

The retail chains development and changes in service patterns in small towns and rural areas

Retail trade and services are becoming the most dynamically developing sector of non-agricultural activity in Polish rural areas and in small towns. There are more and more commercial outlets of various formats, including supermarket chains, discount stores and integrated chains. Despite growing number of modern retail trade formats traditional small-format, often referred to as local market is also really important. New trading posts in small towns and rural areas are mainly located in the zones of influence of larger cities. They affect many changes of spatial, social and economic character. Small towns and rural areas surrounding them more and more frequently start to compete for further retail trade investments while noticing lots of benefits and costs of this process.

Discount chains, that are the main shopping place for Polish people, are currently conducting very similar marketing activities, which makes them more and more alike in terms of price level, product range, promotional materials and store environment. To attract customers, discount stores are changing, while tailoring the offer to the needs of consumers. First of all, they are working on changing their perception - in the past the dynamic growth of discount stores was the result of positioning them as the cheapest shops, for the poorest consumers. At present, discount stores undertake several activities to be perceived as those "for everyone". Increasing the scope of assortment, particularly by adding popular brand products, and thus reducing the share of own brands in the assortment is an example of such actions. Emergence of new commercial facilities in small towns and rural areas has a positive impact on their functional and spatial development. Nevertheless, it forms a competitive threat to traditional forms of sale in small shops, in marketplaces and other forms of small retail trade. Small towns and rural areas in Poland in majority of cases is still searching for the path of development appropriate for them and in accordance with their capabilities.

The aim of the session is to show and discuss the scale, arrangement and importance for development of new retail investment in small towns and rural areas in Europe (with comparison between states and regions). Research devoted to this field is important from the point of view of choosing the location of new investments related to discount chains and of the strategy for the development of small towns and rural areas. Identification of consequences of the operation of discount chains in chosen in rural areas and in small towns can impact the verification of the policy adopted by local authorities in relation to spatial planning and forming the functional structure.