include two issues. As a result of the research, it was possible to create a large database that can be used in various other ways. In their further research work, the authors plan to conduct research on the center of a local small town, which will strengthen territorial cohesion. Another important topic of research is the observation of changes in the spatial structure of small towns after the COVID-19 pandemic. We observe that many shops ceased their activities and the importance of e-commerce and working from home increased. It is extremely interesting to observe whether, and in what form, the trade of a small town will revive.

6. Conclusions

The conducted research showed that there is no simple relationship between the location of a discount shop and the decreasing number of traditional shops in the examined cities. However, a certain differentiation of the impact of discount shops was observed, depending on the small town's relationship with a large city and town's leading function (peripheral town, towns in close proximity to Wrocław, spa towns). In the light of the research results, the trend related to the decline in the number of small shops in certain types of cities should be considered a consequence of changes in external conditions affecting the structure of local trade.

Interesting conclusions also arise from the analysis of the spatial policy of towns in relation to the location of discount shops. Research has shown that the planning documents introduce little restrictions on the location of discount shops. Such an approach may result from an unambiguously positive reception of discount shops by local authorities. The lack of evidence of a negative impact of discount shops on the functioning of the town's

trade creates an atmosphere for conducting a liberal spatial policy in relation to new forms of trade.

The results of the analysis of the distribution of main trade spaces in small towns showed the resilience and stability of traditional commercial spaces. New shopping centers in the form of discount shops and accompanying shops have not eliminated older shopping centers, but have only become a new, additional element of the commercial structure of a small town.

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