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**THE ROLE OF SMALL  
AND SEMI-MEDIUM-SIZED  
TOWNS IN SOLVING  
THE PROBLEMS  
OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT**



*The article focuses on the problems related to the disparities in the settlement system of the Kaliningrad region, the problems of small and semi-medium-sized towns, and the role of such towns in solving the regional development problems of the Kaliningrad region. The author analyses the Lithuanian experience of revitalizing small towns. The article outlines the ways to apply this experience to the Kaliningrad region.*

**Key words:** small and semi-medium-sized towns, settlement system, population outflow, revitalising of small and semi-medium-sized towns, unified settlement system, regional development, regional centres.

The centre-periphery concept based on the differentiation of economic centres, periphery and semi-periphery districts within a certain territory is dominant in Russia as concerns the planning and management of socioeconomic development processes. However, this concept can hardly be applied in the case of the Kaliningrad region, since, as the analysis of socioeconomic processes dynamics in the region shows, it leads to a more pronounced disproportion in the population distribution, an increasing role of Kaliningrad, as well as aggravates the conditions for the development of peripheral and semi-peripheral territories of the region.

The system of population distribution in the Kaliningrad region is characterised by a significant population density, a high level of urbanisation against the background of the domination of Kaliningrad — the regional centre (419 thousand people as of 01.10.2010) — the absence of larger towns and prevalence of small settlements in the rural areas. The share of urban population is 76.4%. The average population density is 62 people per square kilometre. The average city/town population size is 30,000 people, that of rural settlements — 206 people.

The solution to the regional development problems, as well as creating a balanced socioeconomic situation on the peripheral territories of the Kaliningrad region, requires, in our opinion, a more appropriate concept of the unified settlement system, according to which each settlement is hierarchically linked to other settlements and has a certain role within the system. The settlement system of the Kaliningrad region is not balanced and is unipolar, i. e., its western part, the territory of the Kaliningrad agglomeration, which occupies more than one fourth of the region's territory, accommodates 70% of the region's population. Here, the population density is 262 people/km<sup>2</sup>. It is worth mentioning that such disproportion in the population distribution generates a number of problems relating to the increase in population density and creates a significant anthropogenic impact. Figure 1 shows the settlement system of the Kaliningrad region.

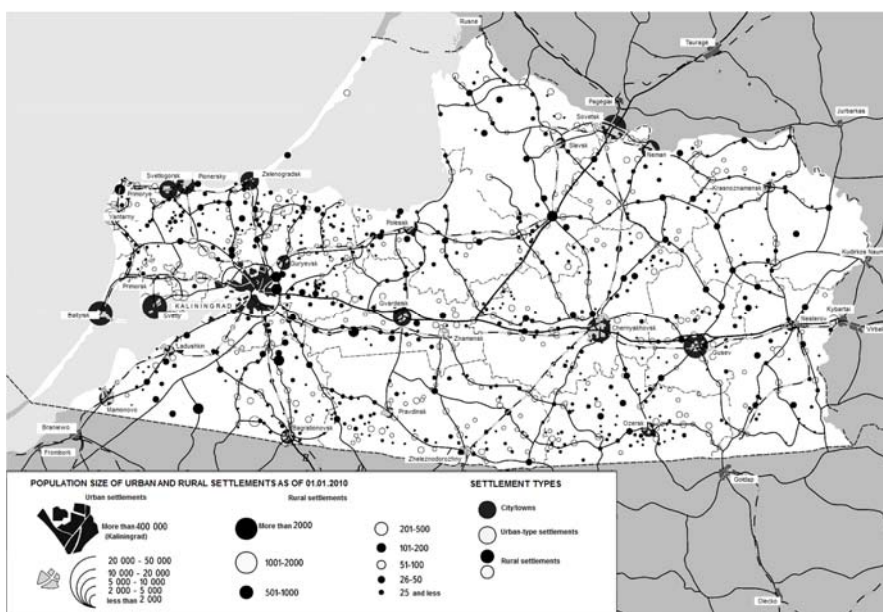


Fig. 1. The settlement system of the Kaliningrad region as of 01.01.2010 (materials used: [6])

As of the beginning of 2010, the western part of the region accommodated 677 thousand people, while the rest of the region's territory - 260 thousand people. There is only one city in the region — the regional capital Kaliningrad with a population of 419 thousand people [5]. There are 3 urban-type settlements, 15 small (with a population of less than 20,000 people) and 5 "medium sized (with a population of 20—50,000 people) towns in the region. The distribution of the population by different settlement types is shown in figure 2.

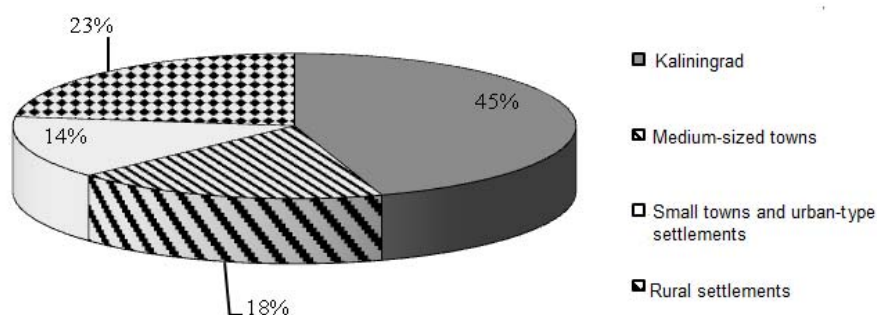


Fig. 2. The distribution of the population of the Kaliningrad region by settlement types (as of 01.01.2010)

The Kaliningrad agglomeration is a pole of economic and population concentration. It is home to 88 % of all economic entities and accounts for 89 % of the regional industrial production.

The semi-medium-sized towns of the Kaliningrad region — Sovetsk, Chernyakhovsk, Gusev, Svetly, and Baltyisk — play the role of medium-sized towns functioning as interdistrict and local administrative centres for the rural districts, although, according to the official classification given in the urban planning code of the Russian Federation, they fall into the category of small towns. Alongside the five semi-medium-sized towns, there are three other towns strategically important for the economic development — Mamonovo, Bagrationovsk, and Neman located on the Lithuanian border. Another settlement of economic importance is Sovetsk — a town at the Lithuanian border. These towns serve as the land "gates" of Russia (through the Kaliningrad region) to Europe.

The economic indicators of small and semi-medium-sized towns can hardly be referred to as high or even satisfactory. There are 14,623 economic entities in the rural settlements, small and semi-medium-sized towns, which accounts for 29 % of the total amount of economic entities of the Kaliningrad region. There are 28.3 economic entities per 1,000 population of the urban-type and rural settlements. The small and semi-medium-sized towns and villages of the Kaliningrad region exhibit a tendency towards their population reduction, which relates to the natural decline and population outflow. This demographic situation is explained by the fact that most of small and semi-medium-sized towns of the region, as a result of the outflow of younger population, are characterised by a decreasing proportion of the working-age population and increasing population ageing. However, in comparison to small towns and urban-type settlements, as a result of incoming migration, the population number is increasing in the semi-medium-sized towns of Svetly and Baltyisk, since they are situated in the west of the region and are parts of the Kaliningrad agglomeration. In the three other semi-medium-sized towns, the populations size is decreasing, the highest decrease being registered in Chernyakhovsk.

The solution to the towns' problem is possible only in the framework of a scientifically justified and practically applicable spatial planning approach. The objective of this research is to identify forms of effective economic activity of small towns, to facilitate their infrastructure improvement, raise the efficiency of the towns' economy, and to perfect the social organisation of town life in the framework of the unified settlement system [1; 3]. It is important to focus not only on the development of Kaliningrad, but also to increase the role of semi-medium-sized towns of the Kaliningrad region using the potential of the unified settlement system, relying on semi-medium-sized towns as base centres. Similar approach yielded positive results in the 1960—1980s in Lithuania.

The unified settlement system of Lithuania was created from the network of base centres of different ranking; the process was well-planned and research-based. Similar attempts were made in other ex-republics of the USSR. However, they did not succeed. The Lithuanian experience is espe-

cially valuable, since the specific feature of the scheme of small town activation and city development limitation applied in the country is that it is complete and well-thought-out as concerns industrial siting and settlement development. These plans were approved in 1964.

Throughout the post-war period, until 1958, the Lithuanian industry had been concentrated in the three cities — Vilnius, Kaunas, and Klaipėda. Consequently, the population of these cities increased as a result of incoming migration from small towns and villages. The Lithuanian industrial siting and urban development scheme were aimed at the limitation of industrial construction in large cities and its development in towns during the main scheme implementation period. A decision was made to concentrate industrial construction in small and medium-sized towns, which were expected to become centres of labour resources accumulation and provided services for the population of adjacent settlements of a lower administrative ranking. So, there emerged the idea of establishing 20 "regional centres", or "poles of development".

Industrial complexes were to be located in all regional centres as the basis of the towns development, so that it would become possible to establish specialised healthcare institutions, institutions of culture and utility services to meet the needs of the population of not only the town per se, but the region in general. The republic's capital Vilnius, Kaunas and the port city of Klaipėda had already become such centres. Later, they were linked by the railroad junction to the cities of Šiauliai and Panevėžys, where the number of people employed in industry increased more than by one third over five years (1961—1965). The other five regional centres were to be established on the basis of small towns. Until 1980, they had accounted for 30% of the urban population growth in the republic. Other Lithuanian settlements accounted for 15%, with the five regional centres having the rest 55%; at the same time the growth of the largest centres — Vilnius and Kaunas — was strictly limited [2].

New enterprises established in Lithuania regularly formed so-called industrial hubs, which were to develop only in regional centres. Such concentration of different industrial facilities at specially chosen sites, which shared certain common services, made it possible to cut costs by 5%.

The Lithuanian experience shows that the establishment of such "industrial hubs" can be managed by small towns — regional centres. It is important to solve this problem integrally, from the perspective of the national economy. It is worth noting that, as a result of the development of a regional territorial network of comprehensive services for the urban and rural population in Lithuanian regional centres, the population's transport expenditure relating to commuting and other trips to the regional centres decreased substantially.

The industrial siting and town development scheme aims to find and justify the place of each town within the whole structure. In Lithuania, the scheme covers a circle of new regional centres, industrial satellite towns akin to Elektrėnai, carefully kept away from resort towns of Palanga, Druskininkai, and Birštonas, as well as rural district centres. This scheme

was specified later — 231 microregions hosting a full complex service facilities were identified for the purpose of improvement of services for the rural population [2].

In the Kaliningrad regions, the function of base centres for the formation of socioeconomic districts reflecting the spatial organisation of the regional economy and population distribution can be performed, alongside the regional centre, by semi-medium-sized towns. The semi-medium-sized towns, according to their economic and geographical position, form three socioeconomic districts [4].

1. In the west of the region, the semi-medium-sized towns of Baltysk and Svetly — a part of the Kaliningrad agglomeration — fulfil the function of a transport and industrial zone (which also includes Primorki and Yantarny) with a focus on sea transport. Moreover, one of the central functions of Baltysk is that of a defence avantpost. The western part of the Kaliningrad agglomeration is represented by the coastal resort subzone comprising small towns (Svetlogorsk, Zelenogradsk, the Curonian spit; the actively developing resort of Yantarny also falls into this category). The southern territory forms the (Polish) border zone including the small towns of Ladushkin, Mamonovi, and Bagrationovsk.

2. In the northern part of the region, the leading territory in terms of socioeconomic development is the town of Sovetsk. It is developing as a multifunctional centre in the northern part of the region, moreover, it plays an important role in cross-border cooperation between the region and Lithuanian border districts. Another promising territory in the north of the region is the town of Neman, which can acquire the status of a semi-medium-sized town, since the Neman municipal district is the construction site of a nuclear power plant. The small town of Krasnoznamensk plays the role of an agro-industrial centre.

3. The socioeconomic development of the south-eastern part of the region is dominated by Chernyakhovsk and Gusev — favourable sites for the formation of an agglomerates system due to their location at the junction of the region's main transport routes. Moreover, Gusev is a transit centre on the international transport route from the Kaliningrad region to Poland and a promising centre of the region's innovative development.

The scheme of socioeconomic districts of the Kaliningrad region has similar features with the scheme of regional centres of Lithuania (today, the administrative division scheme) devised in accordance with the unified settlement system (fig. 3).

Three socioeconomic districts can be distinguished on the territory of the Kaliningrad region: the West (Western regional socioeconomic district), the North (the Sovetsk town district, the Slavsk, Neman, and Krasnoznamensk municipal districts), and the South-East (the Chernyakhovsk, Gusev, Nesterov, and Ozersk municipal districts). The development of socioeconomic districts on the basis of the unified settlement system requires measures aimed at the adjustment of this concept to the current conditions, since Lithuania's success was based on the planned economy.

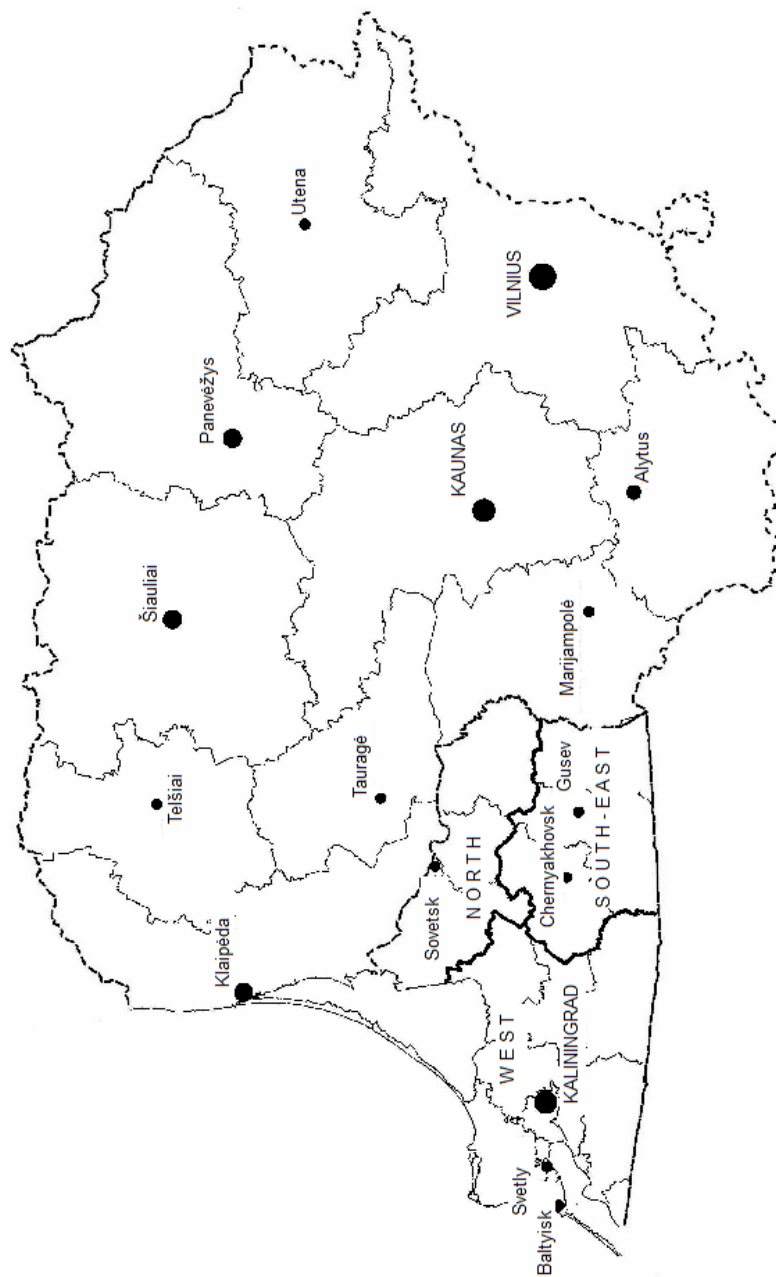


Fig. 3. A scheme of socioeconomic districts of the Kaliningrad region and Lithuanian regional centres



Market economy conditions require, in their turn, a coordinated policy of municipal, regional and, in some cases, federal authorities aimed at the enhancement of the image of the Kaliningrad region in order to increase Russian and international investment facilitating the industrial development of towns, which will also improve the competitiveness of socio-economic district and, as a result, balance the region's settlement system. Further initiatives may include the introduction of a new administrative and municipal division of the Kaliningrad region: the formation of three subregions — the West, the North, and the South-East, where semi-medium-sized towns will play an important organising role both in the industrial and social aspects.

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