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Soviet Utopia vs. systemic transformation: Development paths of mono-functional industrial towns in Georgia

Abstract: The article aims to compare the development paths of selected industrial mono-functional towns of Georgia, considering, in particular, the changes that occurred after the country regained independence. The spatial scope includes four monotowns of Georgia: Chiatura, Kaspi, Tkibuli and Rustavi. The time frame of the detailed analysis, based on population data, covers the period 1922–2021 (in examining the changes that occurred in Chiatura and Tkibuli, reference was also made to the period prior to Georgia's incorporation into the Soviet Union). Based on the research conducted using the case study and desk research methods, the article presents the possible directions of development of the monotowns in Georgia, which were identified based on the assumptions of path dependency theory. In the detailed results, the characteristic features of the units were indicated, and their development paths were presented (both in the Soviet period and after 1991). The study was concluded by assigning the towns to the priority extracted variants of the development paths after 1991 (variants A and B).

Key words: path dependency theory, Georgia, mono-functional industrial towns, systemic transformation, development, shrinking cities

Introduction

The incorporation of Georgia into the Soviet Union was the first turning point in the modern history of Georgia. The 70-year-long membership in the USSR had both negative and positive consequences. In 1921, after a few years of freedom¹, the state lost its ability for self-determination. The central authorities, under the ideology of communism, strove to create a new type of citizen, strongly susceptible to totalitarian propaganda, the so-called Soviet Man. The society was subject

¹ The First Democratic Republic of Georgia existed in 1918–1921.

to political repression, persecution, purges and numerous attempts to eradicate national identity.

Despite many years of blocking Georgia in its aspiration to democracy and the accompanying enslavement of its citizenry, Soviet authority introduced a series of reforms to develop its territory. The structure of Georgian economy was dramatically transformed. From a former typically agricultural frontier area of the Russian Empire², the country would relatively quickly transform into one of the most prosperous republics of the Soviet Union. The industrial revolution, introduced after the end of the Second World War aimed at rapid industrialisation of the country. The supreme objective of the authorities was to transform the economy from one based on primitive agriculture to industry, in particular the mining industry, the location of which was determined by the availability of raw materials. The new economic objectives resulted in the foundation of multiple mono-functional towns intended as auxiliary facilities for a single branch of industry (often a single industrial facility). In the Soviet period, most urban units of this type experienced a period of prosperity, which is confirmed by e.g. statistics showing the successive growth of their population.

However, the situation changed under the new economic circumstances that developed after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Georgia regaining independence in 1991 may be considered as the second turning point that determined the direction of the country's further development. The first stage of systemic transformation, conducted according to the gradual model, led to the economic collapse of the country. During the first two years of transformation, the GDP of Georgia dropped by more than half (by approx. 80% from 1990 to 1994). Foreign debt in 1994 exceeded USD 1 billion. At the most critical moment of transformation, the country suffered from hyperinflation at the level of 15,607% (Wellisz 1996, Barbakadze 2008).

Free market mechanisms revealed numerous defects of the Soviet system. The multiple-year financial aid of the government in Moscow, intended to develop the economy of the Georgian SSR, ended in the early 1990s. The industry that was artificially supported in the Soviet period mostly collapsed after the country regained independence³. The revenues of the major industrial plants would drop year by year. The decrease in production resulted in increased unemployment. The increase in unemployment in mono-functional towns, by definition incapable of quick restructuring, resulted in their successive depopulation.

The derailment of the mono-functional towns of Georgia from their prior development routes in 1991 would not always have the same consequences. For some urban units, the new circumstances caused a practical collapse, while for others they meant a so-called suspension at the starting point, stagnation caused by the practical failure to choose a new path, when it was impossible to continue

² Georgia was a part of the Russian Empire from 1801–1917. In this period, the territories of Georgia were divided into two governorates: Kutaisi and Tiflis.

³ As noted by Wellisz (1996), the unprofitability of heavy industry in Georgia resulted primarily from the prior artificial reduction of the prices of gas from Turkmenistan and artificial increase of the prices of goods produced by Georgia.

the variant pursued in the Soviet period (utopian socialism vs. realistic capitalism). In the structure of the settlement network, one could also identify towns, in which the new direction of development was selected relatively smoothly.

The basis of this article is an analysis of this discrepancy, in particular the causes that determined the success or failure of a given unit. Hence, the primary purpose of the article is to compare the development paths of selected industrial towns of Georgia, considering in particular the changes after the country regained independence, i.e. during systemic transformation.

The time frame of the detailed comparative analysis, conducted based on the population data covers the period 1922–2021. In the analysis of the causes and consequences of the adoption of a specific development path, reference is also made to a longer period, i.e. the years that preceded the incorporation of Georgia into the USSR. The spatial scope includes four selected Georgian mono-functional industrial towns: Chiatura, Kaspi, Tkibuli and Rustavi (Fig. 1).

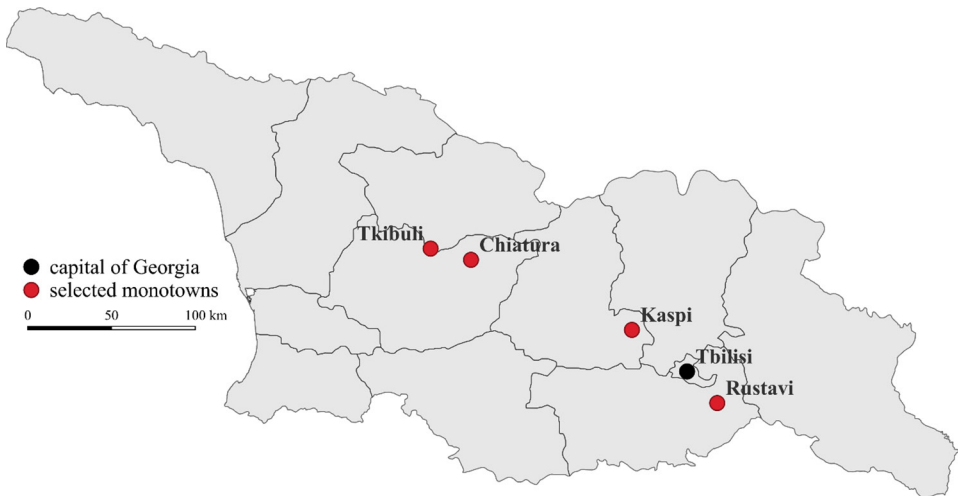


Fig. 1. Administrative division of Georgia's first tier with the location of mono-functional industrial towns covered by the study

Source: own study based on GADM and OpenStreetMap databases.

Theoretical background

The discussion of this particular type of town, namely the *monotown*, should be started from an introduction to the specific nature of the urbanisation processes that constituted the settlement network of the USSR for decades. In establishing terminology, it is important to answer such questions as what a socialist town is, what its main features are, and what assumptions determined the selection of the locations of new urban centres in the Soviet period.

The term “socialist town” is currently defined in the subject literature in two ways. In a narrow sense, most commonly represented by scholars of the post-Soviet area, it means a novel model of housing complex, introduced by USSR authorities in the interwar period (1920s and 1930s). On the other hand, in western literature this term is defined with a broader meaning, as the totality of urban structures that were designed in the republics of the Soviet Union from 1921 to 1991. In this article, centres are investigated that acquired a municipal charter before and after the Second World War and that are considered to be so-called socialist towns due to their genesis and specifics. Accordingly, the author is considering the described term in the broader sense, consistent with the view presented by western scholars (Ilchenko 2018).

A socialist town was significantly different from a centre formed in a capitalist environment. It served propaganda and promoted the new values. It was intended to integrate society, mainly by eliminating the differences (in particular in wealth) between the residents. This so-called “apparent egalitarianism” was highlighted for example by the uniform type of residential development, in which buildings would feature the same or similar standard. The basic unit in the town structure was microrayon. This spatial division was intended to enable the citizens to meet all their basic needs in the direct vicinity of their place of residence. One of the main principles of urban planners was to minimise the travel time to the workplace (French, Hamilton 1979, Reiner, Wilson 1979, Smith 1996).

The so-called monotowns were a type of urban centre characteristic of the Soviet period. They were built across the Soviet Union, most often as auxiliary facilities of large industrial facilities, referred to as “city-forming enterprises” (Crowley 2015). In accordance with the definition proposed by Shastitko and Fatikhova (2015, p. 6), a monotown is “a settlement with such a close relationship between the functioning of a large company (the principal employer) and the economic and social aspects of the town’s life that the future of the town depends on the prospects of the company’s functioning and development.” This type of urban centre was an embodiment of the main purpose of the Soviet planned economy, i.e. economic specialisation of the republic. The selection of the location of a monotown was determined primarily by political reasons. In many cases, a factory/company town, due to its actual unprofitability, required continuous financial support from the central budget. In addition, a frequent practice of the Soviet authorities were price controls on products and energy, which created the appearance of profitability of the facilities and efficient management of the assets owned by the state. The collapse of the centrally managed economy and the rise of capitalism in the 1990s quickly verified the errors committed under the prior system.

The basic theory explaining the processes described in this article is the concept of path dependence, popularised by the American Nobel-prize winning economist, Douglass Cecil North. This concept, by emphasising the importance of historical conditions, describes the impact of past decisions on the current and future development processes of a given entity. In accordance with its basic principles, at the initial phase of the development process, several possible paths of changes emerge. The second phase consists in the selection of one of the avail-

able variants, followed by successive reinforcement of the selected development trajectories. The prolonged replication of one solution often results in a mechanism of locking in the path, by which any change of the direction of development is practically impossible⁴. To consider the given process in the categories of path dependence sequences, it is necessary to differentiate the *critical junctures*, turning points, at which the dominant position of the given variant, i.e. derailment of the entity from the prior development path. This theory, which was initially used in the analysis of market processes (e.g. in the context of the genesis of the effect of domination of the “inferior” product), is currently used for example in the analysis of locations of economic activity, the variety of transformation paths among countries, as well as the development mechanisms of urban units that are the subject of the analyses described in this study (Mahoney 2000, Gwosdz 2004, Dzionek-Kozłowska 2009, Dzionek-Kozłowska 2015, Jaroszevska, Wiczorek 2016, Kaczmarek-Khubnaia 2023).

As noted by Jaroszevska and Wiczorek (2016, p. 108) “the process of formation and evolution of an urban centre, its function and social and spatial structure constitutes a specific development path.” In years 1921–1991, all towns in Georgia were subject to changes under the single (Soviet) development path. The consequent pursuit of set objectives and multiple repetition of a once imposed solution (over the 70-years under socialism) established the initially selected direction of changes to the extent that urban centres quickly experienced locking in of the path, which practically imprisoned them in one development trajectory, often unfavourable from a market perspective. The collapse of the Soviet Union was the turning point, the breakthrough that derailed all republics of the Soviet Union from their prior transformation route.

In the first years of systemic transformation, many unprofitable industrial facilities were shut down, which resulted in a crisis of monotowns, for which quick restructuring, due to their functional characteristics, was practically impossible. All mono-functional towns located in the post-Soviet area (including Georgia), due to the abrupt change of the socio-economic system, experienced many structural problems.

One of the fastest visible negative effects of breaking out of the Soviet development path was a (temporary or permanent) decline in population, resulting, among other things, from a sharp rise in unemployment resulting in numerous migrations of residents, an ageing population, degraded urban areas and heavily polluted environment. As a result of several factors, cities (primarily industrial monotowns) began to experience a process of shrinkage, which is defined in different ways in the literature (depending on the research approach adopted). On the one hand, in the traditional approach, it is explained as a process of progressive depopulation accompanied by a worsening economic situation. The second approach emphasises the multifaceted nature of the social, spatial and economic changes that occur under constant population decline. In this approach, population change is considered in terms of symptoms of other negative structural

⁴ Due to the excessive costs of introducing it.

changes leading to the shaking/breaking out of cities from previous development trajectories that have been reinforced for decades (Strykiewicz et al. 2014, Ciesiółka et al. 2020, Sroka 2022, Averkieva, Efremova 2022, Murray 2022).

After more than a decade of changes, it is noticeable that the circumstances of system transformation led to a wide variety of development paths of monotowns. Some of them failed to overcome the crisis that started in the first years of systemic transformation, other entered a new development trajectory relatively quickly and adjusted to free market conditions. There is no doubt that the decisions made by urban authorities directly after the derailing from the so-called Soviet variant had a significant impact on the pace and direction of their further development. Referring to the basic principles of the path dependence concept, two probable development paths of monotowns may be distinguished after 1991 (Fig. 2).

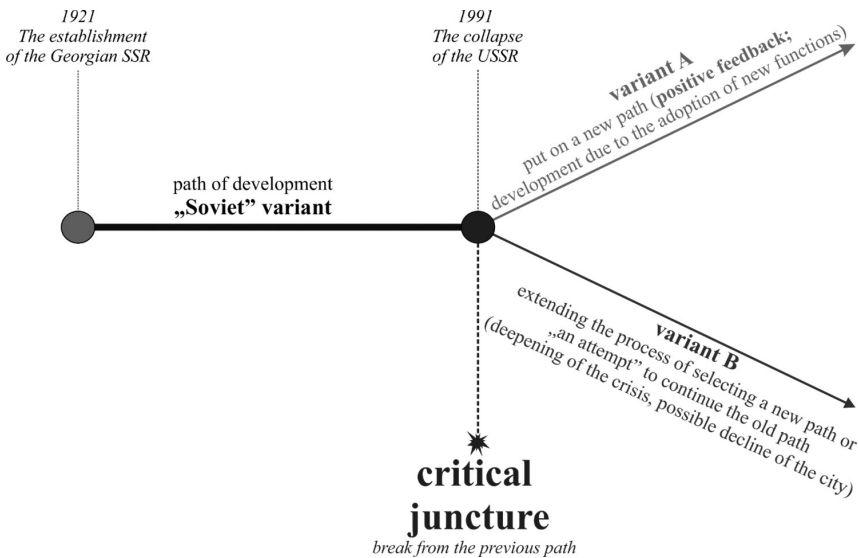


Fig. 2. Possible development paths of post-Soviet monotowns after 1991
Source: own study based on Mahoney (2000), Gwosdz (2004), Jaroszewska, Wieczorek (2015).

Source materials, methods, tools and stages of the research process

For the purposes of this article, a series of secondary data sources was used, including:

1. statistics, originating from the national census conducted in Georgia, when it was part of the Soviet Union and in contemporary times, i.e. after the country regained independence⁵;

⁵ The statistics on population changes used in this study were obtained from the websites of the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat) and the database “Population statistics of Eastern Europe & former USSR”.

2. strategies and analytical documents published by international organisations (the Council of Europe, the Organization of World Heritage Cities);
3. geolocation data (Big Data), made available on Google Maps along with other spatial data from OpenStreetMap and GADM datasets;
4. press releases.

The thematic scope of the statistical data used in the study was limited by their availability. Population data is the only complete source of information based on which it is possible to analyse the changes in the selected monotowns between 1922 and 2021. The fragmentation and, in many cases, the questionable reliability of economic data (particularly concerning the Soviet era and the years immediately following Georgia's independence) caused the study to be conducted using only census data. Such a solution made it possible to analyse the development paths of individual towns over the most extended possible period⁶.

To obtain the results described in the text, the author used a range of research methods. As the most important of them, one may consider the case study (in relation to 4 specific examples of towns) and desk research (collection, compilation and detailed analysis of priorly existing information⁷). At the initial stage of the research process, the available data sources were identified and units were selected as the subject of the further analysis. In addition, literature studies were conducted that permitted the selection of the theoretical concept to explain the processes described in the article. At the next stage, the selected urban units were selected and classified. In the characterisation of the towns, the author focused on the differentiation of their development paths. Due to the necessity of referring to the chronology of events, at the above stage of analyses, the historical-descriptive method was used. The third stage consisted in detailed analyses of statistical data describing the changes in town populations. Graphical and cartographic methods were used to visualise the results obtained. The research tools used include computer programs, including Excel and QGIS. The research process ended in the formulation of conclusions and discussion.

Research results

In the Soviet period, the structure of the settlement network of all republics of the Soviet Union, including Georgia, was significantly transformed. In 1897, 20 years before the October Revolution, the urban population was only 15.3% of the total population of Georgia. By 1959, the share of population inhabiting urbanised areas had increased by more than 27% (Kaczmarek-Khubnaia 2020). In accordance with the principles of the centrally managed economy, funds were distributed in the country based on a hierarchy of towns and regions set in a top-down manner. The authorities prioritised the capital city of the Soviet Union, Moscow, major centres, in particular the industrial towns dominated by heavy

⁶ The statistical analysis was carried out in 2022.

⁷ The so-called secondary, legacy data.

industry, crucial for military and energy purposes (atomic energy) and units of strategic importance (e.g. with sea ports)⁸. Georgia is traditionally strongly connected with agriculture. Despite having many natural resources (e.g. manganese, coal, mineral waters etc.), its towns never reached the rank similar to the most important industrial centres of the Soviet Union, like Stalino (currently Donetsk), Sverdlovsk (currently Yekaterinburg), Novosibirsk or Gorky (Nizhny Novgorod). The lower rank of the towns of Georgia in the hierarchy of the Soviet Union resulted from the peripheral, relative to Moscow, location of the republic, its mountainous terrain, unfavourable for the development of industry that required extensive auxiliary technical facilities, and the relatively scarce, compared to other areas of the Soviet Union, quantity of natural resources (Harris 1945, Pirveli 2001).

Despite smaller financial capabilities, Soviet authorities shifted the structure of the economy of Georgia dramatically. Indeed, its industry was developed and agriculture was mechanised. The industrialisation of the country was connected with advancing urbanisation. Existing towns would develop, assuming additional functions and increasing their population. In addition, multiple new centres were formed.

In this article, development paths were analysed for four industrial mono-functional towns, highly diversified both in terms of the leading branch of industry, location and genesis of foundation. Their characteristics in brief are presented below (Table 1)

As indicated by source literature, one of the negative phenomena, resulting from the socio-economic crisis of monotowns, is depopulation. Due to the above, the analysis of the development paths of selected towns focused on the dynamics of population changes.

The data for the Soviet period indicate that from the granting of a municipal charter to 1989, when the last census was conducted in the USSR, most of the analysed centres were characterised by a constant growth of population⁹. The fact that this tendency was sustained for many years could be considered as confirmation of the economic prosperity in the period, in which they followed the Soviet variant of the development path (Fig. 3).

In older centres, mining type (Chiatura and Tkibuli), founded under capitalism (in the 19th century), which only developed significantly under communism, the population in the period from the granting of municipal status to 1989 more than doubled (an insignificantly higher% growth occurred in Tkibuli). Interesting information is found in the data for prior years. In the period from 1926, when Tkibuli was yet to receive municipal status, to 1939, when it received it, its

⁸ The main city-forming factors in the Soviet Union included industry (of national or regional importance), the presence of a transport hub (of national or regional importance), administrative-political, social or cultural-educational institutions (of greater than local importance), universities and scientific research institutions, kolkhozes and sovkhozes (Pirveli 2001).

⁹ The exception was Tkibuli, which experienced an almost 6% population drop from 1970 to 1979. The data for a broader period indicates that with exception of the above-mentioned years, the town developed similarly to other towns in terms of population.

population increased by almost nine times. The above increase shows how quickly this centre developed in the first years after the establishment of the Georgian SSR and how crucial administrative transformations were in that period. Under

Table 1. Characteristics of selected industrial mono-functional towns of Georgia

Town name	Region	Distance from the region's capital (km)	Distance from the capital of the country	Town (city) rights	Leading industry in the Soviet period	Type of the town (based on the Soviet typology)
Chiatura	Imereti	73	186	1921	mining industry	Town founded under capitalism, expanding its functions in the Soviet period
Kaspi	Shida Kartli	35	64	1959	processing industry	New town founded due to favourable geographical-economic setting, in place of old town in decline
Rustavi	Kvemo Kartli	town is the capital of the region	35	1948	processing industry	New town founded due to favourable geographical-economic setting, in place of old town in decline
Tkibuli	Imereti	36	235	1939	mining industry	Town founded under capitalism, expanding its functions in the Soviet period

Source: own study based on Dawitaj (1967) and Google Maps data.

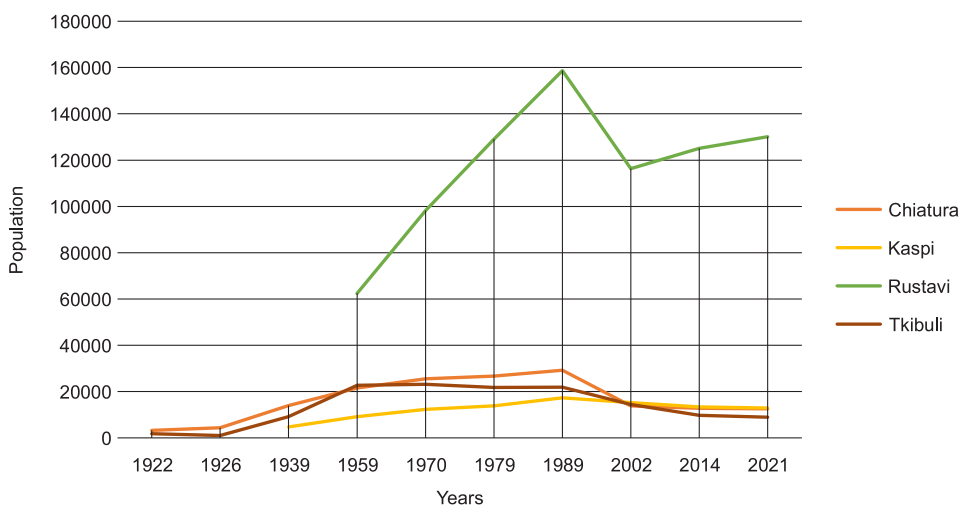


Fig. 3. Population in the selected mono-functional industrial towns of Georgia in the years 1922–2021

Source: own study based on “Population statistics of Eastern Europe & former USSR” (2021).

the centrally managed economy, the granting of the industrial town/urban type centre was connected with a significant increase of restricted grants for development. In Tkibuli, coal was mined from the first half of the 19th century. However, a significant development of the town only occurred in the Soviet period. Financial support enabled the opening of new mines (in the highest prosperity period, coal was mined in as many as four facilities). Despite maintaining the leading role of mining, a lemonade factory, textile workshops and a series of other smaller enterprises were located in the town (Mdzinarishvili 2018)

Chiatura, compared to Tkibuli, was far more prominent in the economy of Georgia at the turn of the 20th century. The first manganese mine in town was opened in 1879. At first, the mining centre was a small village, which in the following years successively attracted new residents. The mining industry was significantly intensified by foreign investment. In 1985, a railway connection between Chiatura and the port town of Poti was built. It was then possible to easily export manganese to foreign markets. By 1900, the centre would supply approx. 54% of the global demand for manganese¹⁰. The increasing yields were curbed for a short time by the outbreak of the First World War. The situation quickly improved after the incorporation of Georgia into the Soviet Union. The manganese mines were nationalised. Chiatura developed in social and economic terms. Its prominence increased in the 1930s, when a ferroalloy plant (of iron alloys) of union-wide importance was opened in Zestafoni, nearly 40 km away¹¹. Thereafter, both units constituted what was called the Chiaturi-Zestafoni Industrial Region (Dawitaj 1967, Avdaliani 2013, Organization of World Heritage Cities 2022).

Another group of towns were the two centres founded in the Soviet period: Kaspi and Rustavi. In both cases, the main factor determining their location was the favourable geographical-economic setting. The arbitrariness in the selection of the location resulted from their planned speciality, i.e. focus on the processing industry. This feature significantly differentiates them from the above-described mining times, of which the location was only determined by the availability of the given natural resources (Dawitaj 1967).

Kaspi was granted its municipal charter as late as in 1959. Despite the relatively late decision to grant this status, after almost 10 years this centre achieved the status of the greatest production centre of construction materials in the Georgian SSR. It was an example of the fastest developing Soviet towns in Georgia. The rate of change was directly influenced by the location. The centre was founded near the capital city of the country, Tbilisi, along the most important transportation route in the Caucasus, route S1, which connected the east part of the country with the regions in the western part, on the Black Sea. Relatively quickly, a station of the Transcaucasian Central Rail was built in town, which additionally

¹⁰ By 1914, the greatest importer of Georgian manganese were Germany (approx. 43% of the total sales) and England (approx. 24%). Interestingly, the group of importers also included the United States. In the later period, it achieved the status of the most important manganese mining centre in the USSR.

¹¹ Manganese was necessary to produce high grade metals. Its alloys, produced at the factory in Zestafoni, was one of the most important exports of Georgia in the Soviet period.

contributed to the growth of its economic potential. In 1958, another facility was opened in town, the “Elektroaparat” factory that manufactured electrical equipment that would be sold both to other republics of the Soviet Union and foreign partners. For the entire Soviet period, the leading specialisation of the centre was the production of construction materials. From the granting of its municipal charter (1959) to the last census of the USSR, the population of Kaspi increased more than 3.5 times (Dawitaj 1967).

The last centre investigated in this article is Rustavi. The town is located approx. 35 km from the capital city of the country (less than 8 km in a straight line), near the Mtkvari river¹². For the entire Soviet period it was the most important industrial centre of Georgia. It is the best example of implementation of the socialist town concept in the Georgian SSR. The data on the population of the town indicates that Rustavi was meant to be a major centre by design, which distinguishes it from the above-described towns. In the first census, conducted 11 years after this centre was granted its municipal charter, the population was more than 60,000. On the eve of the collapse of the USSR (1989), this unit was the fourth largest town of the republic, with more than 158,000 residents. This means that in years 1959–1989 the population of Rustavi grew by 2.5 times. The centre was built from scratch from a village that was a settlement in antiquity. The town was built as auxiliary facility for the country’s largest enterprise at the time, the Rustavi Metallurgical Works. The opening of this facility significantly accelerated the industrialisation of all of Georgia. Due to its operations, new branches of industry were developed (e.g. chemical industry). The location of a large industrial facility also attracted new residents, which additionally contributed to the increased urbanisation of the formerly typically agricultural Georgia. In the following years, a series of new facilities was opened, e.g. a cement factory, an artificial fertilisers factory or machinery factories (Dawitaj 1967, Pinchuk 2019).

The situation of the monotowns of Georgia changed dramatically after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This event, in accordance with the path dependence concept, may be considered as a turning point in the history of the urban centres of Georgia, which derailed them from the prior (i.e. Soviet) development path.

The significant deceleration of the development is proved by statistical data, presenting the population changes in the analysed towns in what is called the breakthrough period. From 1989 to 2002 all investigated towns experienced a significant drop in population, resulting from the economic crisis that followed the actual collapse of Georgian industry. In this period, the country underwent the first and most difficult stage of systemic transformation.

In population terms, the highest outflow was found in Rustavi, the largest and fastest developing Soviet industrial town in Georgia. Over 13 years, the town lost more than 42,000 residents. In percentages, the largest drop in population in this period occurred in mining centres: Chiatura (more than 52.6% of the total pop-

¹² Processing operations (smelting) required continuous access to water.

ulation) and Tkibuli (38.9%). The unit that lost the least percent of population (almost 12%) was the latest and the smallest of the centres, Kaspi¹³.

The results of the last census conducted in Georgia in 2014 indicate that in the following years of transformation the analysed towns became significantly different in terms of development trajectories. Some of them entered the new (capitalist) transformation path, others failed to select a new direction of development. The extension of the new variant selection period deepens the economic crisis or stagnation in these units, which could lead to collapse in the long term.

Examples of towns that failed to enter a new development path are Chiatura and Tkibuli¹⁴. The data presenting population changes in the first of these units show that from 2014 to 2021 the population fell by more than 300¹⁵. The maintenance of this tendency clearly indicates that the town has yet to find its new development path. At present, manganese is still one of the most important exports of Georgia. In 2006, due to privatisation (Georgian Manganese Holding LTD), the operations of the mine in Chiatura were resumed; however, the yield is lower than in the period when the town was economically prosperous. This is to a large extent determined by the advancing deterioration of mining equipment, underground tunnels and freight trains carrying the ore. As noted in the document "Chiatura Reference Plan 2016", the greatest obstacle in the management of the town is that a part of its territory is included in the so-called mining allotment (the mining licence is held by a private company). The above legal condition is an obstacle to operational changes in the town. Due to the above, it remains a typical mining centre.

The situation is similar in Tkibuli. In the town, mining operations are continued, but on a much smaller scale than in the Soviet period. Due to the degradation of the mine infrastructure and failure to meet occupational safety standards, workplace accidents involving miners are frequent. Like Chiatura, Tkibuli is experiencing a continued drop in population. From 2014 to 2021, its population dropped by 871¹⁶. Many town inhabitants choose labour migration; one of the popular destinations is Katowice in Poland (Kokaia 2019).

The second group are the towns that selected a new development trajectory following a brief economic crisis. These units include Rustavi and Kaspi. The first of these towns managed to overcome the 1990s crisis relatively quickly. Already in the census of 2014, this unit recorded a population increase, which proved a significant improvement in its economic situation¹⁷. As a result of the reforms, the centre gained a new function by becoming the capital city of the region, Kvemo Kartli. In addition, its economy was significantly restructured. Rustavi is the location of the largest modern car marketplace in South Caucasus, "AUTOPAPA". In 2009, a private investor reconstructed a Soviet race circuit. This site is an

¹³ In Rustavi, the total population dropped by 26.6%.

¹⁴ Their current situation is described by variant B of the development path (see Fig. 2).

¹⁵ In total, from 1989 the population of the town dropped by 57.2%.

¹⁶ From 1989 to 2021, the total drop in the population of Tkibuli was 59.3%.

¹⁷ From the drop recorded in 2002 until now the population of the town increased by more than 11%.

attraction in Rustavi, which brings international sports events to the town. Due to its favourable location, the unit attracts foreign investment. With German investment, a local cement factory was developed¹⁸. A British-Indian company, GeoSteel, invested in the steel industry. The town is also the place of cooperation of local enterprises and foreign partners. In 2011, the old smelter was privatised (Rustavi Steel Ltd). The steel produced by the facility is currently exported to Asia, the United States and the Middle East (Archive Today 2013, AUTOPAPA 2022).

An interesting case is the town of Kaspi located near the capital city of the country. On one hand, the town has been struggling with the problem of a falling population since the 1990s. From 1989 to 2021, its population dropped by more than 4,000 (1/4 of the total population). The drop, however, was significantly smaller than in that in Chiatura and Tkibuli described above. The town has a good location, also due to placement along the S1 route. The centre, as in the Soviet period, is focused on a processing industry (production of construction materials). It is also developing in functional terms. In the town, in addition to the cement factory, new enterprises were opened, e.g. spirits and sweets factories. It seems that despite the noticeable continuation of trend of population decline, the town entered a new development path. The temporary halt of the development processes in Kaspi was influenced in part by the war of 2008. Bombardment damaged the largest workplace in the town. Despite that event, the authorities of the centre continue the pursuit of the set development objectives. For these reasons, in this analysis this town is considered to have managed to overcome the 1990s crisis and select a new development path (in accordance with variant A).

Conclusions and discussion

The primary purpose of the article was to compare the development paths of selected industrial towns of Georgia, considering in particular the changes that occurred during systemic transformation. The study presents the analysis of secondary sources, in particular statistics, strategies and documents published by international institutions, local governments and press articles. The analysis began with the presentation of the theoretical background, which in first defined the terms of socialist town and monotown. In addition, the possible development paths of mono-functional towns in Georgia were presented, in the view of the path dependence concept. In the following part of the study, detailed results of the analyses were presented. Four monotowns of Georgia were analysed: Chiatura, Kaspi, Tkibuli and Rustavi. Two of the above units (Chiatura and Tkibuli), focused on mining operations, were founded before the incorporation of Georgia in the Soviet Union. On the other hand, Kaspi and Rustavi were founded under communism. The data from Soviet censuses indicate that in the above period all four towns followed the Soviet variant of the development period. All of them

¹⁸ The investor was Heidelberg Cement.

experienced a constant growth of population, which may be considered as confirmation of economic prosperity.

On the collapse of the Soviet Union, a peculiar *critical juncture*, all towns were derailed from their prior development trajectory. The data for later years indicate that the towns focused on the mining industry failed to overcome the crisis that started in the 1990s. The towns focused on processing operations, founded in later years, overcame the negative impact of systemic transformation relatively quickly. The reason for these divergent development paths after 1991 should be found in location features. The factor determining the foundation of the mining centre is the availability of the resource. Both Chiatura and Tkibuli were founded in mountainous areas, at significant distance from the capital city of the country. The peripheral location is an important obstacle to their development. They are definitely more difficult to restructure, which is to a significant extent determined by legal conditions.

In turn, Rustavi and Kaspi were built from scratch near the capital city of the country. After the collapse of the USSR, it was much easier for them to change or develop their prior function. An additional factor that contributed to the economic success of Rustavi in recent years, which is proved by the growth of its population, was its size (it is the fourth largest city in Georgia).

The critical influence of the capital on the process of Georgian monotowns entering new, i.e. post-Soviet, development paths is evidenced by the specificity of the spatial distribution of cities in the country. Georgia's most important growth pole is Tbilisi, with over 32% of its population in 2021. The next most important urban centre is the much smaller Batumi (less than 5% of the population). The capital, through its size and polyfunctionality, attracts the most foreign investment and is also home to most large Georgian companies. These factors mean that Tbilisi's strength is an impetus to nearby areas, stimulating their development. Other factors determining the transformational success of urban centres (not only mono-functional ones) include location along essential transport routes, proximity to seaports or other larger Georgian poly-functional cities (Batumi, Kutaisi). If a city does not meet any of the criteria mentioned above, it is more difficult to change its previous development trajectory, especially if its economy is oriented towards only one sector (Salukvadze 2018, Kaczmarek-Khubnaia 2023). In the case of Chiatura and Tkibuli, taking a new development direction requires organised and long-term action by the local and central government, oriented not only towards the realisation of the development strategy goals of these units but also towards changing legislation, e.g. on the principles of natural resource extraction in Georgia. Their economies require fundamental restructuring, without which these cities will remain trapped in a process of "stepping onto a new path", occurring under conditions of further shrinkage.

The result of the research relating to the demographic dimension of the entry of selected Georgian monotowns into new development paths can be used in analyses of the process of formation of new development directions of cities of this type and size in other parts of the post-Soviet area, particularly units with

similar locational characteristics located in countries with a strong socio-economic dominance of the central centre.

The analysis of the statistical data carried out for this article was based on population data. The scope of the study was significantly limited by the availability of data published by Geostat. The results provide a starting point for further analyses of the socio-economic development of Georgian monotowns. Due to the high exploratory potential of the path dependency theory, gaining access to new data sets (especially economic indicators), describing a more extended period, and collecting primary data will allow new research threads to be taken up, mainly concerning the process of creating post-Soviet development paths (mainly about Chiatura and Tkibuli), or the study of social perception of socio-economic changes taking place in Georgian monotowns after 1991. The results of these studies will contribute to a better understanding of the reasons for the shrinkage of selected Georgian monotowns and thus create recommendations, especially for local authorities.

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Sowiecka utopia a transformacja systemowa: Ścieżki rozwoju monofunkcyjnych miast przemysłowych w Gruzji

Zarys treści: Celem artykułu jest porównanie ścieżek rozwoju wybranych miast przemysłowych Gruzji, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem przemian, które nastąpiły w nich po odzyskaniu przez kraj niepodległości. Zakres przestrzenny badania obejmuje cztery gruzińskie *monotowns*: Cziaturę, Kaspi, Tkibuli oraz Rustawi. Zakres czasowy analizy szczegółowej, opartej na danych ludnościowych, obejmuje lata 1922–2021 (podczas badania ścieżek rozwoju Cziatury oraz Tkibuli odniesiono się również do okresu sprzed włączenia Gruzji do Związku Radzieckiego). W artykule przedstawiono możliwe ścieżki rozwoju gruzińskich *monotowns*, które wyodrębniono w oparciu o założenia teorii zależności od ścieżki.

Słowa kluczowe: teoria zależności od ścieżki, Gruzja, monofunkcyjne miasta przemysłowe, transformacja systemowa, rozwój, kurczenie się miast