

**MARRIAGES AND BIRTHS IN SMALL TOWNS AND
NEIGHBOURING VILLAGES IN THE 17TH AND 18TH
CENTURIES (EXAMPLES FROM SOUTHERN POLAND)**

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present basic demographic behaviour of inhabitants of small towns located in the south of Poland during the 17th and 18th centuries. Some analyses concern also rural community of neighbouring villages. Results base on – partly preserved – parish registers of marriages and baptisms of a few towns. In the case of one of them (Wojnicz) also the reconstruction of 49 families established in the second half of 18th century was made. Firstly, the main demographic trends based on numbers of marriages and births (baptisms) were presented. Then, the contracted marriages were analysed with relation to geographical and social origin of newlyweds. Examination of the age and marital status of newlyweds was able to a limited extent. More attention was devoted to the seasonality of marriages, also in comparison with practices of peasants. Duration of marriages was determined for the reconstructed families from Wojnicz in the second half of 18th century. The following part contains results of the studies in births and fertility (prenuptial conceptions, illegitimate births, marital fertility). Only the issue of the seasonality of conceptions was investigated with regard to the urban and rural communities.

Introduction

Systematic research into historical demography using parish registers as source material was begun in Poland in the interwar period and was resumed after a break forced by the Second World War. The 1960s were a particularly fruitful period for historical demography. A Section of Historical Demography was established within the framework of the Polish Academy of Sciences in 1964, and a new journal, *Przeszłość Demograficzna Polski* [Poland's Demographic Past] was launched in 1967. Both these forums still exist, but studies in this field have visibly lost their impetus since the 1980s. Thus in the early 21st century many regions of both the former and contemporary Poland are still a *terra incognita* for historical demography. One of the reasons for this state of affairs is that many of the oldest church registers are still kept at their home parishes under a variety of conditions. This material has not been registered, so we have little knowledge about its geographical distribution and chronological scope.¹ The most recent positive development in this respect was the edition (2009) of a modern handbook of historical demography focusing on the early modern (also called Old Polish) period, edited by Prof. Cezary Kukło (Kukło 2009).

The primary subjects of this paper are inhabitants of small towns located in the south of Poland (the Małopolska region), as to date there have been almost no studies on this topic, especially on the basis of parish registers. Remarks on neighbouring rural communities

¹ More about Polish research into historical demography: Sulowski 1995.

are supplementary, because my research into rural communities is only just beginning. Small towns with a population of fewer than 2,000 inhabitants were the most numerous group in the urban structure of Poland in the 17th and 18th centuries. Some of these towns had populations equal to or even smaller than large villages. The issue of ownership was of decisive importance for their economic situation and the actual status of their residents. Royal towns – which tended to be larger and wealthier – were less numerous. Private towns founded by noble families were the dominant form. In formal terms they were all inspired by the legal model transferred from medieval Magdeburg in Germany (*ius magdeburgense*), which was most popular in southern Poland. In practice, complete personal freedom was preserved for the residents of royal towns, whereas townspeople in private towns were first and foremost the subjects of the town owners, and were under their sole jurisdiction. However, they still retained greater freedom, and they had different privileges and obligations than the rural population. Parishes in small towns very often also included several nearby villages. As follows, both communities (townspeople and peasants) lived closely together, not only due to contacts of an economic nature (e.g. weekly fairs).²

This paper is based on the registers of baptisms and marriages from parishes located in several towns in the former Cracow diocese. There is a widespread opinion that Polish parish registration prior to the end of the 18th century was of a much lower standard than Western European records, e.g. French ones. Although marriage and baptism registers were widespread from the end of the 16th century, the extent of information they contain is not impressive. The baptismal registers normally contained (aside from the name of the celebrant and the date of the ceremony), the baby's name, the forenames and surname of the parents (without indication of the mother's origin), the place of their residence, and the names of the godparents. Information on the social standing or occupation of the father appeared only exceptionally – usually in the case of nobility. Records of marriages usually indicate the names of the contracting parties, rarely their marital status (and if so, more often in the case of women), and analogous data on witnesses to the ceremony. Information on socio-occupational status was as rare as in the case of baptisms. In addition, old registers contain numerous gaps and mistakes. The material which was the base for preparing the paper used displays all of the above mentioned faults. Above all, it is hard to find longer chronological series, either because of missing registers, or the poor condition of surviving ones. As a consequence, the situation when parallel series of different events are documented is infrequent. For this reason most of the findings presented here result

² See also: Wyrobisz 1983; Bogucka 1996.

from analysis of the registers from Pilzno and Wojnicz. Additional data comes from Mielec, Przecław (both own research) and from Uście Solne (published material). Among the parishes surveyed, the best records, dating from 1757, were found in a parish in Wojnicz.³ All the abovementioned towns had a Christian population of between 600 and 1,300 inhabitants at the end of the 18th century.

Fundamental changes were made to the way marriages and baptisms were registered and the extent of information the records provided in 1776, on the orders of the new, Austrian authorities of the territory. Printed forms of vital records, kept separately for each settlement, were used from 1784 (Kumor 1995).

General demographic trends

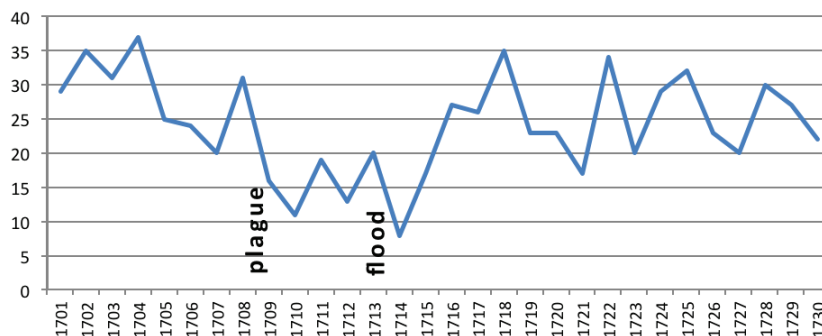
Our knowledge about the development of the Polish towns in the early 17th century suggests that this was a time when populations peaked. However, by the second half of the 1620s symptoms of crisis were already being reflected in the demographic dimension. This is clearly visible in the oldest marriages register used in this study, from Przecław: it shows a significant decline in the number of marriages, especially in the decade of 1625-1634.⁴ The crisis of cities originally attributed primarily to the destruction wrought by the war with Sweden in 1655-1657 actually began much earlier. The wars fought by the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth almost continuously from 1648 until 1664 prevented the normalization of the economic situation. The decreasing numbers of marriages (Pilzno, Przecław) reflects the difficulties of small towns in the 1660s and 1670s. The impact of the bubonic plague epidemic that swept through southern Poland in 1678 and 1679 is also noticeable (in marriages in Przecław and in baptisms in the case of Wojnicz). The beginning of the 18th century was characterised by an unusual number of successive catastrophic events (the Great Northern War, a plague, and a flood). Some of these – the plague in 1708 and 1709 (Pilzno, Wojnicz) and the great flood in 1713 (Pilzno, Przecław) [fig. 1] – were reflected in low annual numbers of baptisms or marriages. A distinct mark in parish records (Mielec, Uście Solne) was left by a major famine in 1736 [fig. 2]. In the second half of the 18th century there is a marked increase in the growth rate of urban populations, not only in comparison with the previous period, but also against their rural surroundings, where

³ List of registers used: marriages – Mielec 1762-1777; Pilzno 1665-1669, 1671-1676, 1705-1751, 1752-1773, 1778-1784; Przecław 1617-1644, 1660-1680, 1711-1728; Wojnicz 1675-1712, 1757-1787; baptisms – Mielec 1732-1761; Pilzno 1669-1697, 1700-1732, 1757-1784; Przecław 1667-1670, 1749-1759; Uście Solne 1734-1774; Wojnicz 1675-1712, 1757-1787.

⁴ This would be a phenomenon parallel or slightly subsequent to the economic crisis, which began around the late 16th century (Augustyniak 2008: 218-220).

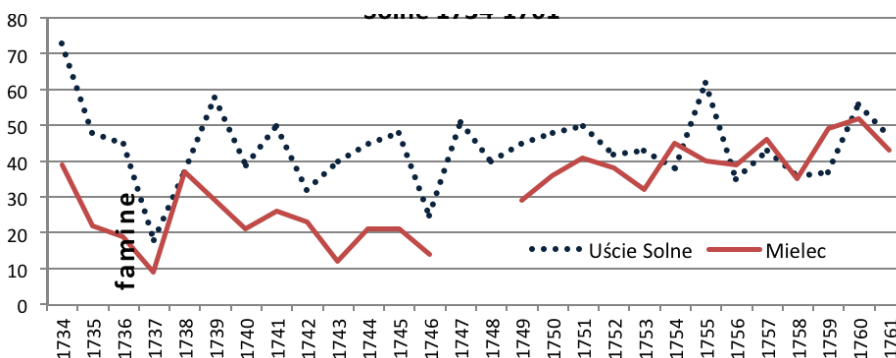
population growth was stable or much weaker. The political stabilization that ensued from 1772, after the occupation of southern Poland by Austria, seems to have had a positive impact on numbers of births (increase) in towns such as Pilzno and Wojnicz. However, this may also have been caused, at least in part, by the improvement of the standard of registration due to increased state control.

Figure 1. Pilzno (town). Number of baptisms 1701-1730



Source: parish register of baptisms.

Figure 2. Number of baptisms in the towns Mielec and Uście Solne 1734-1761



Source: Mielec: parish register of baptisms; Daszyńska-Golińska, Z. 1906. Uście Solne: przyczynki historyczno-statystyczne do dziejów nadwiślańskiego miasteczka. Akademia Umiejętności, Kraków

Marriages

a. Territorial origins of newlyweds

Residents of small towns may have had problems finding life partners of equivalent status. There were few unmarried people of an appropriate age in towns which usually numbered barely a few dozen or at most a few hundred families. Hence in many cases it was necessary to consider seeking a “lifelong friend” elsewhere. The scale of this phenomenon is difficult to quantify. Theoretically, because of the obligation to marry in the bride’s parish, marriage registers should take account of all local brides and enable full analysis of their husbands’ details. However, the lack of diligence in recording marriage ceremonies, often including failure to detail the groom’s origins, causes problems. One circumstance contributory to this may be where a groom had been in the town for some time and the person who recorded the marriage did not enquire as to his place of origin or record it.⁵ However, examination of the geographical roots of men marrying in three towns (Pilzno, Przeclaw, Wojnicz) enables us to determine, at least in part, the conditions for selection of a spouse. The information provided by the records indicates that the smaller the town, the more men marrying there originated from elsewhere. For example, in the small Przeclaw, in the period of 1660-1680, at least 36% of grooms were originally from other places, while in the bigger Pilzno, this figure went no higher than 20%. In both royal towns (Pilzno, Wojnicz) in the second half of the 18th century the percentage of grooms coming from rural areas was markedly lower than the equivalent figure in the second half of the previous century [tab. 1].

We must also take into account the fact that the internal social and ownership structure of a town had an impact on the territorial origin of the men who married there. In Pilzno and Wojnicz in particular, a significant percentage of the population lived in areas belonging to the clergy and were not members of the town’s burgher class. Analysis of the origins of grooms in the 18th century shows that the two communities within these towns were almost hermetic, despite their territorial proximity. Most marriages were endogamous in character. As we would expect, residents of villages had more intensive contacts with church subjects in towns than with other townspeople [tab. 2].

⁵ Sometimes the domicile of the witnesses to the wedding ceremony offer an indication of the groom’s place of origin.

b. Social origin of newlyweds

The issue of class in selection of a spouse seems to have been strongly conditioned by townspeople's wealth, and this was – to some extent – linked to the size of the town. As long as the future spouse came from a town, equivalence in terms of social class could compensate for differences in wealth. If a marriage partner was sought outside the town, the overall material status of the townspeople could be a decisive factor in determining whether it was someone from the noble or the peasant class. In the case of Przeclaw there is no indication that any of the men from the nearby villages who married townswomen were of noble origin. This is natural, when we take into account that the status of these women as subjects of a noble owners was completely incomparable to being royal subjects. In the case of townswomen from Pilzno and Wojnicz, there are documented marriages to men of a higher social status. In the decade of 1708-1718 five *nobilis* found wives in Pilzno. In Wojnicz at the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries two men with noble titles married townswomen from the local elite. Three grooms considered nobles got married to brides from Wojnicz ca. 1760. However, this was a small number, so the remaining grooms from the countryside were probably peasants. Some peasants married women from the church-owned part of town, who were of comparable social status. There were cases of citizens of royal towns during the 17th and 18th centuries marrying peasants. Parish registers indicate that such situations were relatively infrequent, however, especially in the second half of the 18th century. In addition, this kind of source does not give a full answer to the question of the position of village inhabitants within the community. It can be presumed that at most they were members of the rural elite (e.g. millers, craftsmen, lay employees of the Church).⁶ In terms of class choices of those marrying in the 18th century, the situation in Pilzno and Wojnicz is similar to that observed in Urzędów, a royal town in the nearby Lublin voivodeship. So it would be fair to say that townspeople tended to avoid marital contacts with peasants, more often entering into marriages to people from a higher social class (Surdacki 2007: 515-517).

⁶ Peasants were denoted using the class term "laborious" (*laboriosus*), while some rural spouses were described with the adjective "honest" (*honestus*), suggesting bourgeois origins or a non-farming professional.

Table 2. Place of origin of grooms in Wojnicz in 1757-1787

Type of area		bride from town	groom from				
			same town	<i>Księże</i>	other town	village	other, no data
town	N	163	131	3	6	15	8
	%		80.4	1.8	3.7	9.2	4.9
<i>Księże</i> *	N	32	1	24	0	6	1
	%		3.1	75.0	0.0	18.8	3.1

* an enclave under Church jurisdiction

Source: parish register of marriages

c. Age of newlyweds

Calculation of average age of spouses at first marriage is hampered by a fundamental difficulty: the age of newlyweds was not recorded in registers until 1784. Only a search for the baptism records of parties to marriages allows the scholar to determine their age.

The results obtained from the Pilzno and Wojnicz registers are relatively consistent. The average age of grooms from the two towns in the first half of the 18th century was approximately 26, falling to around 24 in the second half of the century. There was also a reduction in the average age of women at marriage – from about 22 to about 20 [tab. 3].⁷

A de facto minimum age for marriage has been established on the basis of evidence from baptisms registers. With respect to females, the youngest were barely 14.5 (two cases, Wojnicz). Girls who had turned 15 appeared in front of the altar more often – throughout the 18th century there were six such young women in Pilzno and three in Wojnicz. Young men who married were at least 18. However, there was only one case in Pilzno and one in Wojnicz of youths who were under 19. The situation where a groom was under 20 years old was also very rare. The reason for such early marriage was reportedly not premarital pregnancy in any of the cases.

Available material does not allow us to calculate the average age of people contracting second and subsequent marital unions.

⁷ In Głogów near Rzeszów, another small town in southern Małopolska, during the period 1784-1830 grooms married at an average age of 25 years and 3 months, while brides married at the age of almost exactly 21 (Rejman 2006: 150).

Table 3. Average age of bachelors and maidens at marriage based on baptismal registers

	Wojnicz		Pilzno		Pilzno		Pilzno		Wojnicz	
	age	N	age	N	age	N	age	N	age	N
bachelors (<i>period</i>)	1705-1712		1708-1733		1738-1760		1770-1784		1778-1787	
	25.7	10	25.7	30	26.8	25	22.0	9	24.2	15
maidens (<i>period</i>)	1693-1712		1706-1733		1738-1773		1778-1784		1774-1787	
	22.2	17	21.7	43	22.3	36	19.5	22	20.1	33

Source: parish registers of marriages.

The results mentioned above are compatible with research concerning other Polish cities and towns as well as rural communities (Kuklo, Kamecka 2003; Kuklo 2004). They cast into question the place of ethnic Polish territory in the classification proposed by John Hajnal. It is worth adding, that – as in the towns under study here – most Old Polish families, both urban and rural, were nuclear units.

d. Marital status of newlyweds

Registers of marriages from the Old Polish period usually do not indicate the marital status. If they do, they do so more frequently for women. In the case of men, some were described as bachelors (*juvenis*). Women's marital status can be sometimes identified by the traditional suffixes of surnames. There is barely any way of recognising widowers. Only under Austrian rule was the practice of determining the marital status of each person begun.

In the second half of the 18th century the share of marriages involving widows in the total number of contracted marriages (Pilzno and Wojnicz) was 13.6%. More reliable data on marital status (above all concerning widowers) is included in registers from the 1770s and 1780s. These indicate that marriages involving a widow or widower accounted for nearly 31% of all unions in Wojnicz and more than 41% in Pilzno.⁸ The results for respective proportion within the abovementioned group are more consistent. In both towns, marriages in which both parties were widowed accounted for 17-18% of all marriages

⁸ The situation was similar in other Polish towns and in Silesia (Kuklo 2004: 19; Górna 2004: 35).

involving widower or a widow, while the dominant configuration was widower – maiden (60-65.5%) [tab. 4].

An attempt was made to determine the proportion of marriages involving widows in previous years (Wojnicz 1675-1712, Pilzno 1665-1676, 1705-1773) by using the surname suffixes of married women (“-ina”). The results, ranging from 9% (Wojnicz) to 10.5% (Pilzno), are likely understated, partly due to the impossibility of determining marital status for every surname; the relatively frequent suffix “-ska” is unchangeable. However, in the case of Pilzno, a combination of two criteria: surname suffix and information on brides’ marital status occasionally recorded, gives a result of 15% of all marriages involving widowed women. This average is higher than at the end of the 18th century and may easily be explained by the higher mortality in times often haunted by epidemics and other disasters generating a greater need for remarriage.

Table 4. Marriages involving widows and/or widowers in towns

all marriages	Wojnicz 1774-1787			Pilzno 1778-1784		
	N	%		N	%	
	147	100	-	70	100	-
widower or widow involved	45	30.6	100.0	29	41.4	100.0
widower involved	35	23.8	77.8	24	34.3	82.8
widow involved	18	12.2	40.0	10	14.3	34.5
widower-widow	8	5.4	17.8	5	7.14	17.2
widower-maiden	27	18.4	60.0	19	27.1	65.5
widow-bachelor	10	6.8	22.2	5	7.14	17.2

Source: parish registers of marriages

Sources from Wojnicz show that roughly one-third of widowers from the town who married again did so within six months of the death of their wife. More than half found a new spouse within a year. Widows from the town usually waited longer – nine months (i.e. the duration of a potential pregnancy) – before they entered into a subsequent relationship. Almost all those widowed remarried within three years of their spouse’s death. The analysis failed to prove any links between the length of the former marriage and the interval between the death of the spouse and the next marriage, however.

e. Seasonality of marriages

Dates of weddings in the Old Polish period are usually characterized by distinct seasonality, with two peaks: during the post-Christmas, pre-Lent carnival period, and in the autumn, after the harvest. Both the liturgical calendar and the determinants of the agrarian economy influenced distribution of marriages in the countryside and in urban communities.

In towns, four months of the year – January, February, October and November – saw between 64% and 79% of all weddings. On average, 2% of marriages took place in periods prohibited by the Church – March, April and December. The rest were held between May and September [fig. 3].

Almost everywhere and in every period the winter months remained the most popular for weddings in towns. Sometimes as many as half of all marriages took place during carnival time. The importance of the autumn months increased noticeably in the second half of the 18th century. Perhaps this was a consequence of the decline of epidemics, which in previous periods had tended to intensify in the autumn. The most popular months for weddings were, in descending order, February, then November and January, followed by October. Although there were certain differences from town to town at various times, the general picture for each of the four towns covered in this study is almost identical. Among deviations from the rule, it is worth noting, for example, that in Mielec and Wojnicz in the second half of the 18th century the most weddings took place in November (31% and 27%, respectively).

The distribution of weddings by month in Mielec, Przecław, Pilzno and Wojnicz is typical for most cities at that time, even on the European scale (Kuklo 2004: 20; Kuklo 2009: 298-301). It differed from the customs prevailing in rural southern Poland in the high proportion of “Carnival” weddings. Among peasants the most popular months were those following the completion of the most important agricultural work. This can be seen clearly using the example of the villages in the Mielec and Wojnicz parishes (between 46% and 60% of all weddings took place in October and November) [fig. 4]. As in the case of the towns, in the countryside (in Wojnicz parish) preference for the autumn season increased in the second half of the 18th century in comparison to the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries.⁹

⁹ Clear differences in seasonality of marriages between small towns and villages remained in the 19th century, cf. the town of Głogów (in 1787-1830 56% of all weddings were in January and February) and in the village of Krasne (in 1786-1830 50% of weddings were in October and November) - Rejman 2006: 162, 163. In the rural parish of Raciborowice near Cracow, however, in the period 1641-1795 more weddings were celebrated in January and February than in October and November – Wyżga 2011: 155.

Figure 3. Town Mielec: distribution of marriages by month 1763-1777

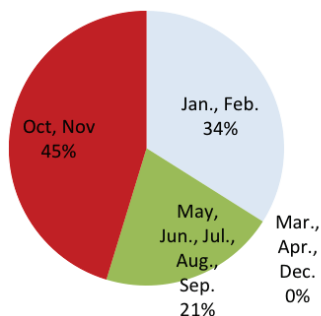
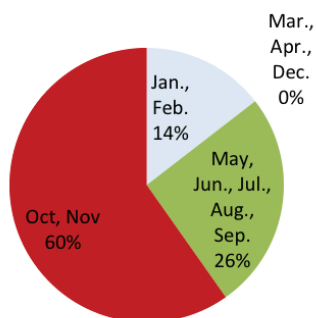


Figure 4. Villages in the Mielec parish: distribution of marriages by month 1763-1777



Source: parish register of marriages

Research material from the town of Wojnicz indicates that the weddings of people who were remarrying, especially widowers, took place more often in the less popular months. While in the second half of the 18th century less than 24% of all marriages in this town took place from March to September, 35% of all marriages involving widows or widowers fell in these months (42% of widowers' remarriages and 33% of widows' remarriages).

In terms of the days of the week on which most townspeople got married, in each of the towns analysed there were certain specific preferences. For religious reasons weddings were rarely held on Fridays or Wednesdays, while for economic reasons market days were avoided.

Peasants marrying in urban churches demonstrated other motives. Examples from Mielec and Wojnicz indicate that most chose Sunday (from 55% to 75% of all peasant weddings). In Wojnicz Monday, the local market day, clearly ranks second. Thus, for practical reasons, peasants would often schedule their weddings for days when they used to visit nearby parish towns.

f. Duration of marriage

The significant percentage of marriages contracted by at least one widowed party means that a proportion of these unions were brief. The reconstruction of 49 families from the town of Wojnicz, which was founded in 1757-1767, permits more general observations on the sustainability of marriages in the second half of the 18th century.

Restricting examination of the sources to the period 1757-1787 precludes fuller presentation of marriages lasting more than two decades. Nevertheless, four couples were found who lived together for more than 40 years and a further eight who were married for over 30 years. The record in this group is probably held by Franciszek and Elżbieta Solakiewicz, whose marriage lasted at least 51 years. Significantly, however, almost 70% of families established within the years 1757-1767 functioned for a minimum of 20 years, thereby creating good conditions for the birth and upbringing of many children. Besides this, a somewhat higher concentration occurs in two ranges: marriages lasting between 15 to 20 years, which is effectively a kind of prelude to the cumulation in the final group (of the longest marriages), and the shortest relationships. Of the five marriages which lasted less than five years, three were ended by the death of the husband and two by the death of the wife (including one case of death caused by post-partum complications). The lack of full information about the marital status of the spouses, especially the women, in reconstructed families prevents us analysing this factor in full. There is, however, one relationship between widower and widow which lasted 24 years. This invites the conclusion that if death did not take one of the spouses quickly (e.g. due to perinatal complications), the couple had a good chance of living together for at least 20 years¹⁰. It is doubtful whether the model of marriage observed in the second half of the 18th century may be applied to earlier periods. It should be assumed that the lack of political stability and security in the country reinforced the effects of natural disasters, resulting in lower standards of living and physical weakness. All these factors increased mortality during epidemics. In such circumstances, the death of one spouse was more frequent, producing a quantitative increase in shorter relationships.

¹⁰ The results obtained in Wojnicz differ from those in the other towns (Kuklo 2004: 19).

Births

a. Seasonality of conceptions

The short interval between birth and baptism (according to the dictates of the Church) allows the scholar to equate both events in practical terms. However, it should be remembered that registration of baptisms only help to determine the seasonal distribution of conceptions which led both to a live birth and a baptism recorded in the parish register. In addition, it is necessary to assume that all births occurred after a full-term, nine-month pregnancy.

Previous studies have shown that larger urban centres were characterised by seasonal fluctuations in numbers of conceptions analogous to those in rural parishes, but with a lower amplitude. Conceptions in the smaller towns surveyed were characterised by significant monthly variation that corresponds more closely to the rural pattern. We should also note the variability of behaviour in this sphere in the same towns in various chronological periods.

Generally, the seasonality of conception in the surveyed towns, which was a reflection of the intensity of sexual activity, was typical for pre-industrial societies, both in Poland and elsewhere in Europe. Most conceptions took place in the period from April to July, generally with a peak in May or June (Kuklo 2004: 23, 24; Kuklo 2009: 351, 352). In some towns, April was sometimes more distinct, which could be explained by local conditions of economic life.¹¹ A sharp decline in sexual activity – although not the sharpest – is seen in March, the month of Lent, which was consistent with the teachings of the Church. In December – the month of Advent – the exercise of continence was not so obvious, especially in Wojnicz. The most noticeable reduction in the level of successful conceptions occurred in September or November. Usually the whole autumn-winter season was characterized by very few conceptions – sometimes with only one more clear peak [fig. 5-8].

In the surrounding villages the seasonality of conceptions was very similar. The biggest intensity of sexual activity fell in the same period (esp. May), although in July the decrease in conceptions was a little sharper than in the towns. As in the towns, the lowest intensity of conception came in the autumn months (October or November).¹² A sharper decrease in

¹¹ The April peak of sexual activity brings to mind habits described in the town of Radomyśl near Mielec in the second half of the 19th century, when men employed in trading in pigs most of the year, travelling with their livestock, always returned home for Easter. In Przeclaw the community of merchants trading in pigs (which should also take into account their helpers) was large enough to skew the seasonality of conception. Some similarity is shown by the seasonality curves in Pilzno in the second half of the 17th and 18th centuries.

¹² The sexual behaviour of peasants from the Raciborowice parish was also very similar (Wyźga 2011: 191, 192).

conception in March should be considered the most important divergence in comparison to towns [fig. 7, 8]. However, in the case of individual parishes, the differences between town and villages seem bigger. For example, the townspeople of Mielec in the 18th century were most sexually active in June, followed by May, April and October. In satellite villages conceptions were most numerous in April and May, and to a lesser extent in June. In turn, the fewest conceptions in Mielec took place from November to March, while in the villages of the same parish the low points occurred in March, August, October and December.

b. Prenuptial conceptions

Prenuptial conceptions are a separate category because both Church law and urban law recognised children conceived or born before marriage as originating from a legal relationship, if their parents eventually married. By comparing the date of the marriage with the date of the baptism of the first child we gain some idea of the scale of premarital cohabitation. We can take into consideration only those baptisms which took place within 252 days (36 weeks) of the date of the marriage, in order to eliminate cases of premature births of babies conceived already in wedlock.

Data from Wojnicz indicate that marriages contracted by a pregnant bride accounted for about 8% of the total. The share of premarital conceptions in first births was about 14%. In Pilzno the respective shares were 4.6% and 6.4%. A trend common to both cities was a decline in the percentage of these conceptions in the second half of the 18th century in comparison to the previous period. In both towns, in the case of marriages preceded by conception of a child, the bride was often already in quite advanced pregnancy, i.e. between 24 and 32 weeks. Apparently, in situations when conception took place in the relations of an unmarried couple, they did not attempt to mask the inconvenient fact by marrying as soon as possible.¹³ Unfortunately, registers do reveal information on longer extramarital cohabitation; an exception is the annotation to the entry on the marriage of Wawrzyniec Kubalowicz and Zuzanna Siemkówna from Wojnicz in 1708, on the legal origin of their previously born sons.

Judicial sources from towns also provide information about the premarital sexual contacts of unmarried young people.

¹³ Widespread social permissiveness towards initiation of sexual contacts before marriage, especially between already engaged couples, was commonplace in Poland and Silesia (Kuklo 2004: 21, 22).

c. Illegitimate children

The issue of illegitimate births in small towns is a quite complicated one. Such towns in fact constituted moderate concentration of young unmarried people in domestic service and, periodically, saw troops stationed (especially Pilzno and Wojnicz), hence a presumption of a higher percentage of illegitimate births than in rural areas. On the other hand, mothers of illegitimate children were not anonymous in small centres. This issue has been examined only for Pilzno and Wojnicz.

Table 5. Illegitimate children in towns

town	period	baptisms		%
		all	illegitimate children	
Pilzno	1669-1696	843	23	2.7
<i>in particular</i>	<i>1672-1675</i>	<i>123</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>4.1</i>
Pilzno	1701-1717	389	9	2.3
Pilzno	1718-1731	351	15	4.3
Pilzno	1701-1731	740	24	3.2
Pilzno	1758-1771	420	4	1.0
Pilzno	1772-1784	562	17	3.0
Pilzno	1758-1784	982	21	2.1
Wojnicz	1676-1687	264	16	6.1
Wojnicz	1688-1699	348	14	4.0
Wojnicz	1700-1711	339	13	3.8
Wojnicz	1676-1711	951	43	4.5
Wojnicz	1758-1767	363	11	3.0
Wojnicz	1768-1777	368	9	2.4
Wojnicz	1778-1787	469	21	4.5
Wojnicz	1758-1787	1200	41	3.4

Source: registers of baptisms

The highest illegitimacy rate – 6.1% – was observed in Wojnicz in 1676-1687. This value is relatively high [tab. 5]; In later periods there were fewer illegitimate children, until the turn of the 1770s and 1780s, when the percentage rose considerably, to 4.5%. This gives grounds for suspecting a link between this phenomenon and the permanent stationing in the town of a small garrison of Austrian troops. A similar observation is confirmed also in the case of Pilzno, where after 1772 the percentage of illegitimate children rose significantly compared to the earlier period (from 1% to 3%).¹⁴ Overall, the percentage of children from extramarital relationships in Pilzno was lower than that in Wojnicz. There were two exceptions: the short period between 1672 and 1675, when baptisms of illegitimate children were registered separately, and the period 1718-1731 (both over 4%), when there was a concentration of illegitimate births in two years: 1718 and 1722. This seems to indicate the generally poorer quality of registration in the Pilzno parish.¹⁵ Most of the mothers of illegitimate children were maiden aged between 20 and 24.¹⁶

d. Birth of a first child

Although the parish registers contain some gaps, parallel series of weddings and baptisms have not always been preserved, and spelling variations of surnames makes this detail difficult to identify, for certain periods we can nevertheless try to determine how quickly the first baby in a marriage was conceived. Among marriages concluded in towns some couples did not have their children baptised in the parish of where they were married, due to migration, while others were childless. The number of childless relationships is difficult to determine. The fact is that between 55 and 70% of couples had at least one child recorded in the baptismal register.

The high standard of the Wojnicz parish register from the second half of the 18th century has permitted determination of the average time between the wedding and the birth of a first child, based on the data on 125 families established in the period 1757-1783. Obvious premarital conceptions aside, this interval was 67 weeks (15 months and about 2 weeks), so on average successful conception took place around six months after the wedding. This interval between marriage and first birth is almost identical to that calculated for Warsaw

¹⁴ In a slightly later period, 1784-1830, in the town of Głogów, the extramarital birth rate was 5.2% and was higher than in the suburban area - 4.3% (Rejman 2006: 115, 116).

¹⁵ The rates observed in Wojnicz and in some periods in Pilzno, are typical of small towns (Kuklo 2004: 22, 23).

¹⁶ Although registers of baptisms rarely gave the marital status of mothers of illegitimate children, the suffixes of their surnames suggested maidens. The age of the mothers was established in Wojnicz (11 cases were verified by the mothers' birth certificate).

in the 18th century.¹⁷ It is worth noting that the median interval was 54 weeks, i.e. less than 12.5 months.

e. Birth of subsequent children

Observation of the intervals between the births of subsequent children provides knowledge about reproductive attitudes in the family unit, the state of its health and the way parents cared for its offspring. A total of 145 spacings between successive births were found for couples married in Wojnicz in the period 1675-1691, who lived there, and who had at least two children. On average, the gap between births was 32 months (median 30 months), and from birth to the next conception 23 months. However, we may assume that the actual gaps were shorter, because there were quite frequent cases of single very long breaks, probably disguising for example miscarriages, stillbirths, or births followed by immediate death of the child. The data from Pilzno from the second half of the 18th century seem to be similarly incomplete. The durations of 106 intergenetic intervals were calculated for this town, with a mean average of 31.7 months (median of 29 months).

On the basis of the much better kept Wojnicz parish register for the second half of the 18th century, data on the lengths of 431 intergenetic intervals were collected. They gave a mean average of 28 months between births of successive children. The median here came to 27.4 months. The period between the birth of one child and the conception of the next averaged 19 months. So statistically, children were weaned at the age of one year and seven months, and by the time they had reached two years and four months their parents were taking care of their newborn sibling. In the 17 families in which the woman had at least six live deliveries, a prolongation of the last two average intervals between deliveries was observed, the penultimate one lasting 33.4 months and the final one 38 months.¹⁸ However, examination of the lengths of intergenetic intervals within families reveals big differences. This suggests that this length might have been dependent on the fate of the previously born child. Among the 431 intervals mentioned above, 68 could be linked to the death within one year of the previous child. In such cases the interval between successive deliveries was only a little longer than 19 months (over 10 months between birth and the next conception), while in the 44 cases that the earlier born child died aged over two years, the break between births was almost 26 months (less than 17 months between birth

¹⁷ Excluding pre-marital conceptions, it was 15.1 months in the period 1740-1769 and 16 months in the years 1770-1799 (Kuklo 1991: 209).

¹⁸ Extension of the last two intergenetic intervals is also seen in 18th-century Warsaw (respectively 27.1 and 32.4 months), but these were shorter than in Wojnicz (Kuklo 1995: 167).

and conception). Although this is lower than the overall average, cases where no death was reported at all were not included in this observation. This confirms behaviour already observed, that when a child died in early infancy, the next fertilization followed quickly (Kuklo 1991: 212). When a child lived more than a year, conception of another child was delayed [tab. 6].

More than half of the observed conceptions (52%) took place later than 1.5 years from the previous delivery. If we add to these the 37 cases of women falling pregnant after the death of the youngest child, we receive 69% of conceptions following on from after breastfeeding the previous offspring or after that child's untimely death. If we bring the cut-off age of the previous child down to one year at next conception, then we obtain 89.5% of all conceptions. The few cases in which women fell pregnant very quickly (within six months of the previous birth) were associated with the death of the newborn baby. Therefore, it can be concluded that parents tended to incorporate spaces of at least a year into their procreation plans, but at times, when the baby was healthy, this space might even be more than two years.¹⁹

Table 6. Wojnicz town: Conception of successive child in relation to life of previous child in the second half of the 18th century

Time between baptism and next conception [months]	conception where the previous child lived		conception after the death of the previous child		no information about the fate of the previous child		observations	
	N	% of a given time bracket	N	% of a given time bracket	N	% of a given time bracket	N	% of all observations
<6	2	13.3	13	86.7	0	0.0	15	6.8
6<12	16	48.5	12	36.4	5	15.2	33	15.1
12<18	43	75.4	12	21.1	2	3.5	57	26.0
18<24	43	78.2	10	18.2	2	3.6	55	25.1
24<	50	84.7	9	15.3	0	0.0	59	26.9
total	154	70.3	56	25.6	9	4.1	219	100.0

Source: registers of baptisms and deaths

¹⁹ Kuklo argues that couples in Warsaw (the largest Polish city at the time) used antinatalistic practices in the second half of the 18th century, and quotes examples of methods of contraception known in that period (Kuklo 1995: 161-172).

This statistical observation may be supplemented by individual examples of the reproductive strategies of families in Wojnicz in the second half of the 18th century. In the marriage of Marcin Kiciński, a tailor, and Anna Tarkówna the average interval between childbirth and the next conception was as long as 27.5 months, with the shortest interval being less than 17 months. During this time their youngest offspring was most likely breastfed by its mother. The effect of such behaviour was greater attention to living offspring, and the fact that none of their children (the youngest daughter was born in 1784) are featured in the register of deaths until 1790. Even longer intergenetic intervals are observed in the family of Andrzej Bogdał, a cooper, and Katarzyna Wojcieszanka – on average 29 months between birth and subsequent pregnancies. Of their five children, four survived to adolescence. The analogous spacing in the family of Błażej Grabowski, a small farmer, and Katarzyna averaged out 28.4 months. They had seven children and none of them died before the age of two.²⁰ All the abovementioned families were connected with (lived in or came from) the church estate in Wojnicz (known as “Księżę”, or *Sacerdotale*), which – if it is no coincidence – sheds some interesting light on the local population consisted of small farmers and artisans. It remains an open question as to whether it was only the mother’s breast-feeding that reduced her fertility for such a long period.²¹ In most other families, such a steady trend of delay in successive pregnancies was not observed, and, where it was in evidence, it was not very consistent. Sometimes it might be suspected that parents among whose children there was a high mortality rate offered more attention to later offspring. In the family of Franciszek Wolski, a butcher, and Marianna of Wojnicz, when in June 1773 a fifth child, also Marianna, was born, three of her siblings were living. But within the month two of the older children died, so the couple focused on the healthy development of Marianna, and the next child was only born two years later. When another daughter, Katarzyna, died after a year and eight months of life, the two children that were born subsequently, Julianna and then Andrzej, also enjoyed their parents’ longer attention (respectively 32.6 and 24.2 months between births and conception of siblings).

f. Numbers of children in families

In the past, due to the high mortality rate among young children, there was a significant discrepancy between the number of offspring born and those brought up. Marital fertility depended largely on the age of the spouses at time of the marriage, their marital status, and

²⁰ Mikołaj, born after his father's death, died the youngest, at the age of two years and eight months.

²¹ Lactation does not give an absolute guarantee of no ovulation; over time the probability of conception increases.

the duration of the relationship. If both spouses' first relationship lasted longer than 20 years, women gave birth to 10 or more children. However, the average for all couples with children was lower. The 50 couples who married in Wojnicz in the period 1675-1691 had a total of 197 children, which is equivalent to almost four per family.²² A total of 305 children were born in the 49 reconstructed families from Wojnicz from the second half of the 18th century (those with offspring), which gives an average of 6.2 children per couple. The average fertility of women having children must have been higher due to the possibility of having children in two and even three relationships. Among the reconstructed families, nine of the married couples had 10 or more children. Ewa Królikiewiczowa, wife of Jakub, a cobbler, had 15, 7 of which survived into their parents' old age. 14 children in 13 deliveries were born to Błażej and Marianna Szachowicz. In this family the child mortality was very high: at the time of their father's death in 1793, only 5 of them were still alive. Jan and Agnieszka Kozłowski, conversely, had 13 children, only two of which died at a very young age. In other large families, 11 and 10 children came into the world.

Full reconstruction of individual families is possible only to a limited extent, owing to the gaps in baptismal registers and the late introduction of recording deaths of children. This method enables us to specify their structure and size at a given moment of existence. Satisfactory results were obtained only for 49 families established in Wojnicz in 1757-1767, which has facilitated approximate determination of the status of the population as at 31 December 1787. To that day 47 of those families had survived, i.e. at least one of its members was still alive. According to estimates, at that time the local family had an average of at least 3.6 children, but no more than 3.9 children. This high result is in part the consequence of taking into account all the children in the reconstructed families who were alive on that day, as well as those who had previously married and set up their own families.

²² Registration of newborn children does not appear to be full during this period; some intergenetic intervals between successive deliveries are very long. Four children per pair is a rather low number.

Conclusions

Behaviour associated with the formation of families and procreation in the pre-industrial period were dependent only to a small extent on the place of residence. The rhythm of habits was primarily determined by the agricultural and Church calendars. This held true for the small towns in southern Poland surveyed. Nevertheless, certain habits, especially those more culturally conditioned, distinguished urban dwellers from the rural environment. This is especially observed in the contracting of marriages, where both selection of spouse and choice of wedding date set them apart from residents of nearby villages. While procreation behaviour seems to be a lot more similar for both communities, there is a need for more in-depth research. The closer look at the small-town family in the second half of the 18th century is possible thanks to the reconstruction of 49 families from Wojnicz. On that basis, the small-town family can be described as quite a stable institution, given that the significant majority of relationships lasted over 20 years. They had six children on average. Observation of the procreation habits of families in Wojnicz reveals some irregularities in natural fertility. Some marriages had quite long intergenetic intervals. Generally longer intervals are observed between the births of the youngest children.

Polish studies in historical demography do not cover very satisfactorily the issues of natural movement of towns and villages in the 17th and 18th centuries, including the influence of external factors (wars, plagues, etc.). Therefore, the question about the possible diversity of demographic development in small towns and the surrounding countryside remains open.

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Table 7. Place of origin of grooms in towns

town		brides from town	Groom comes from			
			another town	a village	the family's town	no data
Przeclaw 1618-1644	N	143	12	22	36	73
	%		8.4	15.4	25.2	51.0
Przeclaw 1660-1680	N	55	5	15	17	18
	%		9.1	27.3	30.9	32.7
Przeclaw overall	N	198	17	37	53	91
	%		8.6	18.7	26.8	46.0
Pilzno 1665-1676	N	85	1	13	70	1
	%		1.2	15.3	82.4	1.2
Pilzno 1705-1744	N	234	9	11	146	68
	%		3.8	4.7	62.4	29.1
Pilzno 1745-1784	N	213	5	23	105	80
	%		2.3	10.8	49.3	37.6
Pilzno overall	N	532	15	47	321	149
	%		2.8	8.8	60.3	28.0
Wojnicz 1675-1712	N	158	4	27	101	26
	%		2.5	17.1	63.9	16.5
Wojnicz 1757-1787	N	237	8	26	193	10
	%		3.4	11.0	81.4	4.2
Wojnicz overall	N	395	12	53	294	36
	%		3.0	13.4	74.4	9.1

Source: parish registers of marriages.

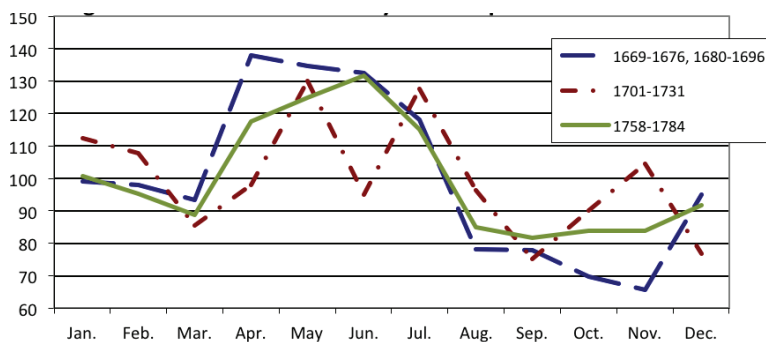
Figure 5. Pilzno town: seasonality of conceptions

Figure 6. Wojnicz town: seasonality of conceptions

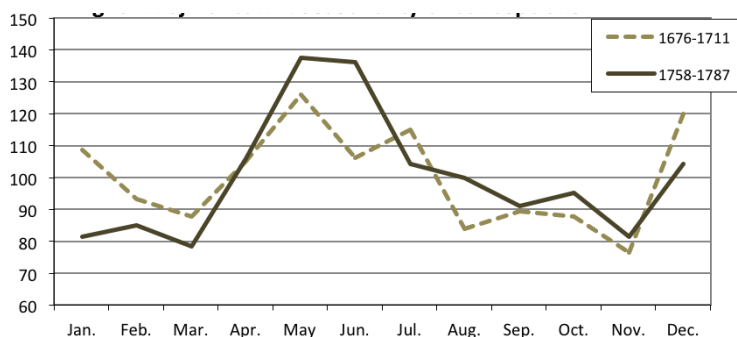


Figure 7. Wojnicz parish: seasonality of conceptions 1758-1783

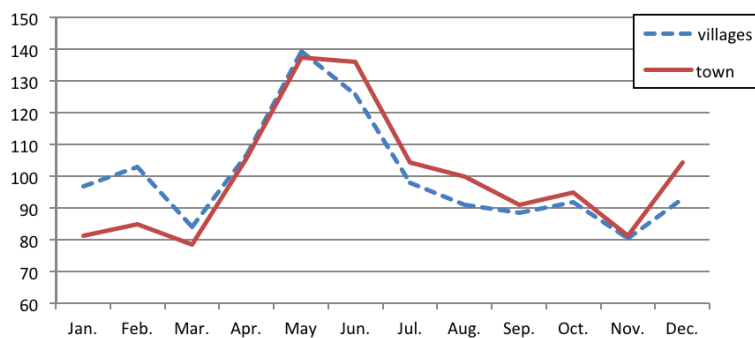
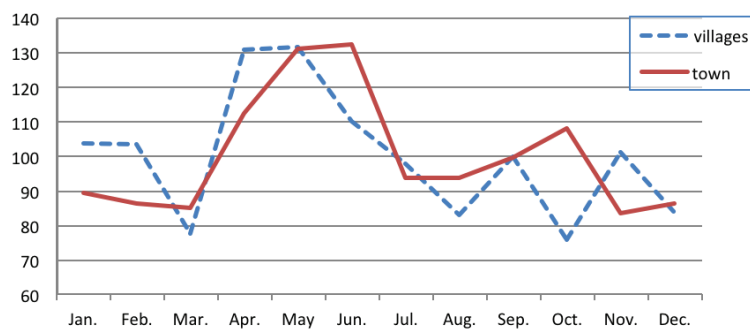


Figure 8. Mielec parish: seasonality of conceptions 1732-1761



Sources of tables 5-8: parish register of baptisms

