

WANDA MUSIALIK  
Opole University of Technology  
Department of Economics, Finance,  
Regional and International Research  
ORCID: [0000-0001-5548-0118](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5548-0118)

**Grzegorz Węgrzyn, *Tożsamość ekonomiczna Górnoślązaków [Economic identity of the Upper Silesians]*, Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego w Katowicach, 2017, 213 pp.**

Economic identity of the Upper Silesians has been studied due to the fact that in the general population censuses a significant group of people declared their affiliation to the Silesian nationality. According to the official census in Poland, in 2002, more than 173,000 residents of the Opole and Silesian Provinces declared Silesian nationality. However, in 2011 this number increased to 362,000 and 415,000 declared a dual national identity: Silesian and Polish. The existence of such a numerous group of people demonstrating Silesian nationality led Grzegorz Węgrzyn to pose the questions: “Do Silesians exist as a supra-individual social entity?” and “Are Silesians a territorial collectivity, an ethnic group or perhaps a nation?” (pp. 8–9). In order to explore this problem, the Author suggested that “there is a connection between the economic environment in which the Upper Silesian community functions and their social identity, especially in terms of economic identity” (p. 11).

Confronting such a wide-ranging problem, quite innovative in its intention, required the use of interdisciplinary research methods. However, the Author admits that his publication may appear “not economic enough for economists, not sociological enough for sociologists and not historical enough for historians” (p. 11). Assessing the monograph from the point of view of a historian’s methodology, it should be noted that although its Author graduated in sociology, he based his

findings in 65% on historical works. The remaining part of publications consisted of sociological, demographic, cultural and linguistic monographs. Out of the historical books listed, 53 were published in the Poland's Second Republic period, 48 were published between 1946 and 1989, that is immediately after the last war and during the years of socialist regime. Another 99 of them were written after the political transformation in Poland. In terms of these studies the publication date was used to estimate the scale of editions listed by the Author, which were published under systemic censorship, when original studies were exposed to the necessity of modifying research intentions. It remains unclear whether Węgrzyn was aware of these factors and took them into account when analysing the findings and conclusions included in the studies from the years 1946–1989.

In eight chapters the Author developed the substantive assumptions presented in the "Introduction", beginning with a definition of the boundaries of Upper Silesia (Chapter I). Then, he defined the terms "Upper Silesians" (Chapter II), "Identity" (Chapter III) and "Economic Identity" (Chapter IV). The most extensive part of the monograph – "Social and Economic Changes in Upper Silesia and Their Impact on the Shaping of the Economic Identity of Upper Silesians" (Chapter V) – was based on historical studies. The last three chapters were devoted to the relationship between professional ethics and work ethos in terms of the economic identity of Upper Silesians (Chapter VI), the religious aspect of this identity (Chapter VII), and reflections on the household model perceived as an element of economic identity in Upper Silesia (Chapter VIII).

Węgrzyn began his narrative in Chapter I, by determining the boundaries of Upper Silesia and claiming that it is difficult to fully define its geographical and historical area, its social, religious and cultural dimensions, as well as the aspects of self-identification and identity of its inhabitants. The Author's explanation do not provide reasons for using the term 'Upper Silesians' in the title of the book, while it seems logical that the term originates from the name 'Upper Silesia', that is, the south-eastern part of the Silesian land. The Author also failed to consider important historical aspects of a region. Similarly to those, who lack deeper knowledge of the past, he defined the area only as the contemporary Silesian Province, without considering the western part of Upper Silesia, today also known as Opole Silesia.

Having encountered difficulties in defining the term 'Upper Silesians', he suggested the use of the auto-stereotype criterion (p. 25), i.e. the 'fellow countryman' – 'stranger' category (pp. 25–28, 33). However, he did not specify who and

for what reason was included in the discussed population. Although he managed to avoid classifying them by nationality, yet referring to terms that antagonise the inhabitants of this region, he pointed to the ‘feeling of injustice’ mainly because of the results of the 1921 plebiscite. It was then that the German state lost 40% of the inhabitants of this territory, who had voted for incorporation to Poland (p. 28). Another type of trauma was the Upper Silesians’ confrontation with immigrants from other parts of the Second Republic (p. 28). The Author referred to this issue again in Chapter V, “Social and Economic Changes in Upper Silesia and Their Impact on the Shaping of the Economic Identity of Upper Silesians”.

When writing about the causes of ‘Silesian frustration’, Węgrzyn mentioned, among others, the wartime events related to the passage of Red Army troops through Silesia in 1945, including the rape of women and the deportation of men deep into the USSR, as well as their confinement in labour camps. He also did not overlook the activities of the Polish Public Security apparatus, as well as the post-war nationality verification of the inhabitants (p. 30). The Author concluded that all these actions disappointed Upper Silesians and he compared their post-war reality to their living conditions in the German state. This might lead to the conclusion that they had suffered injustice in the Polish state (p. 34). In this passage of his work, the Author did not provide any convincing evidence to justify his position. On the other hand, Węgrzyn does not mention that Upper Silesians, being Polish citizens, signed the Nazi national list (*Volksliste*), which protected them against repressions directed towards the Polish and Jewish population<sup>1</sup>.

The Author began his considerations with questioning and defining the Upper Silesian identity, to which he devoted the following Chapter II. He supported the findings of Antonina Kłoskowska<sup>2</sup> and Zbigniew Bokszański, who discussed the existence of variable criteria, including ‘professional identity’ (p. 49). Węgrzyn suggested the possibility of a similar approach to the concept of ‘economic identity’. Its scope is further specified in Chapter IV, recognising the emergence of this identity as a consequence of the distinctiveness and economic specificity of the region. This particularity resulted from the consolidation of heavy industry, which affected the employment structure and professional ethics of the local population. Furthermore, he emphasised that the emergence of this type of identity was also

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<sup>1</sup> Paweł Kacprzak, *Weryfikacja narodowościowa ludności rodzimej i rehabilitacja tzw. „volks-deutschów” w latach 1945-1949*, “Czasopismo Prawno-Historyczne”, 63 (2011), 2, pp. 149–150.

<sup>2</sup> Antonina Kłoskowska, *Kultury narodowe u korzeni*, Warszawa 1996.

influenced by the “strong social stratification of its inhabitants in the past, overlapping with national, linguistic, religious and cultural divisions” (p. 59).

The Author justifies these opinions in Chapter V concerning socio-economic changes in Upper Silesia and their impact on the development of the economic identity of Upper Silesians. This chapter constitutes the essential part of the study, however, in terms of its content it is not plausible enough. In over 80 pages the Author outlined the times ranging from the *Kulturkampf* (beginning in 1871) and the era of the German Reich, the outbreak of the First World War to the inter-war territorial changes of Poland and Germany. He also discussed the years of the Second World War, the period of the Polish People's Republic and the subsequent social and economic transformation after 1989. In an almost ‘telegraphic style’, he presented the specific attitudes of Upper Silesians recorded during the 2002 census. In the last part, in each of the aforementioned subsections, he focused on two problems: the economic difficulties in Upper Silesia caused by the policy of the Polish state taking into account international factors and their influence on the formation of the economic identity of Upper Silesians.

He began discussing this issue by outlining the economic circumstances in Upper Silesia linked to the Industrial Revolution, leading to “the transformation of the discussed area into one of the leading industrial regions, not only of Germany, but also of Europe” (p. 70). The changes were reflected in economic, social and cultural circumstances, allowing the Upper Silesians to develop a sense of separateness, which was allegedly “strengthened by the policy of the *Kulturkampf* and Germanisation” (p. 70) and shaped their identity at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. According to the Author, this meant “perceiving [their – W.M.] place in the socio-professional structure and belonging to a given ethnic-national group” (p. 70). He noted their high “propensity to migrate in search of better living conditions” and their “distrust towards newcomers, who were perceived as competitors on the local labour market”. According to Węgrzyn, paternalistic relationships were established among employers and workers in Upper Silesian mines and factories (pp. 70–71). They developed in parallel with the *Landflucht* and *Ostflucht* phenomena also evident there. It is worth noting that the *Landflucht* was a migration of the rural population from the eastern lands of the Reich, who were losing their livelihoods as a result of unfavourable enfranchisement, or the loss of financial liquidity of landed estates transformed to fit capitalist economy. The *Ostflucht* was an economic emigration from Silesia to the much more developed industrial

centres of the Ruhr, Saxony and Berlin. It has been estimated that, for these reasons, 260,000 people could leave Upper Silesia by 1914. According to the Author, those emigrants also included people leaving for the United States and Brazil (pp. 71–72). They were replaced by immigrants from across the eastern border of the Kingdom of Prussia. By accepting lower-paid job offers, those newcomers made much of the local population hostile, as it limited their ability to make wage demands. However, by maintaining low wages, Upper Silesian products became competitive on the German and European markets, and increased profits encouraged German capitalists to make new investments and employ the immigrants. The Author analysed the consequences of the immigration of workers from across the eastern border to German enterprises, drawing attention mainly to the decrease in labour productivity caused by those workers and also to the increase in the number of accidents at work (p. 81), but without indicating their source. Industrial accidents arose from the lack of preparation of the agricultural population for the skills required in the industrial plants and also from language difficulties<sup>3</sup>.

Węgrzyn is sceptical about the incorporation of the eastern part of Upper Silesia into the independent Polish state in 1922. He pointed out the negative consequences of the demarcation of the Polish-German border, such as transition of 11 German monopolies and mining and metallurgical cartels, 120 mines and shafts, 55 coal fields and 43 zinc and lead ore mining fields, as well as the infrastructure of numerous metallurgical plants to the Silesian Province. He defended the property of German citizens, who in 1922 owned about three-fourth of the heavy industry enterprises and 85% of private land as they hampered the economic condition of the reborn Poland. In the view of scarce state financial resources, some efforts were made to attract French capital. The Author emphasised the national aspect of this decision, placing the blame on independent Poland, as its newly-established economy in Upper Silesia was not capable of making full use of the coal as well as metallurgical and industrial products available there. Węgrzyn also failed to see Germany's hostile policy in 1925 when the customs war against Poland was declared and resulted in an 'economic catastrophe' for Poland. It stopped the export of coal, the work of mines and mining-related plants, causing a major increase in

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<sup>3</sup> Danuta Kocurek, *Rzemiosło na Ziemi Pszczyńskiej w XIX wieku do 1918 roku (na tle pruskiej polityki gospodarczej)*, [in:] *Rzemiosło. Problemy doby współczesnej i czasów minionych. Książka wydana z okazji 70. rocznicy nadania sztandaru opolskiemu cechowi rzemieślniczemu*, eds. Wanda Musialik, Roman Śmietański, Opole 2017, pp. 170, 172–173.

unemployment, before its negative effects were mitigated by a strike of English miners in 1926, enabling the export of coal to Scandinavian markets (p. 88). The problem of selling coal arose again in the years of the Great Economic Crisis (1929–1935) and Upper Silesians also affected by this stagnation – they either lost their jobs or kept only part-time employment. The loss of employment opportunities at that time resulted in the illegal bootleg coal mining also known as *biedaszyby* (poverty mine shafts) (p.114).

An indirect effect of the economic collapse and the Great Depression was an increased hostility of Upper Silesians towards people immigrating there from other parts of Poland, which was reflected in the reinforcement of the ‘fellow countryman’ – ‘stranger’ stereotype. The Author notes that “[w]hile in the past it was mainly low-skilled labourers who relocated to this area, after 1922 clerks, teachers, policemen, railwaymen predominated” (p. 115). He accuses them of “not coming in search of any type of work, but to govern, shape, change, integrate with the rest of Poland” (p. 116). Węgrzyn estimated the immigration level at 400,000 people based on Church statistics (p. 117), questioning the official number of 31,500 employees suggested by Maria Wanda Wanatowicz<sup>4</sup>. However, the Author did not comment on this estimation and methodology of his findings. It is also questionable whether opinions about attitudes towards Polish immigrants were grounded in reality or rather in the subjective feelings of some poorly educated Upper Silesian, who could not benefit from opting for belonging to the Polish state.

When analysing the influence of immigrants from inside Poland on the formation of the identity of Upper Silesians, the Author omitted three groups of immigrants: firstly, those who were relocated from the western part of Silesia, which remained German and who sought refuge in the Silesian Province after the Silesian Uprisings, secondly economic re-emigrants from Westphalia, the Rhineland and Berlin, and thirdly *optants* from the Third Reich. So far research studies have discussed the first group, estimated at about 60,000 people, who left the Opole Silesia after 1922 due to the anti-Polish terror<sup>5</sup>. A selective estimation of the size of the re-emigration from German industrial centres was carried out by Beata Olszewska for the Deanery of Rybnik. When estimating the size of this group, she

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<sup>4</sup> Maria Wanda Wanatowicz, *Ludność napływowa na Górnym Śląsku w latach 1922–1939*, Katowice 1982, p. 169.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Odorkiewicz, *Uchodźcy z Opolszczyzny po powstaniach i plebiscycie*, “Zaranie Śląskie”, 25 (1962), 1, pp. 37–57.

also provided its demographic characteristics. She collected accounts of cultural differences which were revealed when confronted with the Upper Silesian reality<sup>6</sup>. So far historians have not been interested neither in the *optant* community nor in the Jewish population which came to the Silesian Province from the Third Reich after the *Kristallnacht* in 1937<sup>7</sup>.

It seems evident that the Author systemically omitted the assessment of the policy introduced by the Nazi government on the economic identity of the Upper Silesians. This is reflected in the fact that the subchapter devoted to their problems during World War II is three-fourth page long [sic!]. Highlighting their living conditions during the last war, Węgrzyn mentions the increase in the extraction of coal, full employment and employment of “a greater number of war prisoners along with the simultaneous sending of local workers to the front lines” (p. 120). For example, he completely omits the effects of the Nazi *Volksliste*, introduced in 1941 to the inhabitants of the Silesian Province, the acceptance of which protected them from forced labour, confiscation of private property, eviction and displacement. Omission of the above mentioned aspects considerably lowers the cognitive value of the work under review. This can only be justified by rather limited interest of Polish historians in the problems of Hitler’s internal policy in Upper Silesia incorporated into the Third Reich. So far this issue has been explored by Ryszard Kaczmarek, who proved that during the years of Nazi dominance, the material status of some Upper Silesians improved<sup>8</sup>.

The end of the war brought an increase of resentment among the Upper Silesians due to civilian losses caused by front-line operations and also by men being sent to work in the USSR. The Author rightly emphasised the establishment of the Military Miners Corps, whose members were sent to forced labour in mines in Upper Silesia. However, Węgrzyn failed to evaluate the policy towards Upper Silesians in the times of the Polish People’s Republic, that is in the period from the 1970s and the next two decades, when Edward Gierek, the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party, gave the Upper Silesian miners a privileged economic position in comparison to other professional groups.

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<sup>6</sup> Beata Olszewska, *Reemigranci plebiscytowi w powiecie rybnickim – przyczynek do badań*, “Zeszyty Rybnickie”, 6 (2008), pp. 227–236.

<sup>7</sup> See “Urzędowa Gazeta Gminy Izraelskiej w Katowicach”, 1937.

<sup>8</sup> Ryszard Kaczmarek, *Górny Śląsk podczas II wojny światowej. Między utopią niemieckiej wspólnoty narodowej a rzeczywistością okupacji na terenach wcielonych do Trzeciej Rzeszy*, Katowice 2006, p. 312.



Upper Silesian miners benefited from a separate system of wages, social and health care, access to recreation centres and summer camps for children, as well as to special shops and rationed goods<sup>9</sup>. Since the Author overlooked these issues, it may seem that at that time the Upper Silesians were still discriminated. In fact, at that time they were considerably privileged and with Poland's transition to a market economy in 1990 and the reduction of miners' privileges, the Upper Silesians' sense of economic identity was threaten.

The book under review does not provide clear answers to the important questions posed in the first pages of the book: "Do Silesians exist as a social supra-individual entity?" and "Are Silesians a territorial community, an ethnic group or perhaps a nation?" (pp. 8–9). According to the Author's narrative they had already achieved the status of a nation and, at the end, he posed a question about the future of this identification. According to Węgrzyn, the apparent change in the status of those, who work in mining and industry may highlight the nostalgia of Upper Silesians for periods of economic prosperity. However, he did not address the issue of whether the announced economic departure from the dominance of heavy industry would strengthen or weaken the sense of this 'economic identity'. He could have discuss this issue by referring to processes already evident at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in English, French or West German mining districts. By making no such attempt, along with other omitted issues discussed earlier, the Author leaves the Reader of this monograph unsatisfied and in doubts regarding the selection of the presented material and the subsequent conclusions.

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<sup>9</sup> Przemysław Snoch, *Edward Gierek wobec Górnego Śląska i jego mieszkańców (1957–1970)*. [in:] *Oni decydowali na Górnym Śląsku w XX wieku*, eds. Janusz Mokrosz, Mirosław Węcki, Katowice–Rybnik 2014, p. 158.