

THE POTENTIAL OF DIVERSITY. DIRECTIONS OF DEVELOPMENT OF METROPOLIS

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Purpose: The area of interest focuses on the functioning and development of the only officially established metropolis in the country to date, namely the Upper Silesian-Dąbrowa Basin Metropolis, covering a vast urban area. Despite functioning in a relatively culturally homogeneous region, almost every city in the Upper Silesian area, depending on its character, chooses different paths of development, focusing on the potential that constitutes its greatest value, distinguishing it from others.

The article focuses mainly on issues related to the cultural potential of the cities selected for analysis, which differ in terms of their origins, degree of economic development and cultural potential.

Since one of the key objectives of creating a metropolitan area was to establish conditions for the harmonious and sustainable development of all its elements, it seems obvious to ask how this process is progressing almost a decade after the creation of the Silesian Metropolis.

Project/methodology/approach: The article is explanatory and descriptive in nature.

The research methods adopted in this study indicate a qualitative type of research. These include both observation techniques and content and document analysis, carried out on the basis of observed phenomena and facts occurring in urban space. Based on an analysis of the literature on the subject and existing factual data (desk research), the process of development and creation of selected urban areas within the Upper Silesian-Dąbrowa Basin Metropolis will be presented.

Findings: One of the key assumptions related to the establishment of an administrative metropolitan area is to ensure the balanced/symmetrical development of the municipalities and cities that comprise it, in accordance with the principle that bigger is better. Hence the need to look at some of the phenomena occurring in selected areas of the Upper Silesian-Dąbrowa Basin Metropolis, established almost a decade ago, with particular emphasis on the implementation of their culture-creating functions and the development of creative industries.

Originality/value: The innovative aspect of the article lies in the analysis of the development directions adopted by selected cities, the first officially established metropolis in the country, with particular emphasis on creative industries. The results of the analysis and the conclusions drawn may allow for the use and implementation of similar solutions in other cities in order to stimulate their future development and build their own image.

Keywords: metropolitan area, cultural heritage, revitalisation, cultural development, creative industries.

Category of the paper: empirical research (observation) and desk research.

1. Introduction

The article focuses on the problems of the functioning and development of the only officially established metropolis in the country to date, covering a vast urban area known as the Upper Silesian Agglomeration.

The 1990s brought political and economic changes to Poland, and with them began the era of postmodernity. The industrial era came to a natural end.

The Upper Silesia region, whose character and development were inextricably linked to industry, had to redefine itself in the face of changing realities.

The region's potential was recognised in its size and diversity, which led to plans to transform the Upper Silesian area into a metropolitan area.

The idea of creating a Silesian metropolis first emerged in 2007, when 14 municipalities decided to establish the Upper Silesian Metropolitan Union.

On the website of the Upper Silesian Metropolitan Union, which initiated the creation of the then 'Silesia' Metropolis, we read that its primary goal is: 'to create a dynamically developing metropolitan centre capable of effectively competing with other metropolitan centres in the country and in Europe'¹.

Ten years since the creation of the Upper Silesian Metropolitan Union – on 16 March 2017, the Polish Senate finally passed a bill on the metropolitan union in the Silesian Province.

Currently, the **Upper Silesian-Dąbrowa Basin Metropolis** – as it was ultimately named – comprises 41 municipalities (including cities, with a total population of over 2 million), which, despite their diverse origins and historical backgrounds, are united and characterised primarily by the region's common post-industrial heritage.

Based on his research on the potential of the creative industry in the Upper Silesian conurbation, even before the official establishment of the Metropolis, Professor Andrzej Klasik concluded that it was possible to 'build' and promote the development of:

- Katowice as a city of high culture, music and the music industry.
- Bytom as a city of performing arts and cultural events in a post-industrial setting.
- Zabrze as a city of technical monuments and post-industrial tourism (Klasik, 2014).

A summary of the eight years of the officially established Metropolis encouraged reflection on how such a large area in terms of territory and population is developing, which, despite many similarities, is a mosaic of diverse potentials that make it up.

¹ www.silesiametropolia.eu/s,9.htm z dn. 27.12.2024.

2. Materials and methods

Sticking to the strict definition or description of the set of characteristics that define a metropolitan city, in addition to the quantitative dimension, which states that "agglomerations with at least half a million inhabitants or more can be included in this category, there are also qualitative criteria, such as the excellence of services, institutions and facilities, innovative potential in technical, economic, social, political and cultural terms, as well as the uniqueness and specificity of the place" (Jałowiecki, Szczepański, 2006, pp. 210-211).

This obviously raises the **question** of the effect and scale of the synergy achieved in the development of the areas comprising the newly established Silesian Metropolis. This question is therefore the focus of the research presented in this article.

The analysis of the development of municipalities associated with the Metropolis has been narrowed down, for understandable reasons, to a few examples of cities, such as the capital of the Metropolis, Katowice, and selected cities located in the centre of the Metropolis, such as Bytom, Zabrze and Ruda Śląska. The aim of this analysis is to conduct a comparative study on how their creative and cultural potential is being utilised.

The research undertaken for the purposes of this study is explanatory and descriptive in nature. The research method used is a contribution to a study on the socio-cultural development trends of selected cities in the Upper Silesian-Dąbrowa Basin Metropolis.

The technique used was primarily observation of the phenomena under study, occurring in the cities selected for analysis, based on a thorough analysis of revitalisation processes, cultural changes and the development of creative industries. These observations were also based on an analysis of documents confirming the above phenomena and their scale. Desk research was also used, referring to the theories of researchers focusing on the issues of urban revitalisation and creativity.

3. Results, discussion and conclusions

3.1. The first metropolis

The basic assumption behind merging smaller territorial structures into larger administrative and economic entities is to strengthen their joint potential.

‘Clothing’ units that contribute their potential in a jointly functioning entity enriches the whole, and larger units find it easier to stand out from the rest.

Mutual support for activities serving common interests also provides an opportunity for much more rational management of budgetary resources.

Some of these activities were undertaken long before the idea of creating a joint metropolis emerged, such as the existence of the Municipal Transport Union (currently the Metropolitan Transport Union), which operates in the field of rational, joint passenger transport policy.

Another spectacular example of a very effective form of such activities is the joint promotion initiative of the 'product' known as the Silesian Voivodeship Industrial Monuments Route, established in 2005. As we read on the Trail's website: "The Industrial Monuments Route is a thematic, car-based tourist and cultural route connecting sites related to the industrial heritage culture of the Silesian Province. Currently, it comprises 40 sites"².

It is also an award-winning tourist product. In 2008, it received the Golden Certificate of the Polish Tourist Organisation for the best tourist product in the country.

In January 2010, it was the only trail from Central and Eastern Europe to join the European Route of Industrial Heritage (ERIH).

For four years, a joint initiative has also been implemented to promote interesting historical sites in the region under the name 'Kierunek GZM' (Destination GZM)³.

The effectiveness and efficiency of this type of joint action is proof that joint activities have a much greater chance of success, and promotion under a common banner is much more effective than individual activities, which often require constant resistance to strong competition.

3.2. The 'periphery' of the metropolis

Although many joint, successful initiatives and projects have emerged in the Metropolis area, it would be overly optimistic to say that this area is developing evenly.

Eight years have passed since the official establishment of the Metropolis, and it is becoming increasingly clear that the creation of the Metropolis with its capital in Katowice has resulted in the concentration of metropolitan functions mainly in that area. Thus, a so-called satellite system has crystallised, with Katowice occupying a central position, while the remaining 40 municipalities in the region, depending on their size, potential and the inventiveness of their authorities, are developing more or less in parallel.

Such a huge urban organism as a metropolis must, by its very nature, be highly diverse internally, but this is not a problem; it can even be considered an undoubted asset of a region where such enormous diversity can be found: cultural potential, social capital, rich landscape and urban and architectural layouts.

The problem is rather whether, in such a large and diverse urban organism, there is a real chance for the parallel development of all the areas belonging to it.

² <https://zabytkitechniki.pl/staticcontent/27320> z dn. 31.03.2025.

³ <https://www.slazag.pl/kierunek-gzm-2025-festiwal-mikrowypraw-po-gornoslasko-zaglebiowskiej-metropolii> z dn. 25.06.2025.

3.3. Diversity in unity – on the development paths of selected cities in the Metropolis

According to a 2013 report by the 'Financial Times', even before the official establishment of the Metropolis in question, it was estimated that: 'Apart from Katowice, Chorzów, Gliwice, Tychy, Bielsko-Biała, Żory, Sosnowiec, Częstochowa and Mysłowice are the so-called cities of the future of the Silesian Province, which have a chance for great development'⁴.

To this day, Katowice remains the undisputed leader in the region, having been distinguished in as many as six categories prepared by the British daily, partly because the city places great emphasis on the development of so-called leisure and creative industries, which proves to be extremely important for potential investors.

This raises the question of what really determines the success of some cities in the region compared to others belonging to the newly created Metropolis?

One of the publications issued by the Krakow Institute for Urban Development discusses, among other things, the importance of cultural functions in the process of urban development and revitalisation: "The process of deindustrialisation began in the 1960s in Western Europe. In Poland, the industrial function was maintained until the 1990s. The industrial heritage left behind gradually deteriorated. In the 21st century, measures were taken to revitalise these spaces. It turned out that former industrial buildings are attractive places for cultural activities. Cultural institutions began to give these places a new identity and enabled the use of post-industrial facilities for other functions" (Siwirska, 2017, p. 131).

An excellent example of investment in post-industrial potential is the city of **Zabrze**, which has been hailed today (in line with the predictions of Professor A. Klasik) as the Polish capital of industrial tourism.

In addition to the well-known historic Guido Mine, Zabrze's major tourist attractions also include (awarded the Main Prize in the category of cultural heritage protection and revitalisation) an underground tourist route, namely the Main Key Heritage Adit.

However, it is important to note that this type of revitalisation entails the development of other initiatives that are important for increasing the attractiveness of the city, related to the location of prestigious cultural events in their area, using the original space.

The cultural creativity of a city is now recognised worldwide as a decisive factor in determining the status, value and attractiveness of a place. These topics were also the focus of the Creative Cities Congress, organised in 2018 in **Katowice** – the second UNESCO Creative City in Poland.

Suffice it to mention the Katowice Culture Zone created around the 'Spodek' Sports and Recreation Hall, which also includes the revitalised post-industrial facilities of the former 'Katowice' Mine, adapted into the buildings of the Silesian Museum, and one of the most

⁴ Dziewięć miast naszego regionu, które wyróżnił „Financial Times”. To właśnie do nich należy przyszłość. Dziennik Zachodni (2019.04.12).

modern music buildings in Europe, namely the building of the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra (photo no. 1). All these facilities have become venues for prestigious cultural events.



Figure 1. The building of the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra in Katowice.

Source: own work.

As Charles Landry, a world-renowned expert on the importance of creativity in urban development, writes:

"We need to change the question: not what value imagination, creativity, culture, heritage, art or design have for urban development. Instead, what is the cost of not thinking about imagination, creativity, culture, design, art and heritage? Name a city that is important on a global scale but weak in these areas. All cities need to gain recognition and be on the global radar in order to increase their prospects for wealth creation and realise their potential. Creativity, cultural distinctiveness, art and a dynamic creative economy are seen as resources and assets in this process" (Landry, 2010, p. 3).

Hence, the lack of appreciation for such an important aspect of city life as culture in its broadest sense and the creative industries associated with it often results in serious consequences in the form of the marginalisation of cities.

Kazimierz Krzysztofek also writes: "The culture of a city is reflected in the character of the space, which is a chronicle of the city's life and a record of its history. The city is both a product and an expression of culture, and at the same time it creates a specific environment for the promotion of culture and its fullest experience thanks to the possibility of confronting many trends and direct access to various forms of its expression" (Krzysztofek, 2005, pp. 37-39)

It would seem that cities with centuries-old traditions and well-developed historic centres, such as **Bytom**, are in a privileged position in terms of exploiting their cultural potential.

Unfortunately, the post-war years were a period of predatory mining policies under the city, resulting in the demolition of many historic quarters, as described by Agata Listoś-Kostrzewa, among others (Listoś-Kostrzewa, 2021).

Nevertheless, even then, the city was important on the cultural map of Silesia due to its numerous cultural initiatives and the location of one of the most prestigious cultural institutions, the Silesian Opera.

The period of local government reconstruction after 1989 was not kind to the city. This was due to the rapid restructuring of industry, which led to a massive increase in unemployment, impoverishment and a rapid outflow of population. For Bytom, this was another difficult moment in its history, following a period of exploitative exploitation.

Therefore, hope appeared with the allocation of a special fund to the city under the Regional Operational Programme of the Silesian Province for 2014-2020 for the comprehensive revitalisation of the city – the amount of EUR 100 million⁵.

Despite such enormous support, a year before the end of the Programme, it turned out that the allocated funds had not been fully utilised and the opportunity for development had not been taken advantage of. Apart from a few investments, both cultural and social, which were implemented thanks to EU funds.

Currently, Bytom lags behind other developing centres in the region, so it is important to remember that the opportunity offered by belonging to a common entity – a metropolis – does not relieve city authorities of their responsibility to implement effective urban policy in municipalities.

However, what gives cause for optimism and allows us to believe that one of the most beautiful cities in the agglomeration will not succumb to complete degradation is the fact that the city has managed to maintain a dance scene, whose origins are linked to the activities of the Silesian Dance Theatre.

The opportunity for cultural development in Bytom, as predicted by Andrzej Klasik (Klasik, 2014), is still seen in, among other things, the ‘development of performing arts and cultural activities in industrial spaces’, thanks to, among other things, the Dance Theatre Department of the Academy of Theatre Arts in Krakow located here and the activities of the Bytom Dance and Movement Theatre Rozbark.

In 2024, Bytom also became the venue for the AGLO Festival, an initiative of Zbigniew Rokita, one of the most popular writers and screenwriters of the younger generation and winner of the NIKE Literary Award.

"There has never been a festival like this in Silesia before, and the 770th anniversary of Bytom, one of the oldest cities in our AGLOmeration, is a perfect opportunity to talk about this region, its inhabitants, history and future. [...] Bytom Cultural Centre will welcome interesting guests, and with them their good books, performances, workshops and walks around Bytom"⁶.

Fortunately, the festival was repeated the following year, with the hope that it would become a permanent fixture in the city's calendar of important cultural events.

Thanks to such initiatives, Bytom, perceived in recent years as a city destroyed and battered, has once again become an arena for interesting cultural events.

⁵ Regionalny Program Województwa Śląskiego na lata 2014-2020 - Ministerstwo Funduszy i Polityki Regionalnej.

⁶ <https://www.bytom.pl/aktualnosci/index/AGLO-Festiwal-czyli-trzy-dni-z-Bytomiem-i-Slaskiem-/idn:41629>

It is also worth noting that the effects of the partial revitalisation that began in the city a few years ago are becoming increasingly noticeable in its space, restoring at least a semblance of its former glory to the city.

Unfortunately, observation of some Silesian cities proves that so-called architectural revitalisation is not always accompanied by effective social revitalisation. The renewal of degraded urban spaces does not always entail giving them new, functional meanings.

Examples of such ineffective revitalisation practices in the region include investments carried out in **Ruda Śląska**.

One of the most spectacular and seemingly successful examples of revitalising attractive post-industrial space in Ruda Śląska was the implementation of a project to renovate the historic Ficinus workers' housing estate.

The Ficinus Colony is a historic workers' housing estate, which is one of the oldest preserved examples of patronage housing in Upper Silesia. The uniqueness of the colony lies in the use of natural sandstone, obtained from nearby quarries, as a building material, which gives it its unique and original value (photo no. 2).



Figure 2. Ruda Śląska – Ficinus Workers' Colony.

Source: own work.

However, as we read: 'For years, Ficinus has failed to meet certain requirements set by the Marshal's Office of the Silesian Province as the institution supervising the Industrial Monuments Route. The threat that Ruda Śląska will practically cease to exist on this route is real' (Pilcok, 2015).

As Andrzej Majer writes: 'Revitalisation is a term that is, however, commonly misused to refer to all types of renovations, adaptations or modernisations, even on a small scale. [...] Construction activities are the most important components of revitalisation, but they do not replace it; there is still a lack of understanding that the people affected are equally important' (Majer, 2014, p. 59).

The lack of a distinct aura in the city that would foster and support the so-called creative industries, which give functional and social value to interesting urban spaces, and the underestimation of the importance of cultural heritage, which shapes the character and specificity of a place (a kind of *genius loci*) is probably the reason for the slowest progress of the metropolisation process here in comparison with neighbouring cities in the conurbation.

Today, the city can be described, without exaggeration, as a ‘cultural desert’ in the middle of the metropolis.

4. Summary

Every city is a complex organism made up of various elements. For a city to develop properly, it must ensure development on various levels.

It is also understandable that cities have their own specific conditions for this development. However, this does not mean that city development planning should focus only on one prominent area of ‘specialisation’, neglecting or ignoring the others. Sooner or later, this type of approach will have a negative impact on its overall development.

A city is made up of people who, in addition to the opportunity to work and live there, want to fulfil other significant needs, such as participation in culture or broadly understood entertainment and leisure.

However, as can be seen from observations of individual cities in the Upper Silesian Agglomeration, now the Upper Silesian-Dąbrowa Basin Metropolis, not all cities have such a comprehensive vision of their development.

One need only look at the cities in the region to see that the most successful ones are those that include the promotion of cultural heritage and the development of the so-called ‘creative industries’ in their strategy, making their space attractive enough to attract the most entrepreneurial and creative people, who are the driving force behind cities such as Katowice, discussed here. Others, after years of neglect, are trying to revive their post-industrial creative potential, such as the capital of industrial tourism, Zabrze, or to revitalise the city space by introducing innovative cultural projects, such as Bytom.

Unfortunately, there is no shortage of examples of cities that are still stuck in a deadlock in this respect, becoming the proverbial ‘cultural desert’ in the centre of a metropolis, as exemplified by Ruda Śląska discussed here. The commonly carried out ‘revitalisation’ is unfortunately limited here to architectural renovation, which is not always synonymous with the social and cultural revival of the space, as shown by the example of the historic ‘Ficinus’ colony in Ruda Śląska.

A ‘living’ city is not only broadly understood infrastructure and physical space, it is above all cultural wealth, which overlaps with the material elements of space and creates a sense of place, belonging, identification with space, in a word, a sense of identity. It is people who give places their atmosphere, specificity and meaning.

Without respect for this special value of the city, which is its broadly understood cultural heritage, it will be difficult to expect success in other areas of life, including economic ones.

In summary, based on the examples given in the article, almost a decade after the establishment of the Silesian Metropolis, it is clear that such a large and diverse urban area in terms of potential is showing clearly concentric development. This means that the most intensive development of metropolitan functions is visible primarily in the capital of the region, Katowice, which today stands out as one of the most dynamically developing and important centres in the country, both in economic and cultural terms.

At the same time, although not as intensively, some large urban centres are developing, such as Gliwice and Bielsko-Biała, with historical metropolitan traditions and great socio-economic, cultural and scientific potential.

Other urban centres, depending on their character or potential, but also as a result of historical turmoil, such as Bytom, are trying to define their place on the map of the Upper Silesian region. This process, although definitely uneven in relation to the centre, which is Katowice, is slowly taking place, as can be seen from the initiatives developed and undertaken there.

It is difficult to expect that the establishment of a joint urban entity such as a metropolis will unconditionally ensure fully balanced development of all its elements.

The metropolis in question was 'stitched together' from completely different fragments, which did not give all its municipalities equal opportunities at the outset. It should also be remembered that each municipality has its own local government and the ability to make autonomous decisions regarding its development.

Thus the statement that the center develops at the expense of peripheral areas may not be entirely justified. In such a diverse and extensive urban entity, each municipality can find and define its role within it, becoming an original element against the backdrop of others; however, much depends on creating an accurate vision of development, based on its own potential and its consistent implementation, as Charles Landry wrote: "City leaders should simultaneously understand how material changes affect the emotional and symbolic perception of space and the subtle systems of the city's social ecology" (Landry, 2013, p. 38, Kinal, 2015, p. 19).

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