

Conclusions from the analysis of forces that integrated Silesia as a region between 1526 and 1740

Abstract:

An analysis of the phenomena which occurred in the administrative, economic, social, ethnic and cultural spheres, as well as in respect of the self-identification and identity of inhabitants has demonstrated what a complex region Silesia was under the Habsburgs. Administratively, it was highly fragmented, it possessed an expansive network of government offices, and was economically, ethnically, linguistically and religiously diverse. The beginning of the 17th century constituted a significant turning point. The eruption of the Thirty Years' War led to deep social transformations, altered the religious situation, and generated serious economic consequences. The first half of the 17th century also bore fruit in the form of new cultural and artistic phenomena. Baroque came to Silesia, stimulating the birth of a new artistic and aesthetic movement of European quality, visible in literature, architecture and the visual arts. It should also be stated that during the entire period under analysis, when compared to conditions before 1526, the region's integration and cohesion became stronger and more entrenched. From the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries, Silesia's inhabitants also began feeling a stronger sense of identification with the region. This picture was not transformed by tendencies towards disintegration associated with religious conflicts, but rather by the coexistence of diverse ethnic, linguistic and social groups.

Keywords:

Silesia, regional cohesion, Thirty Years' War, self-identification

The aim of the *Cuius regio* project was to determine factors that fostered the building or elimination of social cohesion and sense of attachment of individuals and groups to the territory of their habitation. The examination of phenomena occurring in the administrative, economic, social, ethnic and cultural sphere, as well as in the sphere of self-identification and identity of inhabitants of Silesia has proven that the period of Silesian history between 1526 and 1740 was in many respects heterogeneous. By and large it was the outset of the 17th century and the outbreak of the Thirty Year's War which may be considered a landmark of each of the issues analysed in this volume. The stance of Silesians in the initial phase of war, their support for the Bohemian estates and the consequences of the Battle of White Mountain in 1620, brought a considerable change in the region's governance. The conclusion of the war and the Peace of Westphalia strengthened the position of

Habsburgs as kings of Bohemia and reinforced political boundaries of Silesia for almost a century. The Thirty Years' War brought about social and religious changes, and also – obviously – significant economic consequences. Independently of political factors and the long-term, destructive warfare, the outset of the 17th century bore fruit in the emergence of new phenomena in the sphere of culture and arts. Silesia saw the advent of Baroque, which stimulated the formation of new artistic and aesthetic trends, especially among Silesian Catholic elites. This characteristic rift of the second/third decade of the 17th century has been thoroughly examined in this volume, particularly in sections devoted to social groups as well as ethnic and linguistic issues, covered in two separate texts (one devoted to the long 16th century and another to the period from the Thirty Years' War to the outbreak of the First Silesian War). And what are the conclusions drawn from the analysis whose aim was to answer the question on social cohesion of inhabitants of Silesia in the examined period?

It is beyond doubt that Silesia possessed a complex administrative system. It originated in consequence of incorporation to the Crown of Bohemia in the 14th and 15th century of the highly fragmented region, equipped in both developed and developing regional estate and ducal institutions, and administrative offices. In 1526 there existed sixteen duchies (in the period between 1526 and 1740 their number changed), four free states and 144 cities possessing their own authorities. Such fragmented and internally complex Silesia was one of five countries of the Bohemian Crown, which were subordinate to offices and institutions whose number was in fact small, but whose power extended to the entire monarchy. The strongest bond between these five diverse countries was the person of king, who was head of royal offices and institutions. Besides, there existed institutions of national estate authority headed by the sejm, whose power extended to all lands of the Bohemian Crown. Yet, each of the countries strove to achieve its their own goals. The tensions between local Silesian interests and interests of Czech, Moravian and Lusatian estates, as well as aims and ambitions of successive kings of Bohemia throughout the entire discussed period, led to the consolidation of regionalism and the building of the sense of unique, Silesian identity.

The sense of independence of the region of Silesia was also reinforced by internal Silesian estate institutions. Their role was all the more crucial that the authority of these particular estate offices and institutions extended to almost all spheres of contemporary governance. In fact, following 1629 royal authorities took efforts to limit and marginalize their role, but at the same time preserved the regional administrative-institutional system. The most conspicuous example of

this is the replacement of the monocratic office of governor of Silesia – who formerly enjoyed extensive authority and was strongly connected with Silesian elites – with the collegial so-called Superior Office (*Oberamt*) composed of royal officers. Nonetheless, the strengthening of the top-down efforts aimed at elimination of regionalisms from the countries of the Bohemian Crown, consolidation of the status of the king and extension of scope of his authority stimulated the emergence in Silesia of anti-centralist forces, which in the end brought results opposite to those intended. On a mental level, this resulted in the growing conviction of distinctiveness of Silesia and Silesians. At the same time, actions undertaken by the kings of Bohemia from the second/third decade of the 17th century led to Silesia being formally perceived and treated as a distinct administrative region. What failed to be eliminated at the time was the internal fragmentation of Silesia. The existence of Silesian offices and institutions in separate duchies, free states and individual cities led in turn to a somewhat enfeeblement of the region's cohesion in favour to the development of connections and relationships on the local level.

From the economic perspective, Silesia was benefitting from developments of the previous period. The privileged position of the region was determined by high level of urbanisation, effective colonization and conversion of extensive territories to farming grounds. Throughout the examined period Silesia did not differ much in this respect from its neighbouring lands, especially those located within the Bohemian Crown. Similarities included even types of cultivated crops. This does not mean however that economic phenomena specific only to Silesia were entirely absent from the region. Despite this specific economic unification, the outset of the 17th century saw a growing number of phenomena which led to the region's increasing economic separation – a process which needs to be viewed as a consequence of royal policy leading to isolation of individual countries of the Bohemian Crown. In spite of this fact, Silesia – thanks to commerce (transit, export and import) – maintained strong connections with its neighbouring countries, not only under the Habsburg rule. It was the flourishing native commerce – fostering the interests of local manufacturers – that constituted an important region-integrating factor. The greatest and most powerful player in the economic sphere turned out to be the city of Wrocław, which became the principal centre of the local market, and also the most devoted guardian of commercial and export interests of its burghers.

In the period when Silesia was part of the Bohemian Crown under the Habsburg rule, the region differed not only from the very Bohemia – its southern neighbour – but also from the lands of Poland both in terms of its unique social structure and importance and status of particular social groups, perhaps only except peasantry.

A characteristic feature was the lasting presence in Silesia of a large – owing to the aforementioned internal fragmentation – community of dukes and free state lords, who played a crucial role in the political, religious and cultural sphere. In Bohemia and Moravia similar role fell to the class of lords, who nonetheless occupied a different social position within the monarchy, which led to ever-growing isolation of the group of Silesian dukes. For this reason they more and more frequently turned their attention to the West, perceiving members of ducal families of the Reich as their equal partners. Marriages, too, were often concluded outside the boundaries of the Bohemian Crown. All this in its own way strengthened the sense of distinctiveness coupled with a sense of alienation, but at the same time led to the blurring of Silesian identity – the one occupying the highest position in group's social hierarchy. A somewhat internal isolation was also characteristic of lower nobility. Holding offices and ranks outside Silesia or concluding marriages by its members outside the borders of the region were rare, and in most cases their actions were restricted to the limits of particular duchies or free states. This led to a somewhat alienation of this social group.

From the 17th century, a phenomenon which became increasingly popular was the ennoblement of bourgeoisie. It was the burghers that turned out to be the group which was most dynamic, most rapidly evolving and most willing to take up new challenges of all other social groups under the Habsburg rule. It was also the group that would absorb new social and cultural phenomena most effectively. While looking after its private economic interests they managed to preserve a strong sense of regional identity, and thanks to patronage and numerous foundations established for the benefit of their local community they in fact supported the building of Silesian identity.

Religion was the factor which fostered the consolidation of the sense of community beyond social divisions. The rapid rise and strong presence of Protestantism in Silesia reinforced the sense of distinctiveness of its inhabitants independently of their social status in the context of authority of Catholic kings and their re-Catholicisation policy introduced from the 17th century. What needs to be mentioned here is that despite the weakening of Catholic Church in the 16th century, the clergy maintained their crucial position, which was further strengthened by numerous landed estates owned by bishops of Wrocław and Silesian monasteries. From the conclusion of the Thirty Years' War policy of the House of Habsburg centred on the discrimination of Protestants by i.e. barring them from assuming offices and ranks resulted with the rise in the number of Catholics in Silesia, but, at the same time, contributed to the intensification of phenomena connected with the consolidation of

the sense of identity and regionalization of Protestant inhabitants of the region both in places where they managed to uphold their religious freedom as well as in places where they failed to do so.

When it comes to the question of ethnicity and language, Silesia under the Habsburg rule remained, just as in the previous period, a highly diverse region. Next to two dominant languages: Polish and German, it was the Czech language that played a significant role in some of its territories – especially those submontane ones and those of the Duchy of Cieszyn. Provisionally, there was a division – introduced already at the outset of Renaissance – into German-speaking left-bank Silesia and Polish-speaking right-bank Silesia. Nonetheless, it is impossible to delimit the exact range of separate languages or ethnic groups in the entire period of the Habsburg rule, even more so that the dynamics of phenomena in this sphere was ever-strengthened by the constantly evolving demographic situation. The analysis of the available source material allowed the researchers to distinguish two particularly interesting phenomena. The first one is the emergence in Silesia, together with Humanism, of a unique – independent of ethnic or linguistic affiliation – sense of connectedness to the region among the educated members of the Silesian community. The articulation of conviction of the existence of ‘the Silesian nation’ as well as the expression in literature in the 16th century and at the outset of the 17th century of ‘love for one’s homeland – Silesia’ in a universal Latin language above all divisions, led in turn to the emergence and maintenance among Silesians – up until the close of the examined period – of a clear sense of independence from the inhabitants of all its neighbouring countries. Therefore, eventually, just like in the case of the previous period, ethnical and linguistic diversity contributed neither to the disintegration nor to a marked integration of the Silesian community in the Habsburg era.

Perceiving Silesia as a certain whole and the building of the aforementioned emotional bonds with the region intensified at the outset of the modern era with the rise of Humanism. From the turn of the 15th and the 16th century it was principally thanks to literature – especially poetry, but also historiographical works, geographic descriptions, first descriptive maps of Silesia – that there emerged an image of a region with defined boundaries, inhabitants connected by common history, pride of fertile soil and magnificent cities headed by Wrocław, the region’s capital. What was then observable among the well-educated Silesians was the growth of their sense of Silesian identity. This sense, instilled in and transmitted to boys of various social backgrounds in local gymnasiums – from members of the wealthy nobility and burghers to representatives of poorer families who were granted access to education thanks to the system of foundations and scholarships – continued to last

throughout the entire Habsburg era. From the times of the Thirty Years' War, under the influence of the policy of monarchs whose aim was to weaken the role and importance of Silesian-wide institutions, and in connection with the extinction of Silesian Piasts and the transfer of duchies under the rule of non-Silesian dynasties, what nonetheless gained on strength was also the sense of localness. Even at the time, in most of the cases, a wider context was present in the minds of authors of historic and cartographic works. The sense of Silesian identity and somewhat historic continuity of the region at least from the 10th century connected with the search of ancient origins of its inhabitants dating even to the biblical period, constituted a factor that fostered the building of cohesive identity – and the frame to hold together the co-existing, and more and more frequent from the 17th century, diversified local identities.

At the turn of the 14th and 15th century and in the period of Baroque, Silesian art developed specific characteristics which determined its unquestionable value. The high artistic level of its many works made it possible to consider Silesian art as part of the panorama of greatest artistic achievements in contemporary Europe. A separate issue is the question of identity of Silesian art of the early modern period. Just as in the case of the Middle Ages, it is difficult to determine whether there developed a unique Silesian style in plastic arts, architecture or artistic handicraft. Nonetheless, what undoubtedly proves the existence of artistic phenomena typical for the region of Silesia are unique and present only in Silesia Evangelical churches of Peace and Mercy, as well of the so-called 'Escape' and 'Borderland' Churches. In Baroque, Silesia saw the emergence of significant, local artistic centres – workshops of great monasteries (in Lubiąż, Krzeszów, Henryków). They gave rise to a highly unique mystical current in Silesian art (its main representative was Michael Leopold Willmann): 'the Baroque mannerism' and 'expressionism' in Silesian sculpture. What was also characteristic for Silesia was aesthetic conservatism of Silesian community.

A region-disintegrating factor in the sphere of arts and culture was excessive inspiration with the common artistic tradition – the culture of the western civilisation with its origins in the Mediterranean Basin and the tradition of Christianity. Silesia was also lacking a centre which would assume the role of the hub of artistic patronage.

The examination of the diversified array of phenomena and processes which occurred in Silesia in the period up until 1740 proves that in comparison with the situation from prior to 1526, there took place a growth in the region's cohesion and its consolidation. Until the Thirty Years' War, the dominant role in the development

of regionalisms, and even political, administrative and religious separatism – which integrated the region – was played by Silesian dukes and estates. In turn, from the outbreak of the War, a growing importance was attributed to the actions of royal administration. Not without significance was also the growing, from the turn of the 15th and 16th century, sense of self-identification of the inhabitants of Silesia with their region. Despite certain disintegrating tendencies, especially those connected with conflicts fuelled by religion, the eventual consolidation of the Habsburg rule as a result of the Thirty Years' War contributed to a growth in the internal administrative cohesion of the region as a whole, which at the same time continued to remain highly internally fragmented.

