# POLAND UPPER SILESIA AND OPOLE PROVINCES: A STONE REPORT

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Here is the next part of the report concerning the condition of Polish stone industry. In the last issue of Świat Kamienia we were writing about Lower Silesia, now we are going to focus on opolskie and śląskie provinces. The area that this part of the report covers can be divided into the following regions: Opole region, Częstochowa region, Upper Silesia, Silesian Beskids, Żywiec Beskids and Cieszyn Silesia. Each region can be characterised differently and the level of development of stone industry varies from region to region.

Opole province is known for its agricultural character. However, its southern part has a rich stone tradition. In the area of Głuchołazy and Nysa we can find many stone companies. It is a result of the fact that one of the most famous Polish stone is mined here - Sławniowice marble. Unfortunately, the mining there is rather small now and it does not contribute to the development of these places. In other places in Opole province we can find many companies which deal with tomb stone industry and materials for building industry. Most residents of the province live in houses (not flats) and their high incomes (in Opole province there are the most people who work abroad) enable them to equip their houses and gardens with expensive goods. Częstochowa region, except for a small amount of aggregates and dolomites, does not possess any stone deposits and, therefore, the stone industry is not highly developed there. Limestones and marls, which can be found in Kraków-Częstochowa Jurrasic Highland Chain (Polish: Jura Krakowsko-Częstochowska) and which in the past were used to erect fortresses, are now used for the production of lime and cement.

Upper Silesia is a region famous for hard coal mining. Also a lot of limestone and dolomite aggregate is mined there. The architecture is historically based on the red brick, however, nowadays we may observe that more and more stone companies are becoming interested in this region. The main reason is the huge market: there are nearly 3 million people in the Upper Silesia region and the population of the whole province is nearly 4,6 million. This makes a huge market for tomb stonemasons and for those who deal with materials for building industry. We separated Silesian Beskids, Żywiec Beskids and Cieszyn Silesia from Upper Silesia due to their natural resources and stone tradition. We can see it, for example, in a different historical architecture of Żywiec, Cieszyn and other towns of the region. In the range of Beskids there are numerous deposits of sandstone and today the greenish sandstone Brenna is mined in a large scale. The mountainous character of this region made the stone, apart from wood, the basic building material for the residents.{mospagebreak}

**INFRASTRUCTURE**

The region being described has the most highly developed road network in Poland. Also their quality is much higher in comparison to other parts of Poland. A4 motorway goes through opolskie and śląskie provinces, whereas the fast road S1 goes through Sosnowiec and Częstochowa (to the north of Cieszyn). We can reach the sandstone mine in Brenna from S1 road in just a few minutes. There is a good road connection between S1 and the aggregate mines located near Tychy and Jaworzno. Besides, the A1 south-north motorway Gorzyczki-Gdańsk is currently being built. The road works in Upper Silesia are very advanced.

It is not so easy to get to Sławniowice. Although Opole region has a good road infrastructure, its southern part is rather neglected. You can get there in the quickest way from Opole via Prudnik and from Wrocław via Nysa. The latter road, however, is of a much worse quality. In general, driving through this region is nice and easy and the location of mines and leading stone companies near the main roads contribute to that. At the same time small mining does not create problems which, for example, Strzegom has to face, such as the problem of roads destroyed by heavy transport, protests of the residents, dust, etc. Also the railway infrastructure is one of the best in Poland. There is a Central Trunk Line leading from Katowice to Warsaw, whilst the railway line going to the west via Opole, Wrocław and Legnica to the Polish-German border is modern. From Katowice we can also get by train to Ostrava (via the border crossing in Chałupki) where it is not too far to Vienna, Bratislava or Budapest. The modernization of the railway line to Cracow is also planned.

The connection which is in the worst condition leads from Opole via Częstochowa to Warsaw. 90-kilometer travel by train from Opole to Częstochowa takes almost 2 hours. Those companies which use inland navigation may use ports in Opole, Gliwice and, most of all, in Kędzierzyn-Koźle. Besides, there is one airport in the region - it is in Pyrzowice near Katowice.

**TRENDY STONE**

The total population of śląskie and opolskie provinces is more than 5,5 million (4,5 million in Upper Silesia province). Upper Silesia is a highly urbanized but also highly neglected region. Therefore, the building material is becoming more and more significant here. It is used both in renovation works and for making new investments, particularly offices in the centres of the biggest cities. In Silesian cemeteries we can find a whole range of stones used for the production of tombs. A well-developed network of wholesale firms enables stonemasons to access stones in a great variety of colours. We also need to remember that many residents of Upper Silesia and Opole province are well-off which can be also seen in the sophistocated tombs in the cemeteries. We may also notice that whereas in Opole region there are various tombs, in Upper Silesia black is the dominating colour. However, it is not a rule and everything depends on the customers' tastes and skills of the local stonemasons. The choices of the residents of Upper Silesia are also influenced by Silesian reality - a high level of dust in the air. All light architectural details go black very soon.{mospagebreak}

As regards single-family houses, we can observe huge differences even between the neighbouring villages. The part of Opole province where German minority and the people who declare themselves Silesians live is characterized by particularly tidy farmyards. The residents often invest a lot of money and effort in the fencing of a house and in the garden. The regions settled by the people who moved here from the east (today Ukraine) usually contrast with this picture. Some older residents of these villages are subconsciously afraid of "the return of the Germans" and they do not invest too much in the places where they live. The situation is changing rapidly as the young generation starts to play the main role. Silesian province, on the other hand, is dominated by urban architecture, mainly based on brick and mineral plaster. Stone facades, interior building elements are usually modern. The architecture of the country areas - including Częstochowa region and mountainous areas abound with stone used as a building and decorative element. Brick fencing made of limestone and sandstone are particularly popular.

**DEPOSITS**

The mining of mineral raw materials in Opole province and in Upper Silesia is highly developed. Most mines, however, produce road aggregate. There are no good monolithic structure deposits which can be used to obtain a building stone. Those which are worth mentioning are the deposits of marble in Sławniowice near Głuchołazy, the deposits of granite in Kamienna Góra near Nysa and the deposits of sandstone in Brenna. According to the Central Statistical Office (GUS), total extraction of building stone in the abovementioned deposits is not more than 10,000 tons a year. If we speak about statistics, we should also mention sandstone mines in Braciszów near Głubczyce and in Dębowiec near Prudnik which, however, concentrate on the production of aggregate, as well as sandstone quarries near Żywiec (Łodygowice) and near Wisła (Obłaziec-Gahura). The basalt deposits in Gracze and Rutki (Opole province) and the deposits of limestone and dolomite in Imielin, Nowa Wioska and Podleśna (Upper Silesia) are exploited as aggregate and crushed stone.

Brenna is a picturesque village situated in Silesian Beskids. Stonemasons associate it with the extraction of Brenna sandstone - a material which is characterized by its blue-grey colour. There are still 3 million tons of Brenna industrial resources. The situation is worse as regards the mining -it is decreasing year by year. The greenish stone is popular locally and it is seldom sold outside the Upper Silesia province. However, there are still five active quarries from which the blocks of sandstone are obtained.

The extraction takes place in a difficult mountainous conditions. Most deposits, apart from Tokarzówka, which are exploited by Kamtex company, are situated on the slopes of the mountains. 5 out of 11 Brenna deposits are currently being exploited. Beskid, extracted by the stone company of the same name, is owned by Mr. Heller; Kormany (or Brenna-M) is exploited by the stone company owned by Józef and Władysław Madzia; Cisowa, owned by Cieślar Madusiak company, Głębiec (the owner is waiting for the license, the previous license of Petra company has come to an end) and Tokarzówka, exploited by Kamtex. The total extraction is difficult to estimate because it is lower than the lowest limits in the statistics of Polish Geological Institute. We are sure that it is not more than 5,000 tons of material a year. Brenna sandstone is used for the production of facings, stairs, walls, or as a garden stone and a sculpture material. Sławniowice, on the other hand, is the name of the marble deposit situated in Opawskie Mountains  near Głuchołazy. The marble in two colour varieties is extracted there: Sławniowice Szare and Sławniowice Złociste. Unfortunately, in spite of a good infrastructure and attractiveness of the material, the extraction is decreasing drastically. In 2006 it was 8,000 tons, but only 2,000 tons a year later. In 2008 the mine -the company owned by the State Treasury - was put for sale. Unfortunately, nobody wanted to buy it. In spite of the fact that Sławniowice marble is presented at most fairs in Poland, it is difficult for that material to go back to the Polish market.

We should also pay our attention to the granite quarry Kamienna Góra in which the extraction was resumed in 2008 by Hochel company based in Świętokrzyskie province which also owns' a large meat processing plant. The offer includes granite blocks with a capacity up to 1,8 m3.

**STONE COMPANIES**

According to the latest data concerning the discussed region presented by the Central Statistical Office (March 2009) there are 1450 companies related to stone industry -1169 in Upper Silesia and 281 in Opole region. It includes 850 stone companies which deal with stone processing and installation. Besides, in the region there are 49 companies which deal with obtaining block stone and aggregates. The remaining 551 companies are the companies which produce machines and equipment for stone extraction and stone processing as well as building companies which fix, install and maintain these machines. Since Upper Silesia is mainly the centre of hard coal mining, we may guess that many of these companies do not have much in common with stone industry. Therefore we may assume that the number of stone companies (including those that deal with aggregate and crushed stone) in Upper Silesia and Opole provinces amount to about 1,000 in total. Among the stone companies, small family companies (which employ up to 9 people) are the dominant group - there are as many as 844 of them. 38 companies employ between 10 and 50 workers, and only two companies (Granitex from Wodzisław Śląski and PPHU Kamień from Katowice) employ more than 50 people.

Similar employment situation can be seen in quarries. As many as 23 quarries employ up to 10 people, and only 4 quarries (including Sławniowice marble) more than 50. The total employment in stone sector in the region might be estimated to be minimum 3,500 employees of stone companies and at least 300 workers of stone-related companies such as machine producers, stone shops, and those that offer various stone-related services. We may assume, however, that the given numbers are to a great extent lowered, and the stone companies declare lower employment than it is in reality. It is related with a seasonal character of stonemasons' work.

The stone companies in the analysed region are located quite proportionally throughout the province. Upper Silesia province is characterised by a very high population density. Therefore, there are very many stone companies which deal with tomb stones and building materials here. The region is currently lacking large companies which process blocks and make large investments. Opole region and Upper Silesia are places where the stone is sold and installed rather than processed. Obviously, it does not concern regional deposits of stone and aggregate. The largest stone centres of the region are Cieszyn district (47 companies), Kłobuck district (31 companies), Będzin district (35 companies), Kluczbork district (45 companies), Nysa district (62 companies) and the city of Katowice (36 companies).

The dominating form of owning stone companies and quarries in Upper Silesia is private ownership. In the group of stone companies nearly 100 per cent is privately owned by Polish citizens. The situation is similar in case of owning coal and aggregate mines. Only a few companies are in foreign hands.

The problem of the region lies undoubtedly in the lack of stone tradition, which, in the time of an increased demand for stone works, is a challenge. Especially Częstochowa region has no such tradition. Many companies even have to employ workers who come from Kielce region where the stone industry was and still is very popular. However, Częstochowa is a good place for such companies. Being close to Świętokrzyskie province and quite a good connection with Lower Silesia makes the Polish stone supply easy. Also the growing number of warehouses in Upper Silesia region is a great source of supply of imported stones. We should not forget that the companies are located between two large markets: Silesian in the south and Varsovian in the north.

The leading companies from Częstochowa region are, as regards the producers of tombs and building details - Gramar company from Blachownia, in case of the companies which deal with facing stone, renovation of facings, and with the elements of architecture - Stone-Art from Częstochowa, and in the group of importers - Pa Stones Polska. In Upper Silesia we should mention Granitex from Wodzisław Śląski, PPHU Kamień from Katowice, Budokam and the stone company owned by Janusz Walotek and Krzysztof Jaworski in Brenna. In Opole region worth noting are Euro Granit Adamus (EGA) from Pakosławice near Nysa, Marmur Sławniowice (in spite of the problems they have it still has a large potential), KMK Marmur-Granit from Głuchołazy, Bromma Granit from Kąty Opolskie, Kamieniarstwo Skraba Ryszard from Bąków and Kamex from Kluczbork.

Last year the potential of the region was noticed by natural stone wholesalers. Currently, there are 11 natural stone warehouses (including store houses, branches, outlets, etc.): EGA in Nysa, Opole and Częstochowa, RR Granity in Katowice, PA Stones in Częstochowa, Interstone in Częstochowa and Chrzanów, Marmur E. Dulemba in Kobielice near Pszczyna, Marmi Corradini in Oświęcim, Rogala in Jełowa near Opole and Brachot-Hermant in Gliwice.

**MARKETING**

Stonemasons are not marketing experts. The leading Silesia-based companies, particularly the nationwide wholesalers, which have their branches there, use the services offered by such magazines as Świat Kamienia. They also appear at national fairs. The participation in fairs is the most popular form of promotion used by stonemasons. Silesian local companies rarely use such forms of advertising. Putting advertisements in various calendars or local maps is quite popular. We can also find adverts in local papers, especially in Gazeta Wyborcza in case of Częstochowa, in Dziennik Zachodni in case of Silesia and more seldom in Nowa Trybuna Opolska in case of Opole province. Smaller companies also advertise their services at spring and autumn regional building fairs which take place in Katowice, Opole and Częstochowa. For many Silesian stonemasons the Internet is becoming a powerful advertising tool. The companies which in the past used Panorama Firm (a book including a list of companies with addresses and adverts) can see how useful a good Internet site can be. But they all agree that the best form of advertising is a well done job.

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