

# Selected features of demography and social infrastructure of the town and Municipality of Wleń in the context of local development

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## **Abstract:**

**Aim:** The aim of the paper is to analyze the selected components characterizing the demographic potential and the state of social infrastructure in the rural-urban Municipality of Wleń.

**Design / Research methods:** The data derived from the Local Data Bank of the Central Statistical Office was analyzed, describing population structure, number and density, natural growth, number of marriages as well as the data on social infrastructure, i.e. healthcare, welfare, security, education, sport and culture. In addition, the analyses covered also data from participant observation and data obtained in the course of the public consultations conducted in relation to the development strategy for the years 2015-2022, devised for the municipality of Wleń. The research was conducted for the time period from 2004 to 2014 – the choice was driven by the wish to carry out observations that would span a decade.

**Conclusions / findings:** The Municipality of Wleń is undergoing depopulation and succumbing to negative consequences relating to the process. The municipality needs active, creative and young population in order to secure future development. Yet, this is a group of well informed consumers of space who expect specific services (including education), hence maintaining an adequate level of social infrastructure provided by the municipality should become a high-priority target for the local authorities. Positive changes can be observed such as better childcare provided in nurseries. While facing aging population, lacking a social welfare home may become a growing problem. The sense of security, on the other hand, is certainly an asset the municipality space offers.

**Originality / value of the article:** The findings of the studies are useful for local self-government.

**Implications of the research:** The research findings may prove helpful for the municipality management.

*Keywords:* local development, population, social infrastructure.

JEL: R58, R23.

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## 1. Introduction

The development processes which are being implemented in a municipality are multi-dimensional and differentiated - the same characteristic refers to the definitions of the development process which have been functioning in the literature on the subject. Parysek draws attention to the classification of local development in the category of socio-economic processes, which implies that it encompasses both creating new jobs and shaping comprehensively the possibly best living conditions in the local environment (Parysek 1997: 46). Pietrzyk emphasizes that local development is synonymous with actions which local actors (self-governments, business entities, associations, etc.) are willing to undertake, having reflected on the enhancement of local resources while taking into account territorial particularities (Pietrzyk 2006: 32). Klimek is among those who point out to the problem of ambiguity of the definition (Klimek 2010: 63). Sztando, moreover, highlights the dual nature of the local development process which has the effect that we have to see it in local and trans-local terms, i.e. as one of the most important development ideas of a modern state and society (Sztando 2012: 14-16).

However, for the authors of the paper, looking for differences contained in the definitions is not perceived as important – we argue that inherent in local development and in each and every definition of the concept is local community, for it is the community which talks about the needs and shows its involvement, thus forming the basis for the local authorities operations. There is no doubt that the functioning of a municipal community requires an adequate social infrastructure – hence the study encompasses selected features referring to demography and social infrastructure. It is worth recalling that there is no one clear definition of social infrastructure in literature. Although scholars cannot agree on the category, there are no doubts that it is a significant development factor, being crucial to the level of competitiveness of a particular area, and thus considerably affecting the standard of living and the operations of business entities (Przybyła, Gonda-Soroczyńska 2014: 249). According to Kroszel, social infrastructure is to be understood as a system consisting of facilities and institutions providing non-productive services, individual in their nature (of a consumption type) in an organized manner. Further, he limits the scope of those

services to operations in the field of education, culture promotion, health and social care, physical culture and tourism (Kroszel 1990: 190).

The aim of the paper is to analyze the selected components characteristic of the demographic potential and social infrastructure of the urban-rural Municipality of Wleń. To this end the following data were used: data derived from Local Data Bank of the Central Statistical Office, data from the participant observation and data obtained in the course of the public consultations conducted in connection with the development strategy for the years 2015-2022, devised for the Municipality of Wleń. The research was conducted for the time span between 2004 and 2014 – this time frame was driven by the wish to carry out observations that would span a decade.

## **2. Characteristic features of the area of interest**

The urban-rural Municipality of Wleń, covering an area of 8606 ha, is located in Lower Silesian Voivodship, in Lwówecki District. The municipality comprises 12 villages: Bełczyna, Bystrzyca, Klecza, Łupki, Marczów, Modrzewie, Nielestno, Pilchowice, Przeździeca, Radomice, Strzyżowiec and Tarczyn. The analysis of the land use structure (data as of 2014) shows that the municipality consists overwhelmingly of agricultural land (4870 ha), largely made up of arable land (2669 ha). Forests, wooded and scrub land cover 3083 ha, with underwater land of 232 ha. In the municipality, the developed and urban land takes up 4.6% of the entire area (399 ha). While describing its characteristic features, it should be noted that the municipality is situated at Izerskie Foothills, at the base of the Sudety mountain range to the west. Wleń itself, located in the valley of the Bóbr river, is one of the oldest Silesian towns – it was granted city privileges in 1214. The basic spatial forms, as specified by Bogdan Jałowiecki (production, consumption, power, symbolism and exchange) have a centuries-old tradition (Jałowiecki 2010: 37-39). Although there have been insufficient repairs and modernization of the housing stock, the urban space of Wleń is actually cohesive. In the light of the observations made by Danuta Stawasz, this fact should be recognized as the town's asset

(Stawasz 2015: 23-31). It is worth recalling that before the Second World War Wleń was also – just like Sokołowsko, Opolno, Trzebnica – a well known health resort taking advantage of its healing mineral springs (Gonda-Soroczyńska, Soroczyńska 2010: 75-88).

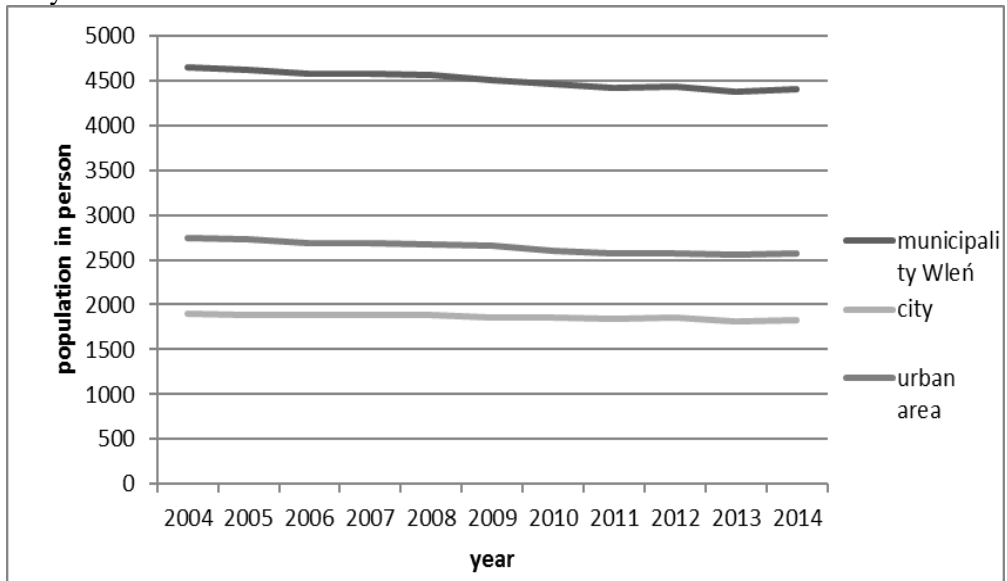
The municipality is characterized by its rich natural, cultural, historic and landscape assets – all those led to the establishing of a scenic park in 1989, The River Bóbr Valley Scenic Park (PKDB – Park Krajobrazowy Doliny Bobru). In Wleń Municipality, the area-related forms of nature conservation cover 5030.70 ha, which accounts for over 58% of the entire area of the municipality. In 1994, within the borders of PKDB, a nature reserve Góra Zamkowa was created, encompassing 21 ha. According to the data of the Central Register of Forms of Nature Conservation, it is a forest reserve of phytocenoses type, created to protect dry ground forest, a habitat to numerous precious plant species and a place of cultural heritage. However, the natural environment of the municipality is not without negative consequences – floods tended to occur so often and were so severe that at the beginning of the nineteenth century a dam was built on the Bóbr river in Piechowice. Naturally this investment could not solve the problem, yet it reduced considerably the negative impact of the natural forces. The infrastructure losses resulting from natural disasters alone in the years between 1997-2008 were estimated to amount to PLN 4.5 million (pecuniary values were indexed to 2008). The funding provided to remove the damage caused by the natural disasters was equal to PLN 16.7 million over the research period, with 11.5 million alone in the year 2008 (Piepiora 2011: 217-227).

### **3. Demographic potential of Wleń Municipality**

The Municipality of Wleń has a population of 4404, with over half of the population (58.47%) living in rural areas. The observation made within the research period (2004-2014) is that the division of population between rural and urban areas is stable. In both cases we see a decline in the population – in the town by 3.84%, while in the rural areas by 6.19%. It is alarming that the decline is faster than that

recorded in Lwówceki District, where it was by 3.05% (base year 2004 to 2014), see Chart 1. It is worth noting that the situation both in Wleń Municipality and Lwówceki District is the reverse of the development observed in Lower Silesia, where we are witnessing population growth.

**Chart 1.** Population of Wleń Municipality by factual place of residence – data for the years 2004-2014



Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the data derived from CSO – Local Data Bank

Over the entire period of research, women slightly outnumbered men in the town of Wleń, whereas in the rural area men made up a larger proportion of the population. 52% of the town population were women. In the rural area, these differences were not significant either – the highest proportion of men in the population was recorded in 2007 and it was equal to 51.60%. Thus, the feminization ratio in the municipality of Wleń was very low – a considerably lower than in Lwówceki District and Lower Silesian Voivodship – see Table 1.

The analysis of the population structure according to pre-working, working, post-working age leads in some worrying conclusions. The comparison of the data for 2004 with those for 2014 reveals that the pre-working age population declined by 26.42%. Considering the importance of this population group for the future of the municipality, the number of people was given on the chart below in the year

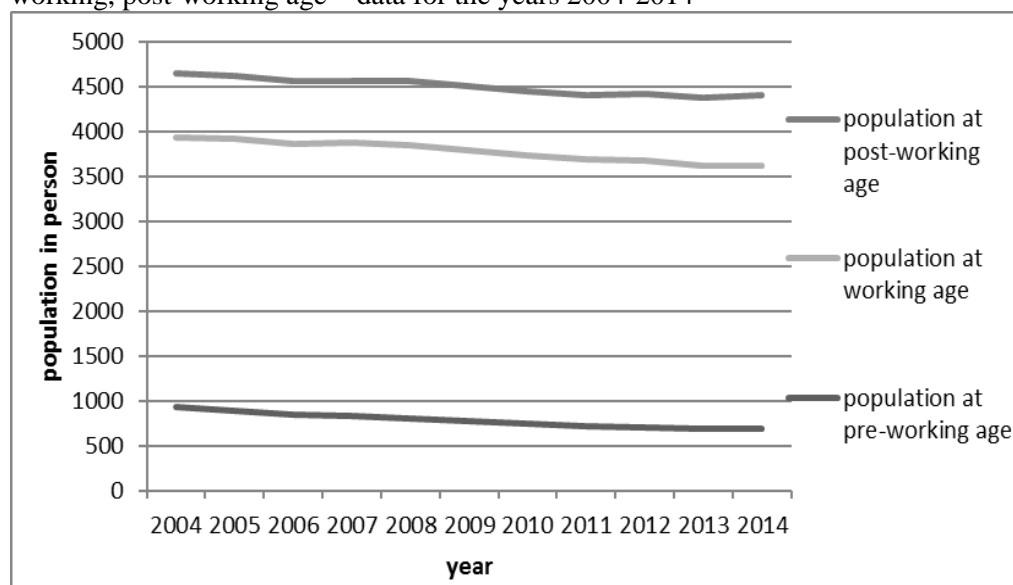
concerned. The decline is also recorded for the group of working –age population (2.46%), with growth being recorded only for post-working age population – see Chart 2. These trends are consistent with the current depopulation trend.

**Table 1.** The feminization ratio in the Municipality of Wleń, Lwówecki District and Lower Silesian Voivodship – data for the years 2004-2014

Specification	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Wleń Municipality	101	102	101	100	101	101	101	101	102	101	102
Lwówecki District	105	105	105	105	106	106	105	105	105	105	105
Lower Silesian Voivodship	108	108	108	109	109	109	108	108	108	108	108

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the data derived from CSO – Local Data Bank

**Chart 2.** Population of the Municipality of Wleń according to pre-working, working, post-working age – data for the years 2004-2014

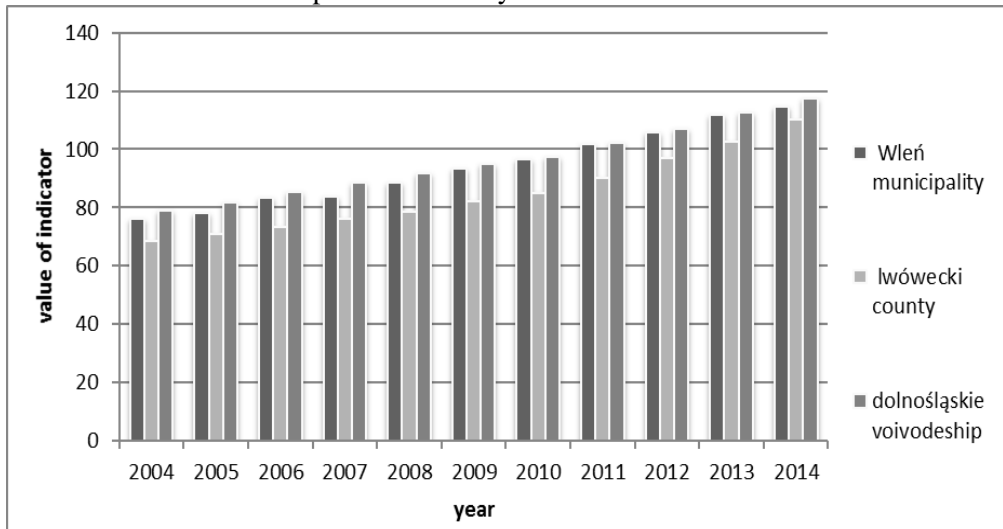


Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the data of CSO – Local Data Bank

The demographic dependency ratio measured as the ratio of the post-working age population to 100 population from the group of pre-working age population was

114.6 in 2014. In 2004, this ratio was equal to 76.0 – which naturally gives reason to some concern. Yet, the Municipality of Wleń is not unique in this respect – almost identical was the increase of this ratio for Lower Silesia, with the ratio recorded in Lwówecki District being even higher (by 41). On the positive side though, the demographic dependency ratio was lower in Wleń Municipality than in Lower Silesia over the entire research period – see Chart 3.

**Chart 3.** The ratio of the post-working age population to 100 population in the pre-working population group in the Municipality of Wleń, Lwówecki District and Lower Silesian Voivodship – data for the years 2004-2014



Source: Authors’ own elaboration based on the data derived from CSO – Local Data Bank

Over the 2004-2014 period, natural growth was positive only in one year (2008) in the municipality – see Table 2.

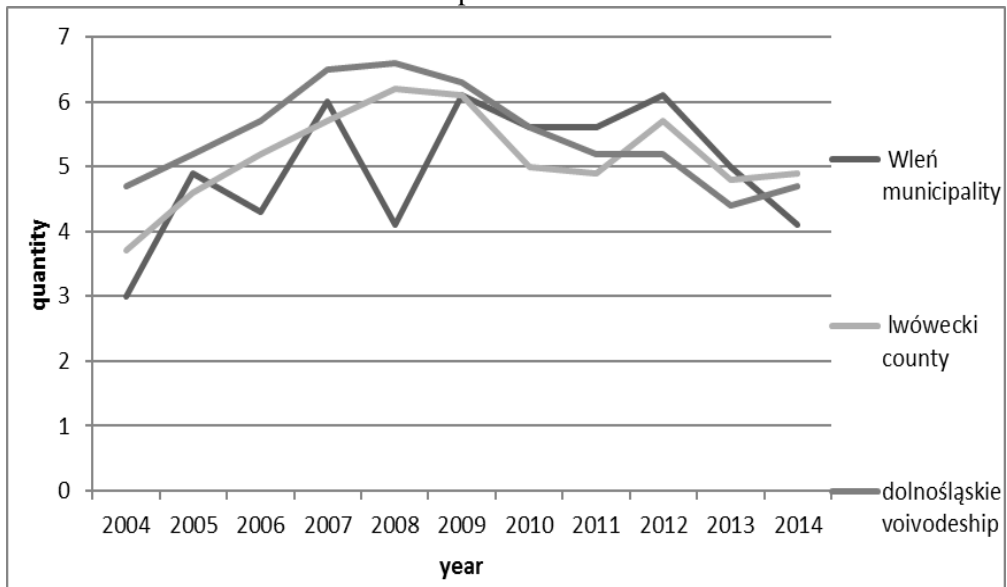
**Table 2.** Live births and deaths in total in the Municipality of Wleń – data for the years 2004-2014

Specification	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Live births	27	37	42	45	52	35	34	40	46	37	44
deaths	49	51	48	50	51	53	60	63	54	59	58

Source: Authors’ own elaboration based on the data derived from CSO – Local Data Bank

The number of marriages contracted in Wleń Municipality per thousand population, varied significantly over the research period– the value ranged between 3 and 6,1. There were four years (2004, 2006, 2008, 2014) when this number was smaller than the value recorded in Lwówecki District; in 2009 the number of marriages was exactly the same, while in the remaining years the municipality recorded a higher number than the district. The comparison of the number of marriages in Wleń Municipality with that recorded for Lower Silesia shows that the municipality recorded higher values than Lower Silesia only in three years (2011, 2012, 2013) – see Chart 4.

**Chart 4.** Marriages per thousand population in the Municipality of Wleń, Lwówecki District and Lower Silesian Voivodship.



Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the data derived from CSO – Local Data Bank

## 4. Social infrastructure in the Municipality of Wleń

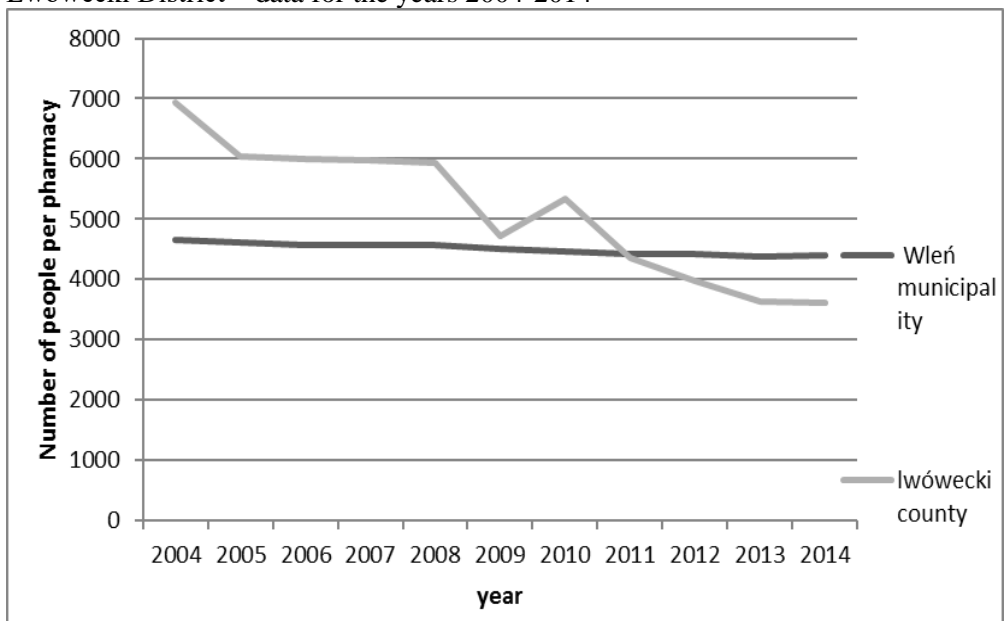
### 4.1 Health care

Over the 2004-2014 period, there were three out-patient clinics operating in Wleń Municipality. Since 2009 this number went down to two. The number of



consultations provided annually under primary health care ranged between 17.6 thousand and 13.8 thousand over the period examined (2004-2014). The highest number was recorded in the year 2011 (17,683 consultations), while the lowest in 2014 (13,750 consultations). If the assessment of access to pharmacies were to be limited to the analysis of statistical data, the situation would have to be evaluated as satisfactory – the number of individuals per one pharmacy which is generally available in the years 2004-2010 was higher in Lwówecki District than in the municipality – see Chart 5. Although, in fact, there was only one pharmacy operating in the municipality. Considering the territorial dispersion of the population, this situation need not be perceived as negative, implying that, in this respect, there are deficiencies in the social infrastructure.

**Chart 5.** Population per one generally available pharmacy in Wleń Municipality and Lwówecki District – data for the years 2004-2014

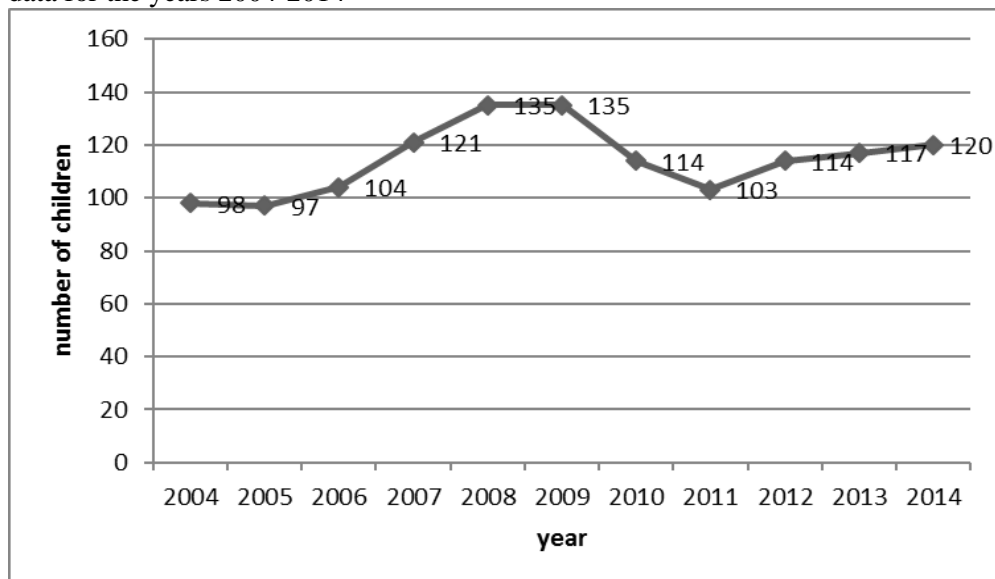


Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the data derived from CSO – Local Data Bank

The analysis of data on childcare up to age 3 indicates a development in the care offered by day nurseries – the comparison of the data for the year 2004 and 2014

shows an increase by 22 children, which should be considered significant, given the 4.4 thousand population of the Municipality of Wleń – see Chart 6.

**Chart 6.** Number of children (up to 3 years old) in nurseries in Wleń Municipality – data for the years 2004-2014

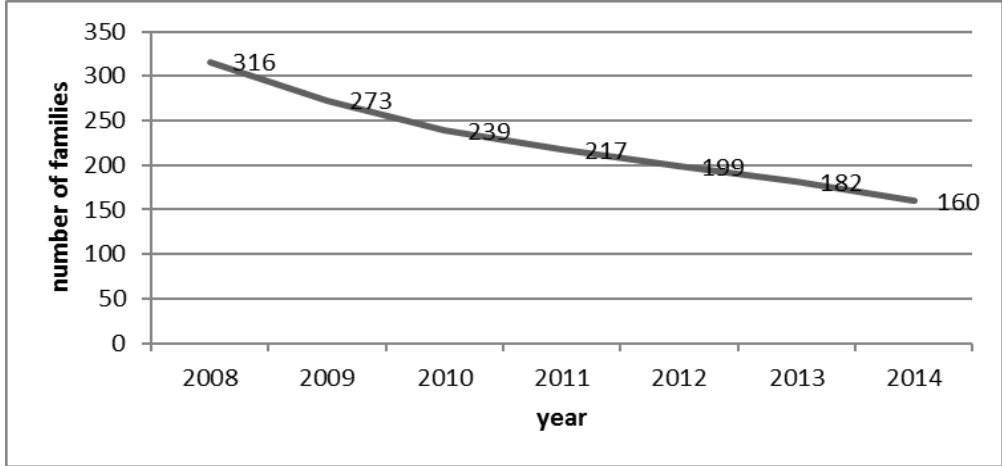


Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the data derived from CSO – Local Data Bank

The number of households who are recipients of social assistance by income was the highest in 2009, comprising 201 households. In the last year of the period in question, i.e. 2014, this number was significantly smaller – 177. The number of families receiving child allowance in the municipality over the years 2008-2014 declined systematically – see Chart 7. However, it is difficult to see it as the effect of an improved financial situation of the inhabitants. The reasons are more likely to be found in the reduced number of children entitled to receive the benefit.

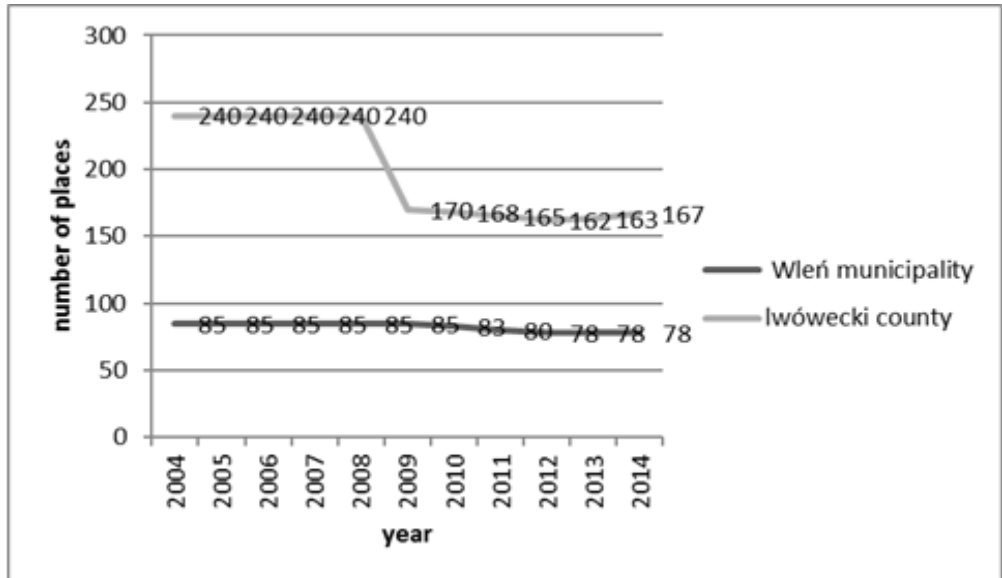
In the municipality of Wleń – in the village of Nielestnie – over the research period, there was one Social Welfare Home operating (DPS ). The number of beds offered by the DPS went down from 85 in 2004 to 78 in 2014. Considering the fact that in the last three years included in the study not all beds were occupied, we can argue that the offer in this respect is sufficient – see Chart 9.

**Chart 7.** Number of families receiving child allowance in the Municipality of Wleń – data for the years 2008-2014.



Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the data derived from CSO – Local Data Bank

**Chart 8.** Number of beds in the Social Welfare Home in the Municipality of Wleń and Lwówiecki District – data for the years 2004-2014.



Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the data derived from CSO – Local Data Bank

However, it should be made clear that the offer of the Social Welfare Home in Nieleśnie is addressed only to people with intellectual disabilities. With respect to

people suffering from chronic somatic diseases, assistance is offered by a facility in Mirsk. The social welfare home in Mirsk is located in Lwówiecki District, outside the borders of Wleń municipality.

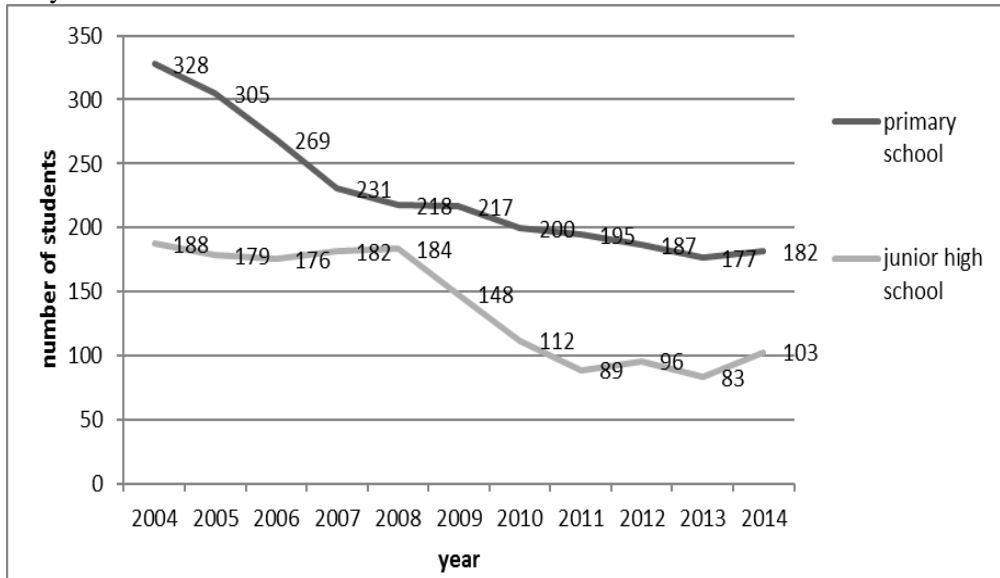
#### **4.2 Security**

The information obtained from the town and municipal authorities of Wleń shows that there is an Office for Enquiries which is under the authorities of the District Police Station in Lwówek Śląski. Further, Wleń has municipal security guard service (one post). Also, there are three voluntary fire brigades (OSP): OSP Wleń, OSP Pilchowice and OSP Radomice. In addition, OSP Wleń and OSP Pilchowice belong to the National Firefigting and Rescue System. There are also plans to establish OSP Marczów. It is worth noting that during the public consultations taking place in connection with the development strategy for the years 2015-2022, devised for the Municipality of Wleń, the inhabitants voiced positive opinions in terms of the level of security in the municipality. While writing about security, J. Kotus emphasizes that the sense of security is created by an objective situation where no threat is present and subjective, emotional and psychological evaluation of space as being safe (Kotus 2005: 54). In the light of the above, this component of social infrastructure should be assessed positively.

#### **4.3 Education**

The Municipality of Wleń runs a School Complex named after Jadwiga Śląska- it comprises a middle school, primary school and a kindergarten. Classes are held in the facilities located in Wleń and Pilchowice (only kindergarten). Over the research period, the number of pupils attending schools in the Municipality of Wleń decreased considerably –comparing the data stemming from the beginning and from the end of that period shows a drop of about 45% for both the middle school and primary school – see Chart 9.

**Chart 9.** Number of pupils in the schools located in Wleń Municipality – data for the years 2004-2014



Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the data derived from CSO – Local Data Bank

#### 4.4 Sport and culture

The leading institution in terms of organizing cultural, social and sports events in the municipality is the Culture, Sports and Tourism Center. The schedule of local events conducted by the center encompasses a list of 30 events of which the following should be considered key events: Homing Pigeons Fair, Street Memorial named after Michał Fludr, Medieval Market of Female Pigeon Keeper and Town and Municipality Day Festival, Municipality Harvest Festival and Children Song Contest (OKSiT 2016).

Based on the information received from the town and municipality authorities, the following sports clubs operate in the municipality: Pogoń Wleń, Uczniowski Klub Sportowy Bobrzanie, Czarni Strzyżowiec and Wiejski Klub Sportowy Pilchowice. In the past there was a Table Tennis Club too. Books are made available to inhabitants in three places: Municipality Library in Wleń and in its two divisions located in Bystrzyca and Pilchowice.

## 5. Concluding remarks

The Municipality of Wleń is undergoing depopulation and succumbing to negative consequences relating to the process – among other things, this is reflected in higher demographic dependency ratio. A chance to change things – as Adamska rightly points (Adamska 2013: 11-12) – should be seen only in striving for multifunctional rural areas. In order to achieve this, not only involvement on the part of the authorities, but also on the part of the local community is needed.

Therefore, the Municipality of Wleń needs active, creative and young people. They, however, represent a well informed group of consumers of space, expecting specific services, hence maintaining an adequate level of social infrastructure offered by the municipality should become a high-priority target for the local self-government. Positive changes can be observed such as, for example, the development of childcare provided in day nurseries. On the other hand, in the context of aging population the fact that there is no Social Welfare Home offering its services to people suffering from chronic somatic diseases could cause problems in the future. The sense of security is certainly an asset the municipality space offers. It needs to be stressed that maintaining educational services is necessary considering the expectations of young families. The analysis of the number of pupils indicates that there was a decrease during the period in question. However, in the light of the above those services have to be sustained.

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## Wybrane cechy demografii oraz infrastruktury społecznej gminy i miasta Wleń w kontekście rozwoju lokalnego

### Streszczenie

**Cel:** Celem artykułu jest analiza wybranych elementów charakteryzujących potencjał demograficzny oraz stan infrastruktury społecznej miejsko-wiejskiej gminy Wleń.

**Design / Research methods:** Dokonano analizy danych Banku Danych Lokalnych Głównego Urzędu Statystycznego opisujących strukturę i liczbę ludności, gęstość zaludnienia, przyrost naturalny, liczbę zawieranych małżeństw, a także dane odnoszące się do infrastruktury społecznej tj. ochrony zdrowia, opieki społecznej, bezpieczeństwa, edukacji oraz sportu i kultury. Ponadto przeanalizowano dane zgromadzone w efekcie obserwacji uczestniczącej oraz dane pozyskane w trakcie konsultacji społecznych prowadzonych w związku z opracowywaniem Strategii rozwoju gminy Wleń na lata 2015-2022. Badania wykonano dla okresu 2004-2014 – wybór było podyktowany chęcią dokonania obserwacji dla dekady.

**Conclusions / findings:** Gmina Wleń poddaje się procesowi depopulacji i negatywnym konsekwencjom z tym związanym. Dla przyszłego rozwoju badana gmina potrzebuje aktywnych, kreatywnych, młodych mieszkańców. Jest to jednak grupa świadomych konsumentów przestrzeni, oczekująca określonych usług (w tym edukacyjnych), stąd utrzymanie odpowiedniego poziomu infrastruktury społecznej oferowanej przez gminę winno być celem priorytetowym dla władz lokalnych. Można zaobserwować pozytywne zmiany jak chociażby rozwój opieki prowadzonej w ramach żłobków. W obliczu starzenia się społeczeństwa może natomiast narastać problem braku Domu Pomocy Społecznej. Niewątpliwie zaletą wleńskiej przestrzeni jest poczucie bezpieczeństwa.

**Originality / value of the article:** wyniki badań są użyteczne dla samorządu lokalnego.

**Implications of the research:** wyniki badań mogą być pomocne w zarządzaniu badaną gminą.

*Keywords:* rozwój lokalny, ludność, infrastruktura społeczna.

JEL: R58, R23.