

## PROJECT OF A SPECIAL DEMOGRAPHIC ZONE AS A RESPONSE TO A THREAT OF DEPOPULATION IN THE OPOLE PROVINCE

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### Abstract:

*Depopulation in the Opole Province is a real threat, the effects of which, although spread over time can be seen today. They arise from many complex factors such as negative birth rate, population aging or unfavourable migration balance. The threat of depopulation brings certain results in the sphere of socio-economic policy in the region, which when appropriately targeted (despite their potentially negative nature) can contribute to pro-development solutions. In the situation of the demographic crisis the regional authorities created their original project of the Special Demographic Zone (SDZ), which has no counterpart in the whole country. SDZ combines, in a complementary manner, spheres of different sectoral policies, thus addressing the main challenge facing the Opole Province - preventing depopulation.*

### Keywords:

*depopulation, a threat, the Opole Province, Special Demographic Zone*

## INTRODUCTION

According to Ulrich Beck's thesis, modern societies are risk societies<sup>1</sup>. The reality of late modernity generates various threats associated with the global nature of social change and technological developments. People are becoming more aware of hazards; they endeavour to avoid them. In the category of social risks, it is difficult to single out factors that may eliminate any threats occurred and causes of problems arisen. An ex-

<sup>1</sup> U. Beck, *Spółeczeństwo ryzyka. W drodze do innej nowoczesności*, Scholar, Warszawa 2002.

ample of such a threat is depopulation, which may have a variety of reasons of both endogenous and exogenous nature.

The article addresses the issue of a threat of depopulation in the Opole Province and presents a specific response of the regional authorities to the risk occurred. The Opole Province is the smallest and the least numerous region in Poland<sup>2</sup>. In addition, it is characterised by the highest level of depopulation of all provinces - in the years 2002-2012 the number of inhabitants of the region decreased by 4.8% compared to an increase of 0.8% on average in the country<sup>3</sup>. Depopulation is a serious threat to society, the most significant effects of which are usually postponed. The aforementioned authorities' response is the project of the Special Demographic Zone (SDZ) - an innovative program that aims to counter the decline in population and use the development potential of the aging population in the region. Below there is presented a short description of depopulation as a category of threat, the scale and causes of this phenomenon in the Opole Province, as well as the basic assumptions of the SDZ.

### 1. DEPOPULATION AS A THREAT

In the modern turbulent reality, the essence of threats is frequently diffused and the nature of specific problems forces decisions the effects of which can be considerably delayed. They require complementary approach to the problems, which are often a combination of various factors that may be both the result as well as the cause of dangers. When analysing types of threats Barry Buzan pointed their five broad sectors: military, political, social, economic and ecological ones. Such a multilayer approach preserves the realistic perspective, with significantly enhanced recognition of the nature of security at the same time. In the context of contemporary threats, social issues and problems constitute an important component to ensure national security. They are clearly related to other designated spheres. However, among social issues the population potential seems to be of particular importance with regard to military and non-military threats. Simultaneously, military, political, economic, ecological and other social problems can have a decisive influence on the demographic potential of countries and regions. This kind of dialectic is well illustrated by the following simple relationship – the population potential, both in quantity and quality terms, is a necessary foundation for the economic development. On the other hand, the economic prosperity is an essential component of the social development.

At this point it is therefore worth having a closer look at the essence of depopulation as a major challenge for the socio-economic policy and a significant threat to security. The analysis of the strategic tasks of socio-economic sectors of the state security created for the National Security Bureau's needs indicates that special emphasis should be placed on developing the effective population policy. Poland is moving towards

<sup>2</sup> CSO, *Narodowy Spis Powszechny Ludności i Mieszkań 2011*, Warszawa 2012, p. 48.

<sup>3</sup> The Board of the Opole Province, *Program Specjalnej Strefy Demograficznej w województwie opolskim do 2020 roku, Opolskie dla Rodziny*, Opole 2014, p. 19.

demographic collapse<sup>4</sup>, a significant decline in the number of economically active people and decrease in the already low birth rate. For more than 20 years the low number of births has not guaranteed a simple replacement of generations. In 2012 the fertility rate in Poland amounted to less than 1.3 (which means that 100 women in the age range of 15-19 accounted for about 130 babies born), while the optimal size of this indicator stands at 2,10-2,15<sup>5</sup>. In 2012 in the Opole Province this indicator was at the level of 1.15 and was the lowest in the country<sup>6</sup>. These threats have a significant impact both on the economic situation of the country (causing a decrease in the available workforce and the pension system overload) and on the Polish position on the international arena.<sup>7</sup> The Polish unfavourable demographic situation is also the result of negative balance of external migration.

Witold Orłowski stresses that *“before accessing the European Union we said that a huge benefit for the Poles was to be able to work abroad. Meanwhile, due to the opening of borders we have been exposed to more dangers in the field of human capital. The more young people will emigrate from Poland the worse development prospects of the country will be. An attempt could be made to replace them by the immigration (...) as and when we actually begin to take advantage of it, entirely new risks may occur”*<sup>8</sup>. The negative balance of external migration in many parts of Poland is to some degree a natural phenomenon. In our country there are regions where generations starting independent life traditionally move abroad to earn money. The social factor is of great importance here: the Polish social policy perpetuates the adverse conditions for the age groups that are in most need of social support: young families with children and pensioners. Both material conditions (i.e. the childbirth allowance, the unstable situation of the pension system, low wages) and formal ones (maternity leave, unfavourable employment conditions, the inefficient health care system) encourage decisions on emigration<sup>9</sup>. Maternity and paternity leave, the proper health care system (including prenatal) and an easy access to specialists, the corresponding number of nurseries etc., constitute extremely important elements of the pronatalist policy, limiting choices about delaying having children or even resignation of having a child or next children. At the same time there are also elements that directly or indirectly influence decisions on emigration. Although in this case, probably more signifi-

<sup>4</sup> The CSO survey shows that in the first quarter of 2014 the total birth rate was negative for Poland and amounted to 0.69 (per 1000 inhabitants). In the Opole Province the indicator was 1.92.

<sup>5</sup> CSO *Podstawowe informacje o rozwoju demograficznym Polski do 2013 roku, Material to the press conference of 30<sup>th</sup> January 2014*, p. 4 [online]. [available: 06.09.2014]. Available on the Internet: [http://stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/L\\_podst\\_inf\\_o\\_rozwoju\\_dem\\_pl\\_do\\_2013.pdf](http://stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/L_podst_inf_o_rozwoju_dem_pl_do_2013.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> See: Demographical data on the website of SDZ, [online]. [available: 06.09.2014]. Available on the Internet: <http://www.ssd.opolskie.pl/page/27,dane-demograficzne.html>.

<sup>7</sup> *Bezpieczeństwo pozamilitarne Polski w świetle rezultatów SPBN*, [in:] “Bezpieczeństwo Narodowe” no. 23-24/2012, p. 55.

<sup>8</sup> Speech by Prof. Dr. hab. Witolda Orłowskiego, [in:] “Bezpieczeństwo Narodowe”, no. 26/2013, pp. 45.

<sup>9</sup> E. Mazur-Cieślak, *Polityka migracyjna państw europejskich a wyzwania migracyjne dla Polski*. [in:] “Bezpieczeństwo Narodowe”, no. 20/2011, pp. 137.

cant are other variables concerning financial situation, including solutions used on the labour market: forms of employment and the level of earnings and purchasing power.

The lack of appropriate solutions in the areas of migration and pro-family policies is the result of many years of neglect and decision makers' conviction of the self-regulating mechanisms in this field (which also protect the state budget against unreasonable expenditures on social benefits). What is more, it should be remembered that *"emigration may be convenient for the government as it naturally defuses social tensions linked to unemployment. On the other hand, there is often an irretrievable loss of active people and the increase in the demographic gap"*<sup>10</sup>. The drainage relates primarily to young people of childbearing age, which further increasing the loss of population. It is a serious threat to the development, especially for small regions and local communities. Thus, the actions and decisions of state, regional and local authorities should take into account long-term effects of depopulation, not just short-term trends (e.g. the labour market), which apparently may seem beneficial. In addition, expenditure incurred for the family policy are de facto an investment, since the old society generates enormous social costs, among others as a result of increased demand for health and care services. Further, the payment of pensions in the appropriate amount is at risk, because the repatriation system does not work (the ratio of people at working age and non-working is disordered). Low pensions of the large part of society disrupt demand potential and this is a simple way to reduce the real economic indicators.

## 2. MAIN THREATS AND DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES IN THE OPOLE PROVINCE

In the analysis of the main risks and development challenges facing the Opole Province an attempt should be made to present their basic causes and understand their essence. The Opole Province is a region that in many ways stands out from the other regions in Poland. Before the political transformation it was counted among the group of areas with a high level of economic development and relatively well-equipped infrastructure. Starting from the 90s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it began to gradually lose its position in this regard. The weaker growth rate and sluggish economic changes have made the Opole shift towards structures with an average level of economic development and worsening social problems. Modernisation processes, including the regional economy restructuring, despite many positive changes did not result in the increase of competitiveness and investment attractiveness.<sup>11</sup> Changes in the economic sphere have become one of the main reasons for the emergence of numerous problems that are now major challenges for the regional social policy.

Without a doubt, issues associated with the demographic situation in the Opole Province can be counted among a core group of social risks in the region. Data from the General National Census show that changes observed in the years 2002-2011 in the

<sup>10</sup> L. Bełza, *Główne zagrożenia w obecnym i przyszłym środowisku bezpieczeństwa pozamilitarnego*, [in:] "Bezpieczeństwo Narodowe", no. 2/2011, pp. 127

<sup>11</sup> K. Heffner, B. Solga, *Wybrane problemy rozwoju społeczno-gospodarczego Śląska Opolskiego*. [in:] *Wyzwania dla polityki społecznej Śląska w kontekście kryzysu i procesów demograficznych*. ed. by A. Zagórowska, PO, WUP w Opolu, Opole 2009, p. 100.

population development were varied in the provincial system. In six regions there was recorded the decrease in population. The largest decline was recorded in the Opole region - by 4.6%<sup>12</sup>. It should be emphasised that demographic changes in the social policy have a direct impact on the scale of social needs. When it is assumed that demographic conditions are of key importance for social and economic policies, above all it is crucial to recognise the demographic situation<sup>13</sup>. Therefore, the actual negative growth is a problem that affects many aspects of socio-economic life of the region. The level of the economic dependency of the production group in Opole is and will be one of the highest in Europe. In demographic terms this region remains and will remain in the extremely difficult situation (the worst in Poland). This means that it needs to be treated as an area threatened by the population crisis<sup>14</sup>. Fundamental demographic trends for the region have been known for a long time - demographic forecasts until the year 2030 for the Opole Province drawn up by the Department of Demographic Studies of the Central Statistical Office in 2004 indicates regularities related to changes in the population's age structure:

- the decline in the total population figure;
- the decline in the share of children and adolescents over the total population;
- the decline in the share of the working-age population;
- the process of the aging of the population<sup>15</sup>.

Among the total population of the region, the number of people at the pre-productive age is 173 000 (17% out of the entire population), at the working age 666 100 (65.6% of the total number). However, in the case of the second specified group, 409 200 persons (40.3% of the total population) were categorised as people at the mobile age, and as many as 256 900 people (25.3% of the total) as those at the immobile age. A significant number - 177 100 (17.4% of the total) are persons at the retirement age<sup>16</sup>. Even a cursory analysis of the population structure by age groups shows that the number of people of working age in the Opole Province will systematically decrease, and the already high dependency rate will grow. In terms of elementary demographics there should be mentioned a significant overall decline in population in the analysed region. Comparing only the years 2010 and 2012, the population reduced by 0.7%, that

<sup>12</sup> CSO, *Narodowy Spis Powszechny...*, p. 48.

<sup>13</sup> A. Rączaszek, *Czynniki Demograficzne w rozwoju społeczno-gospodarczym – Wprowadzenie do problemu wzrostu skali potrzeb na usługi społeczne*, [in:] *Studia Ekonomiczne. Wybrane problemy regionalnej polityki zrównoważonego rozwoju społeczno-gospodarczego*, ed. by A. Rączaszek. UE w Katowicach, Katowice 2011, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> The Self-government of the Opole Province, *Strategia Rozwoju Województwa Opolskiego do 2020 r.*, Opole 2013, p. 31.

<sup>15</sup> R. Rauziński, T. Szczygielski, T. Słodra-Gwiżdż: *Ekspertyza: Grupy szczególnie zagrożone wykluczeniem społecznym – aspekt demograficzny. Województwo opolskie w latach 2009-2030*. ROPS in Opole, Opole, 10<sup>th</sup> December 2009.

<sup>16</sup> CSO, *Narodowy Spis Powszechny...*, p. 118.

is 7 038 people<sup>17</sup>. Researchers from the Silesian Institute in Opole indicate that with the systematic decline in the number of inhabitants (commencing with the year 2000, there are on average about 5 000 people fewer each year) resulting, among other things, from the negative population growth, the number of people of the retirement age increases.

The negative population growth rate fall is mainly due to low fertility rates<sup>18</sup> and the negative migration balance, which have been particularly intensive there. Current attitudes and childbearing, described inter alia by the low fertility rate or the average age of giving birth, adversely affect the current and future demographic situation of the Province<sup>19</sup>. According to data from the Central Statistical Office in 2012 - as in previous years - in the Opole Province the negative migration balance amounted to 2 173 persons<sup>20</sup>. Moreover, CSO argues that in the country the most intense exodus to third countries was recorded for the Opole Province - the number of immigrants per 1 000 inhabitants<sup>21</sup>. One of the forms of migration from the Opole region is the undeclared constant emigration (suspended emigration), including those who have definitively left the country without unregistering. In terms of discrepancy between the number of the domiciled and permanent residents the migration can be estimated at approximately 105 thousand people, which is 10% of the population of the Province. It took place mainly in the 1980s and 1990s. For several years, new post-accession permanent emigrants, mostly to Great Britain have swelled the migration<sup>22</sup>. Regardless of the undeclared emigration, in the region the economic emigration is in the unprecedented scale. The total number of people undertaking employment abroad should be assessed at about 100-120 thousand people per year<sup>23</sup>. Foreign labour migration can be seen as a kind of a tradition associated with, among others, a significant proportion of citizens of German and Silesian nationalities characterised by a specific form of identity (concerning the relation between the place of origin and place of work, primarily Germany and the Netherlands) who reside (are registered) on the territory<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> SO in Opole: *Stan i ruch naturalny ludności w woj. opolskim w 2012 r.*, Opole, May 2013, p. 2. [online]. [available: 06.06.2013]. Available on the Internet: [http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/opole/ASSETS\\_sygnalna\\_ludnosc\\_2012.pdf](http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/opole/ASSETS_sygnalna_ludnosc_2012.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> *The Self-government of the Opole Province, Strategia Rozwoju Województwa...*, p. 26.

<sup>19</sup> *The Board of the Opole Province, Program Specjalnej Strefy...*, p. 22.

<sup>20</sup> SO in Opole: *Stan i ruch naturalny ludności w woj. opolskim w 2012 r.* Opole, May 2013, . [online]. [available: 06.06.2013]. Available on the Internet: [http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/opole/ASSETS\\_sygnalna\\_ludnosc\\_2012.pdf](http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/opole/ASSETS_sygnalna_ludnosc_2012.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> CSO, *Narodowy Spis Powszechny...*, p. 103.

<sup>22</sup> R. Jończy, *Zagraniczne migracje zarobkowe z województwa opolskiego w latach 2008-2010 oraz ich wpływ na opolski rynek pracy i sferę fiskalną samorządów terytorialnych. Diagnoza i rekomendacje w kontekście rozwoju regionu*, UMWO, Opole 2011, p. 119-120.

<sup>23</sup> R. Jończy, D. Rokita-Poskart, *Wpływ zagranicznych migracji zarobkowych na sytuację społeczno-demograficzną województwa opolskiego*. Ekspertyza wykonana na zlecenie Obserwatorium Integracji Społecznej Regionalnego Ośrodka Polityki Społecznej w Opolu, Opole, November 2012, p. 5-6, [available: 06.06.2013]. Available on the Internet: <http://ois.rops-opole.pl/>

<sup>24</sup> D. Berlińska: *Mniejszość niemiecka na Śląsku Opolskim w poszukiwaniu tożsamości*, PIN IS, Opole 1999.

Another important cause of the population crisis in the region is the proximity of the Silesian Agglomeration and Wrocław. Opole, as an intermetropolitan region is particularly vulnerable to negative effects of the accumulation of concentrated growth. Its manifestation is, among others, the intensive extraction process of relatively scarce resources to nearby metropolitan areas. This phenomenon is easily seen on the example of Wrocław, for which the number of de-registrations from the Opole region is three times higher than the number of de-registrations from Wrocław to the Opole Province<sup>25</sup>.

When diagnosing the main causes of population loss in the Opole Province the authors of the Special Demographic Zone Project mentioned the following elements:

- insufficient in relation to the needs the number of jobs linked to the level of unemployment in part of the region (new jobs created less frequently than on average in the country, the statistical employment rates of residents are relatively low, the unemployment level is higher than on average in Poland);
- not gainfully attractive job positions in the region and its surroundings, that leads the workforce to search for and work abroad (mass shuttled migrations are triggered this way);
- weakening domestic demand in the region increasingly accomplished abroad;
- not fully exploited investment potential of the region;
- decreasing stability of work positions;
- relatively low entrepreneurship of Opole Province citizens;
- barriers to the development of entrepreneurship, including excessive bureaucracy, high labour costs, etc.;
- the structural mismatch between supply and demand on the labour market;
- new cultural patterns arising from globalisation;
- obstacles to reconciling family and professional life, including those related to the accessibility of nursery-kindergarten services<sup>26</sup>.

The dual character of the abovementioned problems must be underlined once again – they are the reason for depopulation but some of them should be considered as the depopulation results (for example: weakening domestic demand or low indicators of Opole Province citizens' entrepreneurship). Additionally, decreasing population of the Opole Province can be regarded as a predictor of many other social problems (among others: poverty and unemployment). Economic migrations are one of the reasons of the declining level of the social capital in the region, which contributes to social exclusion. These problems (with particular focus on the depopulation of the region) are at the same time the key challenges for public policy of the region. It has been clearly underlined in the Opole Province Development Strategy till 2020 – *“The most important development challenge that our region faces is (...) preventing and counteracting de-*

<sup>25</sup> The Board of the Opole Province, *Program Specjalnej Strefy...*, p. 24.

<sup>26</sup> The Board of the Opole Province, *Program Specjalnej Strefy...*, p. 20.

population processes”<sup>27</sup>. Thus, demographic threats constitute the essential element of strategic thinking and management, determining the Province’s development opportunities. This is reflected in the Opole Province Self-government’s proprietary programme – the Special Demographic Zone. In this document describing the programme’s objectives it was pointed out: “Demographic processes are and will be the significant challenge for the EU, Poland and especially for the Opole Province over the next few years. Preventing and counteracting the depopulation processes is the basic and horizontal challenge for the region”<sup>28</sup>. It is worth emphasising, that the development potential of aging society is perceived as an important resource, and focusing on services appropriate for older persons can become the Opole Province’s asset due to increased demand for this type of services both in Poland and abroad.

### 3. THE MAIN OBJECTIVES OF THE SPECIAL DEMOGRAPHIC ZONE PROGRAMME<sup>29</sup>

Negative demographic tendencies resulted in the Province Self-government’s recognition of the necessity to implement intervention operations aimed at elimination of causes and results of threats appeared. The emergency situation pushed the authorities into concrete actions. The Opole Province councillors supported preparations of the Special Demographic Zone (SDZ) Programme. The Opole Province Assembly accepted *The Decision on the adoption of the Resolution on supporting the initiative of the Special Demographic Zone Programme serving as the package of options to prevent depopulation in the Opole Province*<sup>30</sup>.

The Opole Province Assembly recognised it necessary to take multidimensional actions, supported by the central government, designed to reconstruct the lost population capital and prevent further unfavourable demographic threats in the region<sup>31</sup>. The assumptions of *The Opole Province Development Strategy*<sup>32</sup> formed the starting point for the drawing up the Programme. The reasons for the Province’s depopulation have been identified. The main ones include already listed: the negative birth rate, including low fertility, adverse migration flows and aging society. Many factors influence ongoing demographic processes. They concern the labour market (job offers in the region), the level and the range of education and qualifications, as well as the economic constraints: investment activity, innovation, entrepreneurship and attractiveness of the services market. Broadly understood living conditions and balancing the family and working life are equally important<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> *The Self-government of the Opole Province, Strategia Rozwoju Województwa... p. 7.*

<sup>28</sup> *The Board of the Opole Province, Program Specjalnej Strefy..., p. 11.*

<sup>29</sup> The thematic complexity and details of SDZ Programme prevent its presentation here in its entirety. The presented elements are only its basic assumptions that in bright (albeit brief) way highlight the directions of interventions undertaken.

<sup>30</sup> *The Resolution of the Self-government of the Opole Province No. XIX/262/2012 of 26<sup>th</sup> June 2012.*

<sup>31</sup> *The Board of the Opole Province, Program Specjalnej Strefy..., p. 18.*

<sup>32</sup> See: *The Self-government of the Opole Province, Strategia Rozwoju Województwa...*

<sup>33</sup> *The Board of the Opole Province, Program Specjalnej Strefy..., p. 35.*



The programme is distinguished by its innovation – it does not have the equivalent in Poland and the whole staff of experts worked on its development. The main goal of the Programme is strengthening and utilising the demographic potential of the Opole Province. The programming document (SDZ) specifies that enhancing the demographic potential is to be conducted either in the qualitative aspect (in the areas of entrepreneurship, innovation, education and culture) or the quantitative one (activities supporting taking decisions about parenthood, keeping citizens in the region and encouraging people from the outside to live in the Province). Utilisation of the demographic potential concerns, first of all, activation of the regional society.

The activation refers both to economy, i.e. investment activity, enterprise development, and the creation of attractive services and trade offers. Social activation of different age groups, mainly older persons, is equally significant. Strengthening and utilisation of the region's demographic potential is possible through activating labour market and improving life conditions in the region<sup>34</sup>.

Four thematic packages create the priority areas of the Programme implementation. The areas cover the whole spectrum of a human life from the birth till senior age, and SDZ is the initiative addressed to all inhabitants of the Province<sup>35</sup>.

Package I "Work is a Safe Family" is focused on the labour market, primarily on the safety of employment, corporate social responsibility, increased attractiveness and the number of job positions as well as the growth in citizens' entrepreneurship and investment activities. Facing the diagnosed problems the actions will be taken in order to increase the number of job positions and improve their standard in the region. It is of crucial importance for minimising the scale of the migratory outflow of young people prepared to take up the first job. They relate the future career and everyday life with a place other than the Opole Province despite the fact that they come from the region and finish their education there.

The tasks to be undertaken in the future will apply to implementation of complex investment projects, ensuring conditions for cooperation of the key actors so as to create new work places and foster development of innovation. These are the essential issues determining the possibility of preparing an attractive employment offer, convincing enough to change emigration traditions successively and in a long-term perspective, and also lead the people from the outside to live in the Opole Province<sup>36</sup>. The activities in the area of the labour market should be regarded as especially important, mainly in the field of countering the emigration decisions, but also proactive ones, which as it was before indicated result from the adverse financial situation (subjectively or objectively). However, it should be clearly underlined that the Opole labour market is entangled in cross-regional correlations, among other structural ones. The adverse changes that have affected the labour market in recent years may turn out hardly possible to catch up.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibidem, p.37.

<sup>35</sup> See: Ibidem, p. 38.

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem, p. 45.

Package II “Education and Labour Market” concerns the adaptation of the educational offer to labour market demands and aims at growing practical skill of pupils and students. The offer and the quality of education in the Opole Province do not differ from the national average. The Province’s problems are similar to general condition of the education in Poland. However, due to long-lasting emigration tradition some of them bring more negative results - the projected workforce deficit and deterioration of the labour market competition.

Therefore, within the said package there will be, among others, actions taken to shape and support personal development of students, improvement of the practical preparation of the schools’ graduates, matching the educational offer with economy demands, supporting the activities strengthening the citizens’ entrepreneurial mindsets and educational process of the students from the re-emigrants and immigrant families. These activities, on all education levels, should be connected with developing students’ essential competencies, ability to work in a team, self-dependence, and first of all creative thinking. Taking the actions aimed at matching adults’ qualifications with the market demands seems to be extremely crucial<sup>37</sup>.

Linking educational offer (also lifelong learning) of the Opole Province’s centres with the market demands is of considerable significance during the process of staff’s preparation and the reconversion of re-emigrants. The actions proposed under Package II may prove to be ineffective mainly because of supply of the better paid jobs for the graduates in the adjacent regions. Thus, the ‘human capital flight’ will not be halted. This is made even more complicated by the fact that the Opole Province’s economy does not stand out in comparison to Lower Silesian and Silesian Provinces – is mainly based on services. Therefore, better matching of the graduates’ competencies with the economy demands will mean better matching with the labour market demands outside the Opole Province. Attracting graduates from other regions and abroad who ‘will anchor’ in the region may prove to be a great opportunity. However, in this case the significant increase in R&D activities expenditures has to take place and this can mean a very heavy financial burden for universities and the Self-government.

Package III “Nursery and Kindergarten Services” assumes enhancing the access to nursery and kindergarten services, development of the child, parents, legal guardian friendly infrastructure and reconciliation of work and family life. The actions taken are aimed at the complex advancement of health care for mother and child, the increasing access to nursery and kindergarten services and family-friendly infrastructure development. The implementation of the strategy will promote the growth of families’ economic stability including professional activity of both parents<sup>38</sup>.

It is the crucial aspect of the childbearing policy. The easy access to specialists makes the health care effective, and this is the wider issue concerning the healthcare across the country. In turn, the access to nursery and kindergarten services should go hand in hand with, among others, economic conditions of parents. This illustrates the interre-

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<sup>37</sup> Ibidem, p. 52-53.

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem, p. 62.

lation of many aspects of the social-economic development. Thus, the intervention, which is to foster the success of activities established under the Package has to be realistically connected with other elements that can appear to be extremely difficult.

Package IV "Golden Autumn" is focused on increasing the access to the services for older people and this social group's activation. The ongoing demographic processes can be used for the development of complex care and therapeutic services addressed to seniors. The increased, as a result of society aging, demand for these services can be treated as a development challenge, which should lead to the improvement of their accessibility. Furthermore, one of the serious seniors' problems is not very friendly public space and the public transport network, which is not adjusted to their needs. The enhanced seniors' mobility will translate both into strengthening people-to-people contacts and improving their physical and mental well-being.

Thus, under the package there will be taken actions dedicated to seniors to develop modern, specialised services and centres (including their quality and accessibility growth). Predicted actions will move in the direction of enhancing the older people's motivation towards self-development, their social and vocational activation and physical, cultural and educational activities as well. The basic assumption is to minimise the consequences of adverse demographic processes, change the way the older people are perceived and simultaneously increase the internal and intergenerational social integration in the region. The Package covers also activities that will enable to gain the digital competencies; therefore they will enhance the activity of the seniors in different fields of personal and professional life<sup>39</sup>.

The social and professional activity of older people is also the crucial element of actions countering depopulation effects. It must be stressed that these actions do not prevent the causes of the demographic decline in the region. The development of the services adjusted to the seniors' needs can be, in turn, the answer to the enhanced demand. In addition, appropriate (in quantitative and qualitative terms) supply of the services of this type can attract seniors from other regions and re-emigrants. Similarly, as in the case of other Packages it requires substantial financial investments.

It is worth noting, that Packages stated in the SDZ's assumptions are complementary to each other and focused on the essential development-oriented factors. In this context it should be highlighted that the main elements of integrally considered regional development include: economic growth and employment, the increase in prosperity and quality of life, growth of investment attractiveness, innovation and technology development, diversification of economy activity, development of services and social resources, growth of social and professional mobility, development of institutional infrastructure, care for natural environment and enrichment of identity and social integrity<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibidem, p. 67.

<sup>40</sup> A. Klasik, F. Kuźnik, *Planowanie strategiczne rozwoju regionalnego i lokalnego*, [in:] *Funkcjonowanie samorządu terytorialnego – doświadczenia i perspektywy. Vol II.* ed. by. S. Dolata, the Opolski University, Opole 1998, p. 395-404.

These aspects gain particular importance during a demographic crisis. They are also the main pillars of the citizens' social security in the broader temporal perspective since as stated by the authors of National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland: *"The increase of employment with particular focus on activation of social groups in difficult lifetime situations, growth of social integrity and improvement of the social care system, bridging civilisation gaps between towns and villages, contending with unfavourable demographic changes and migrations of the young generation are the priorities in this regard"*<sup>41</sup>.

Taking abovementioned factors into consideration, the SDZ as the *explicite* social project fits in the broadly understood Province's development policy. Undoubtedly, Florian Kuźnik is right when saying that in this respect: *"reference should be made to the so-called conceptual triad: multidimensionality – integrity – interdisciplinarity of politics. Development by its nature is multidimensional and its dimensions are worthwhile to be seen integrally in the process of planning the future. Without a doubt, during the process of preparing the social development concept other development dimensions and their consequences in the social sphere are undeniably worth knowing"*<sup>42</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

Although the Programme being analysed is based on the solid diagnostic foundation, it addresses the whole spectrum of external and internal factors. Despite their importance, innovativeness and complexity, actions taken within the framework of SDZ may appear insufficient - as marginally preventing the deterioration of the population potential of the Opole Province. This is the case because many variables affecting the demographic potential may change or undergo modification over the time. Moreover, due to the nature of contemporary (and possible future) risks and their unpredictability, it is really hard to form an opinion on the effectiveness of undertaken interventions. Additionally, the authors of the Programme rightly point out that the implementation of the SDZ assumptions requires taking account of the universal principles applicable to development policy. They are as follows:

- the principle of partnership and cooperation - consists of accepting a possibly wide range of public and non-public entities in the implementation of the Programme. This cooperation should be based on the principles of mutual trust. This influences the building of social dialogue on the problem occurred, and it also affects the condition of regional community, while enhancing the coordination of actions aimed at improving the living conditions in the region at the same time;
- the principle of subsidiarity - actions and initiatives taken under the Programme are carried out by different entities at a level which ensures the highest efficiency of their implementation;

<sup>41</sup> The National Security Bureau: the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland, Warszawa 2007, p. 16.

<sup>42</sup> F. Kuźnik: *Regionalne i lokalne aspekty rozwoju społecznego*, [in:] *Zarządzanie publiczne w lokalnej polityce społecznej*. ed. by. A. Frączkiewicz-Wronka, WSP TWP, Warszawa 2007, p. 34.

- the principle of coordination - means the execution of the Programme together with other policies implemented at the EU and national levels, as well as the interaction of public and private entities;
- the principle of consistency - the implemented activities and initiatives will be carried out in such a way as to minimise potential conflicts of interests of particular addressees;
- the principle of reasonableness - involves such an implementation of the Programme, that will ensure the improvement of living conditions in the region in proportion to the expenditure incurred; this will mean that actions and initiatives aimed at strengthening the population potential of the Province must be conducted having regard to the economic rationality and financial resources of regional authorities, and in good coordination with other initiatives of this type;
- the principle of equal opportunities - means that actions and initiatives serving to strengthen the demographic potential of the Province will not favour certain social groups to the detriment of others, but build social solidarity and the sense of regional community;
- the principle of motivation - involves the targeting of distribution of support under the Programme, not only help in overcoming problems, but also the activation and identifying options for further development;
- the principle of legality - means that the implementation of the Programme will be conducted with the use of measures in accordance with applicable standards and law provisions;
- the principle of openness - enables the implementation of activities and initiatives that will serve the objectives of the Programme, even if they were identified only at the stage of its implementation.<sup>43</sup>

Not without significant is the fact that huge expenditures on pronatalist actions, which in the case of years of neglect may prove to be ineffective or bring unspecified effects in long term. And this in turn is associated with the continuation of policy by the successive government teams. From the point of view of current political goals, the policy based on expenditures and sacrifices is extremely unpopular. Therefore, it is of great importance to raise public awareness (both at regional and state levels) of the threat of depopulation and the need to introduce appropriate interventions. Moreover, currently a substantial part of activities in the area of social policy is financed from the European Social Fund. This will change after 2020 and can mean potential additional costs, which local governments and the state will not be able to bear.

Regardless of the theoretical doubts about the efficiency and effectiveness of interventions in the Special Demographic Zone it will be possible to say more after 2020. (The Programme requires a long time frame). At the moment, the project should be considered the authorities' courageous decision of in case of the clear threat to the popula-

<sup>43</sup> *The Board of the Opole Province, Program Specjalnej Strefy..*, p. 79.

tion potential of the Opole Province, and might become the model for attempts to undertake similar initiatives in other regions of the country. In the Opole region in-depth demographic and social studies have been conducted for years, thus the expert potential favours the introduction of bold initiatives<sup>44</sup>. The authors of the project assume that the use of the ESF funds and the actual state aid have not been a foregone conclusion so far. It is therefore to be hoped that the activities undertaken within the SDZ will prove to be adequate in relation to the threat.

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<sup>44</sup> Research in the indicated range have been carried out for years by the University of Opole, PIN the Silesian Institute in Opole and the Opole University of Technology. Experts from these institutions were directly and / or indirectly involved in the development of the Programme. In this process also the expertise from the Centre them. Adam Smith was benefited from.

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