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Depopulation of rural areas in Poland : Period : 1950-2011

Objective

The article deals with the issue of depopulation of rural areas in Poland in the periods between censuses (from 1950 to 2011). The depopulation issue is defined in the professional literature in various ways, therefore the article's introduction presents an overview of population process, which from the demography perspective (natural and migration movement) can be considered problematic. Some of these problems are the way of measuring and analysing this phenomenon. For the purposes of this article we have assumed not only a definition of the depopulation phenomenon, but also a set of measures for its analysis. Apart from depopulation measures we have also used the basic demographic measures and indicators used in the analysis of demographic processes constituting natural and migration movements.

Data and methods

The analysis was based on the data from rural territorial units, that is rural municipalities and rural parts of rural-urban municipalities, gathered during national censuses from 1950, 1960, 1970, 1975, 1988, 2002, 2011 as well as the data from current public statistics for the period 1995-2013. In order to achieve the comparability of the abovementioned data over time and space, they were standardized according the administrative division from 1995. This step was necessary because of the small changes of the administrative division of municipalities introduced in Poland each year. In total, the analysis included information regarding 2168 territorial units and utilized the already mentioned methods of statistical analysis, as well as the graphical visualisations of the spatial relations existing in the studied phenomena, the so called choropleths.

Selected conclusions

The conducted study allowed us to discover that it is hard to clearly state that, in spatial approach, there is a homogenous trend in population changes and depopulation of rural areas all over Poland. However this phenomenon is clearly present in certain areas. The dynamics and direction of changes over the entire 60-year period, which was analysed here, were on one hand dependant on the changing socio-economic politics, and on the other hand were determined by local circumstances. Therefore the resulting image of changes and their tendencies is very complex.

The text ends with the conclusions from the conducted analysis and a list of professional literature on this subject. The conclusions include not only the summary of the empirical analysis of basic population processes and depopulation phenomenon changes, but also the key issues related to the development of territorial units in Poland, which need to be dealt with in the near future.