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## **DIRECTIONS OF CHANGES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF POLISH RURAL AREAS - ENTERING INTO EUROPEAN RURAL SPACE**

**Abstract:** Directions of Change in the Spatial Structure of Poland's Rural Areas - Entering into European Rural Space. Rural areas are experiencing a dynamic, multidirectional change. This is the result of the impact of many processes, including rapid, often spontaneous urbanization and structural transformation in the agricultural sector and temporary and permanent movements of the population. Changes in the spatial structures of the countryside are, on the one hand, influenced by European programs and measures, linked to the processes of modernization and organization of rural settlements and economic systems. On the other hand, rapid economic development and spontaneous investment are resulting in the expansion of urban forms of land use – not only in the direct surroundings of cities and towns, but also in those areas which are remote, peripheral and dominated until recently by farming.

The paper presents the genesis of the contemporary land use of rural space in Poland, linking the countryside structures with the intensity and forms of the inhabitant and user economies in the rural areas. The main drivers of change, significantly affecting the emerging forms of farming villages, are processes of intensive suburbanization and semi-urbanisation, the phenomenon of progressive peripherisation of large areas in different parts of the country, the depopulation of the countryside and the profound changes in the demographic structure of the population, the improvement of infrastructure and transport accessibility and the economic revival of villagers. There are also important issues related with advantages such as natural and cultural values of the village.

There is much to indicate that the rational development and use of rural areas will be one of the main challenges for Poland in the near future.

**Key words:** Functional structure, development of rural areas, village spatial structure, urban sprawl.

### **Introduction**

Researchers involved in the issues of rural development clearly suggest that the evolution of the spatial structure of a village is connected to the processes of

change in socio-economic terms and in relation to the cities or regional settlements (urbanization, marginalization)<sup>1</sup>. For a certain period of time, the transformation of rural space was synonymous with the urbanization of rural areas and its numerous symptoms, which were generally treated as positive. However, it was relatively soon indicated that urban lifestyle and the assimilation of rural infrastructure to urban areas do not guarantee an equally high level of socio-economic rural development. At the same time, urbanization in the countryside has launched and revealed a number of negative effects, lowering both the level and the quality of rural life and the possibility of further development [Czarnecki 2008]. Often, the progressive urbanization of peripheral areas (in a regional and even a local sense) and areas with a poor transport infrastructure resulted in such phenomena as depopulation, degradation of socio-economic structures and degradation of rural spatial systems (the gradual disappearance of the service sector, infrastructure, building destruction). All above mentioned issues show that the simple connection of the diffusion of urbanization processes in rural areas (suburbanization, semi-urbanization, counter-urbanization) with the progressive socio-economic development of village does not fully explain this last term.

Modern villages vary greatly in terms of concentration and compactness of settlement systems, morphology and function of each part of the settlement, building types, severity and pace of urbanization. Depending on origin and rural development, rural areas are characterized by large differences in the degree of building dispersion, the size of farms and the quality of housing and economic well-being, as well as access to larger settlements (cities) and transport networks (paved roads, railways, public transport, airports, *etc.*).

In addition, in the period preceding the political transformation in Poland, an agricultural policy was in force, rather than a rural development policy. Due to a lack of attention being paid to the cultural, natural and landscape aspects of villages, many settlement structures were drastically degraded<sup>2</sup>. Paradoxically, in spite of the fact that site development plans have been constantly in force since the early fifties, the dispersion of settlements has greatly increased, and the emergence of housing units and

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<sup>1</sup> Linking rural development with the expansion of cities or metropolization or explaining changes in the countryside through regional development processes can be found in many works elaborated by Polish authors: *e.g.* J. Bański, Z. Hojnicki, B. Domański, R. Domański, G. Gorzelak, B. Jałowicki, E. Jewtuchowicz, A. Klasik, A. Kukliński, T. Markowski, J. Parysek, D. Strahl, J. Szlachta, B. Winiarski, A. Zagożdżon and many more.

<sup>2</sup> The typical village genetic structures are morphological systems of rural settlements related to the characteristics of the natural environment (*e.g.* river valleys, forests, hills, good or poor soil, *etc.*), or the methods of land use for agricultural or non-agricultural means (*e.g.* sediments associated with grubbing forest, management of the three-pole, breaking fields on small or very large plots, *etc.*). Such genetic structures include the linear settlements, the Reihendorf (row village), oval settlements, the Haufendorf (irregular conglomerate village), market village, the Rundling, the Waldhufendorf (“forest village”) *etc.* These systems are often in decline or appear in a modified, degraded form, usually under the influence of spontaneous, uncontrolled urbanization of the countryside.

units of production character (block-level, multi-family buildings, large-scale buildings) in a number of villages, completely inappropriate to the scale and functionality of traditional rural areas, has a political origin [Drobek, Heffner 1994].

Taking all these reasons into consideration means that the initial conditions of rural development in regional and local schemes are not similar, often differing significantly. The quality of the rural environment, an indispensable factor in initiating economic growth, is widely comprehended. It can be regarded as comparable to the values of the urban environment and therefore as a competitive place of residence, work and leisure. An important role for development opportunities in rural areas is played by the availability of rural settlements, in terms of communication and transport, as well as in social terms (as in the openness of rural communities to the impact of external factors). This can be a potentially endogenous and exogenous component of rural community development<sup>3</sup>. These characteristics of rural settlements can be modified, corrected and improved by various local initiatives and external programs that support the rural development.

Rural areas, due to the scope and strength of ties with their surroundings, and especially the relationship between the village and the city, as well as the role and importance of agriculture for the economic and social life of the village, are classified into three general types of relationships [see *e.g.* Wilkin 2007; Rakowska, Wojewódzka-Wiewiórska 2010]:

- **Integrated rural areas:** located in the vicinity of large urban centres, agriculture plays a minor role, most of the population income comes from non-agricultural sources, the unemployment rate in the region is relatively low, they are functionally interdependent on cities, the population is increasing in number;
- **Intermediate rural areas:** areas of high agricultural importance, including large farms, characterized by lower population density than in the integrated rural areas, some of them are small towns that play a role of administrative support, service and supply background for agricultural activities;
- **Remote rural areas:** characterized by a low and declining population density, the percentage of elderly people is high, mostly dominated by small farms, with a high unemployment rate, as well as a high degree of poverty and social exclusion, the technical, economic and social infrastructures are relatively underdeveloped.

An indicating of the rural forms of planning that are most likely to prevail in the coming decades in rural areas in Poland is possible due to the continuous (despite many dramatic turns) character of the processes that shape rural space. In this sense,

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<sup>3</sup> The possibility of the endogenous and exogenous development of a local community is understood as easy access to the settlement from the outside – (transport, various forms of communication) to most parts of the settlements (farms, houses) and on the inside – understood as easy exit from the rural settlement (*e.g.* commuting to work, services, transportation of goods and products) and communication with the external environment (*e.g.* medical treatment, easy participation in local events, the ability to accept and organize such events in the village, *etc.*). [*Developing Europe's Rural Regions... 2011*].

an outline of the potential image of the rural spatial structure in Poland was elaborated for the year 2020 and the following years.

## **1. Trends of change in rural areas during the Polish transformation**

For at least two decades, rural development policy has focused on the challenges posed by the need to differentiate between economic functions (thus is associated with susceptibility to functional changes in rural areas) and, in particular, the possibilities of introducing non-agricultural functions, promoting new forms of non-agricultural employment and supporting the provision of service, as well as implementation of a variety of facilities for different groups of people living in rural areas. These are not the development goals, but the methods that lead to increasing the level and quality of rural life. At the same time, changing the socio-economic and political situation (privatization and its consequences, the rules of market gambling, which in certain regions or in economically weak local spheres, causes complete loss of many types of activities, increase of environmental awareness, *etc.*) leads to relatively frequent alteration of the priorities and objectives of rural development, both at the national and international (European Union) level, as well as at the regional or even local level.

A number of studies have shown that on the regional level we can talk about the significant advancement of the process of transition to a multi-functional rural territory, which is the desired, targeted pattern of rural functioning [Adamowicz, Zwolińska-Ligaj 2009; 11-38]. It is also worth noting that the occurrence, often over a long time, of the transformation of socio-economic and cultural structures of the village (suburbanization, semi-urbanization, counter-urbanization, and gentrification) also results in functional diversity of rural areas, which does not necessarily equate to achieving multifunctional structure [Czarnecki 2008]. It is all the more important that the changes are often impulsive, only planned and desirable to a small degree. To put the issue of rural development in an evolutionary framework, it can be assumed [Kłodziński 2008] that the activities associated with it are focused on three main spheres:

- improving the standard of life of rural families by contributing to the modernization of agriculture and changes in the agrarian structure (technical and organizational progress, improvement of infrastructure, access to information, increase in farm sizes, specialization);
- creation of job places outside the agricultural system, halting the migration process (industrialization of villages, promotion of rural entrepreneurship, expanding local services, external services, such as rural tourism, logistics);
- fostering local initiatives and creating alteration in the rural communities (attracting external investors, integration activities at the local level, image and vision development).

In the period of Polish preparation to enter into the European structures and the accession to the European Union (1995-2005), the rural development policy underwent a relatively rapid evolution, gradually focusing on the directions of changes that generally reduce the gap between the Polish countryside and the level of other Member States, supported by various funds and European programs. Owing to funds and European programs the most enhanced initiatives are those differentiating the economic activity of farms, promote local products and rural tourism, support the development of small and medium enterprises, and those increasing the qualifications, skills and level of education of the rural population. In addition, projects directed at improving the condition of rural infrastructure and protection of environmental resources and the landscape on the local and regional scale are widely subsidized [Heffner 2011] (Fig. 1).

Nowadays, socio-economic development of rural areas is a broad category. Not only does it include the diversification process of the rural economy (and therefore the parallel action of a number of economic functions, meaning the pursuit and achievement of multifunctionality in rural areas), and economic activation of rural communities, which involves the stimulation of local entrepreneurship and attraction of external investment. It also involves processes resulting in the improvement of conditions and better quality of life, achieved by maintaining the natural environment values (often the restoration and regeneration of lost values requires both stimulation of local initiative and residents, and finding economic and technical resources) and cultural values of the village [Marsden, Sonnino 2008].

## **2. Assessment of changing trends in rural areas**

The changes in management of rural areas are heading in two directions. The broader scoping direction is urban “colonization”, which consists of the invasion of both single and multi-family housing on the traditional rural environment as well as on areas previously used for agriculture (including wooded areas). The inhabitant links are external and non-integrated locally [Heffner 2008, pp. 57-71]. Parallel functional systems are formed in the settlement structures, the villages do not turn into multifunctional systems, often due to fading demand for local services and goods, and there is a decline in service functions, which in many cases leads to the depopulation of these regions [Eberhardt 1989]. Similar processes frequently occur in small villages and those located peripherally. However, in many Polish regions, the process of retraining from agriculture has been practically completed (including Lubuskie Region, Opolskie Region, Silesia Region, Lesser Poland, Podkarpackie Region) and only in a few households is the main source of income still farming. Although functional changes in the traditional structure of rural settlements appear rather evolutionary, a number of villages are still being urbanized in a social and spatial sense, and some of them are taking on a multifunctional character, becoming places of residence,

work and leisure (e.g. the expanding phenomenon of “second homes”). In many villages, one can speak of increasing social integration and an improving quality of life.

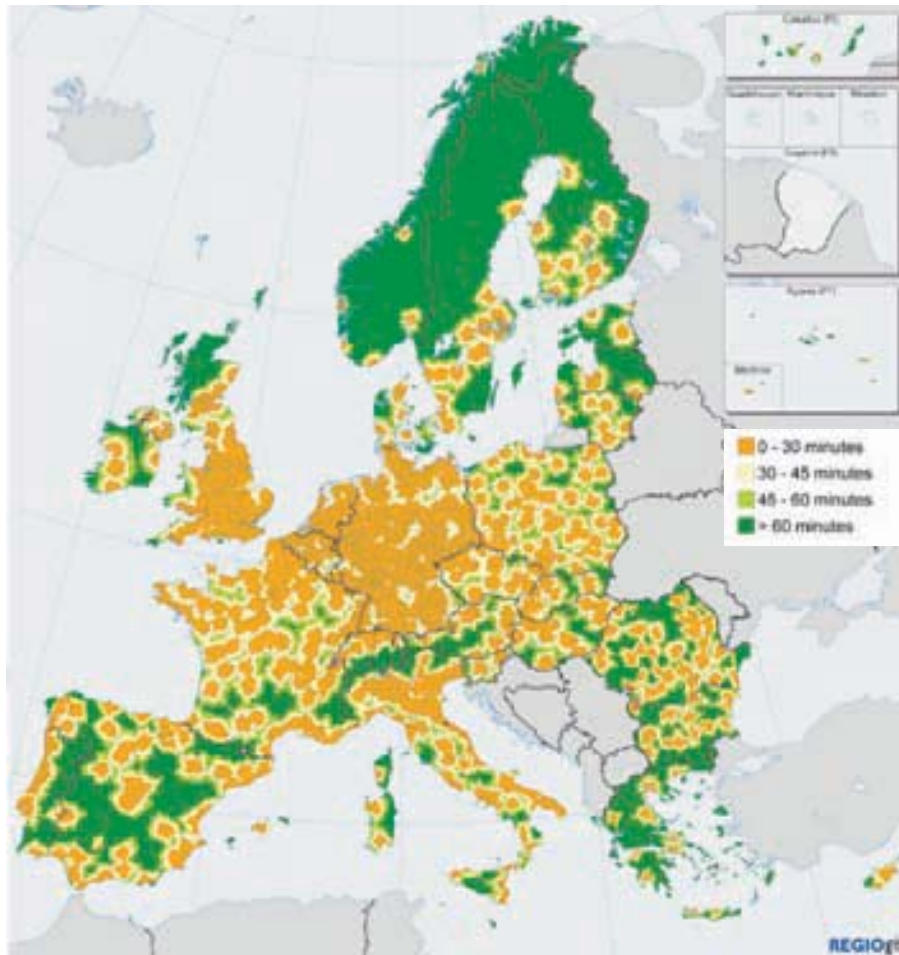


Figure 1. Proximity to a city as a criterion for typology of rural regions

Source: [Dijkstra, Poelman 2008].

Rural areas are highly diverse in terms of economic, social and structural factors, foreseen as the intensity and manner of management and use of space both in the regional system and in relation to urban centres, their rural background and periphery. Their state of development is essential for living conditions and economic possibilities for the rural population, and thus also for the direction and pace of development. In general, however (in terms of space), areas with a lower level of socio-economic development, poorer opportunities and difficult conditions for economic growth, requiring enhancement of the level and quality of life, are dominant [Heffner, Rosner

2005, pp. 187-200]. This is due to the different paths of historical development at the local, regional and national level, evolutionary or revolutionary changing functions of rural settlements, their internal socio-economic structures and spatial systems and socio-economic impacts. Increasingly, though, the rural inhabitants are aware of the need for change, the need for improvement in quality of life and the need for the creation of new development opportunities, initiating and activating the local environment. In regional terms, the rural development prospects depend to a large extent not only on the development of the rural economy and its status, but also on access to local, major urban centres and the nature of the “urban-rural” relationship.

If large metropolitan areas are increasingly developing through interaction with other metropolitan structures, their immediate surroundings – mostly rural – are progressively becoming an urban space with diffusion functions (such as housing, services, supplies, leisure, recreation, ecology etc). The strength and scope of relations and the nature of metropolitan spatial relationships (often understood as major regional centres) allow the consideration of rural areas in terms of the degree of rurality and the dominant trends of development (development performance) [Copus *et al.*; Hadjimichalis 2003]. In the European dimension, predominantly rural, intermediate and predominantly urban regions are distinguished. The first are often equated with peripheral zones and problematic zones, requiring external intervention or activation. The second are treated as a kind of territorial compromise between the attractiveness of cities in terms of employment and access to services, and the benefits stemming from advantages of a rural environment that has not lost all the attributes of the village and its surroundings. The third category are the rural regions with a direct relationship to the large urban centres, where the urbanization process – with all its benefits, and its negative spatial, socio-cultural and environmental consequences – is dominant.

Given the nature of rural development conditions, resulting from the broad sense of spatial relationships in the economy, there are three categories of rural areas: – closely integrated into a large city<sup>4</sup> – rural regions located in close proximity to urban centres, they are often suburban areas of strong urbanization pressure, characterized by a diversity of functional structure, with a predominance of residential, service and industrial functions, their characteristic feature is the gradual disappearance of intensive forms of urban development (sub-urbanization, development

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<sup>4</sup> The concept of a large city in Polish conditions is the subject of ongoing debate – scientific and practical, connected with regional policy and socio-economic policy. Usually, cities with a population exceeding 200 thousand residents are treated as large city centres, although for political reasons in many studies, cities with 150 or even 100 thousand residents have been adopted into this category. In the European dimension, a large city is treated as a metropolis; the potential of its urban population exceeds 500 thousand residents. In strategic studies for the development of rural areas in Poland, a major city is considered as an urban centre with a population of 150 thousand residents, as well as several smaller ones, which are capitals of provinces (Opole, Zielona Gora, Gorzow Wielkopolski). See: [Kierunki ... 2010].

- of communication), decreasing diversity and intensity of the socio-economic phenomena with distance from the centre in the outer zone, the “right” rural areas;
- intermediate, within the influence of a city – these are villages and rural areas of sufficient accessibility (in terms of time and infrastructure) to the main urban centres, located outside the city suburbs (semi-urbanization), they have a positive – in terms of economic, social and cultural – potential stemming from a direct relationship with a city, the beneficial effects of development processes can instantly be felt (diffusion of development);
  - peripheral regions – these are usually mono-functional rural areas with continuing domination of agriculture via traditional or large-scale farming activities, areas with a high proportion of forests – often there are also vast areas of significant ecological importance, they can be characterized by remoteness from major cities and the lack of direct interaction, apparent communication problems, poor external accessibility as well as the accumulation of adverse socio-economic phenomena, the potential development of such areas is endogenous and stems from the advantages of the agricultural value (competing farming, specialized farming, organic farming) or ecological and landscape value (touristic attractiveness, leisure attractiveness).

In cases where the processes of development and management of rural space are the result of spatial relationships and the socio-economic situation in relation to urban centres, rural regions can be represented as the systems located between two extreme situations – rural, inaccessible, peripheral and rural, accessible and urbanized to varying degrees. In Poland, apart from the issue of accessibility, which is relatively good, rural areas are characterized by a predominantly agricultural economy and a depressed structure of socio-economic processes. In the spatial context, the socio-economic development of rural areas is related mainly to proximity to metropolitan areas or areas that are attractively localized (*e.g.* touristic locations). What matters is the degree of degradation of the currently dominant, more traditional business functions (*e.g.* local craft, mining, industry, agriculture and its services) and the extent of the severity of these events (local, sub-regional, regional). At the same time socio-economic development in this aspect determines the non-farm sources of income for the rural population, greater access to a wide range of services, better infrastructure facilities, and reduced developmental differences in relation to the cities.

### **3. Major spatial processes identified in the *National Spatial Development Concept 2030* [Koncepcja... 2011]**

Virtually all legal documents related to spatial process control in Poland, including direct and indirect references to the processes of rural development, predict further concentration of the economic and socio-cultural functions in the national and European centres, located in the core network of growth. This also applies to the progressive intensification of functional links between metropolitan and regional cen-



tres where in practice rural areas do not participate, at least not directly [see *Krajowa Strategia Rozwoju...* 2010].

From the 2020 perspective, and especially 2030, stabilization and even a slow decline in the Polish population will result in an increasing concentration of population in the most dynamic urban centres (cities and regional centres), foreseen as the agglomeration systems covering the surrounding urban or urbanizing rural areas. In the absence of population growth, the consequence will be the further outflow of population from peripheral areas, especially from rural regions – covering both areas dominated by agriculture and small urban centres. This kind of dichotomy of spatial development processes increases the pressure to support the restructuring and remedial processes at different levels – national (Eastern Poland, Poland Western, Central Pomerania), regional and local (cities, depopulated areas).

*The National Spatial Development Concept 2030* estimates, however, that in addition to threats of a socio-economic character, there are also significant benefits that can be the result of an effective planning policy. Its role is to coordinate the territorial impact of other policies, mainly sectorial, which certainly cannot be incorporated into a comprehensive solution. Among the benefits, the following can be mentioned: search, on the regional and local levels, for capabilities for new ways of using development potentials, in consequence altering the current trajectory of development (which will create better job opportunities) and reduce anthropogenic impact on the environment in large areas, which in turn should have a positive impact on the environment and quality of life.

In this context, the importance of EU funding is all the greater, acting more as a catalyst of initiatives activating rural regions, which stimulates private and public funds, and can result in synergy and success. Relying solely on external aid, as evidenced by numerous examples, leads to long-term, but ineffective, assistance for rural areas (e.g. Greece, the former GDR, Italy) [Słodowa-Helpa 2009, pp. 22-28].

#### **4. Factors affecting forms of rural development**

Although the number of factors that affect the emerging and changing forms of rural development is significant, the importance of urbanization processes and phenomena associated with depopulation cannot be overestimated. However, at least some of the main reasons for change should be estimated to determine whether they will affect the shape of the country from the 30-40 year perspective.

It seems very likely that the main factor will be an overall demographic trend, which will lead to a significant decrease in the Polish population. Some also indicate that during this period there will be a significant reduction in outflow of population to foreign countries and the influx of immigrants from outside Poland, especially when it comes to rural areas. The consequence of these trends will be profound changes both in economic sphere and in social relations, in urban and rural areas. At the same time,

one can imagine that for numerous rural areas, particularly those that remain peripheral in terms of economic, social and communication factors, the so-called model of the closed circle of depopulation of rural areas<sup>5</sup> can become a reality. The population outflow from rural to urban areas focuses on peripheral zones in the national and regional dimension (often local), heading to the main urban areas and, to a lesser extent, to the regional centres. Therefore, in their surroundings, the negative processes of rural area peripheralization in interior borderlands are occurring. The outflow covers only some age groups, particularly the elderly and the youngest generation (students, jobseekers) [Findlay *et al.* 2001, pp. 1-15, Mai, Schlömer 2007, pp. 713-742]. In regions with an impact from large urban areas, which are therefore largely urbanized, migration flows will have the character of population exchange, with a positive balance for rural areas [Halfacree 2008, pp. 479-495]. These areas are also becoming a more and more frequent destination for quite high flows of foreign migration, including return migration (Farrell, Mahon, McDonagh 2012, pp. 31–44).

Additionally, changes in the structure of land ownership in rural areas, in the direction of the growth of large farms and increase in the number of very small farms (associated with households living from non-agricultural sources of income), do not affect the maintenance of the existing system of rural space. Another important factor influencing the shape and form of the rural development is the increase of standard of living and a growing awareness of the natural environment and cultural landscape importance [Wilkin, 2005, pp. 9-14]. However, the poor effects of integration processes of rural communities in areas of intense urbanization and the vibrancy of many trends suggest that the structure of rural settlement and landscape forms cannot be superior to those of the first decade of the 21st century [Kajdanek 2012]. (Figs. 2-7).

Modifications in spatial planning are closely related to population density and intensity of economic activity [see *EU-LUPA* 2012], which means that the most important element for the course of these phenomena are the demographic forecasts for Poland. Practically all projections for Poland indicate that by mid-century the population of the country will have significantly decreased [Strzelecki 2011, pp. 45-56].

However, the decrease in the population will affect urban and rural areas unevenly and will have an unbalanced setup at the regional level. The current (first decade of the 21st century) trend of general increase in rural areas will gradually pass into stagnation, and possibly into a declining population number. Only areas with a particularly attractive position (the surroundings of Warsaw and, to a lesser extent,

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<sup>5</sup> The model of the vicious circle of continuing depopulation of rural areas is a concept which assumes that the initial exodus of a large number of people (especially the younger age groups) from a given area results in a drop in demand of both services and manufacturing. Market limitations and difficulties will arise, including those on the labour market. As a result, the exodus continues, leading to a gradual reduction of needs and demand. In the absence of intervention, the process deepens the negative changes, and the phenomenon of depopulation and its effects are derived as a loss of settlement structures in the vast rural areas [see Taylor 2001, Weiß 2002, pp. 15-19].

Cracow, Gdańsk and Wrocław, as well as the coastal zone, mountain zone and lake zone), will be characterized by an increase in population number, whereas other Polish regions will be affected by the depopulation process to a greater or lesser extent. In this context, the analysis of the future direction of Polish rural areas should also take into account the impact of changes in rural development policies pursued within the EU Common Agricultural Policy [Kierunki... 2010]. The framework of this policy has undergone radical changes with the emergence of new socio-economic conditions in the European Union and, since the 1990s, at the environmental level too. Increasing environmental pressure over time has become a very important part of rural policy, at least as important as economic and socio-cultural issues [Bański 2006; Jansson, Terluin 2009].

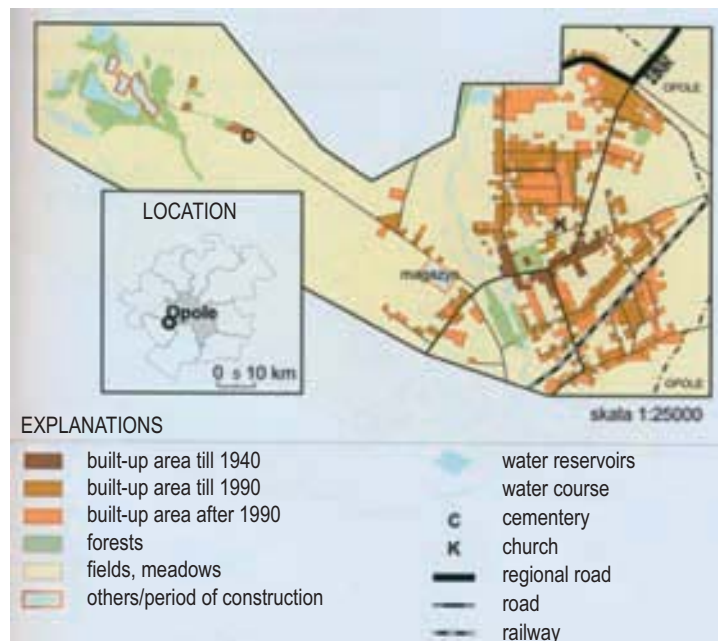


Figure 2. The process of suburbanization in the agglomeration of Opole.

Example of the village Chmielowice

Source: [Figs. 2-7; explanations the same for Figs. 2-7].

In the European vision of rural development from the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the most significant challenges impacting on national and regional policy are the following:

- rapid demographic changes;
- urbanization pressure in the form of suburban sprawl;
- farmland conversion;

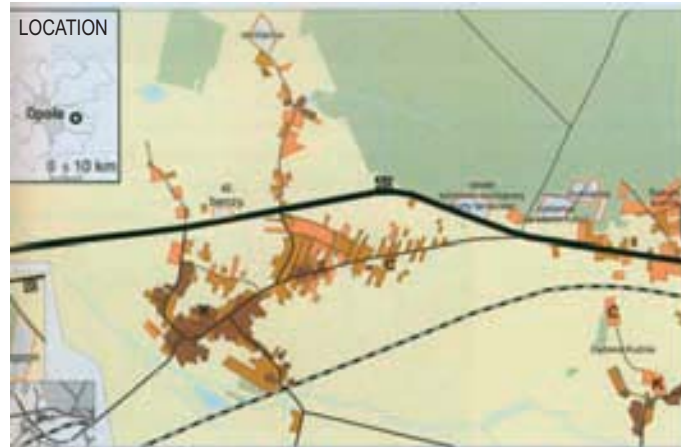


Figure 3. The process of suburbanization in the agglomeration of Opole.  
Example of the village Chrzęstowice



Figure 4. The process of suburbanization in the agglomeration of Opole.  
Example of the village Czarnowąsy



Figure 5. The process of suburbanization in the agglomeration of Opole.  
Example of the village Dobrzeń Wielki

- aim to equalize the level and quality of life between urban and rural areas and between developed rural areas and peripheral rural areas;
- aim to meet the climate challenges both in agriculture and in the wider context of multifunctional and sustainable rural development [Hałasiewicz 2011, Budzich-Szukała 2005].

It is hard to imagine that over the next few decades, the above-mentioned issues will be of no importance for the development of rural areas in Poland. However, one can assume that the urbanization pressure and farmland conversion (overall decline of the population, aging, re-urbanization processes of cities, *etc.*) will gradually decrease. Nonetheless, aims to equalize the level and quality of life will strengthen the trend of sustainable and multifunctional rural development and agriculture development.



Figure 6. The process of suburbanization in the agglomeration of Opole.  
Example of the village Komprachcice



Figure 7. The process of suburbanization in the agglomeration of Opole.  
Example of the village Turawa

The strategies for socio-economic development and planning development evaluated in the country and the strategies for rural areas from the first decade of the 21st century aim at improving the quality of rural life and the efficient use of resources and potentials of rural areas, including agriculture and fishery for sustainable development of the country<sup>6</sup>. The vision of rural areas in Poland, already elaborated for 2020, assumes that the village would be “*an attractive place to live, relax and perform agricultural and non-agricultural economic activity. These forms of land use planning and activities will contribute to economic growth in a complementary manner. Rural areas can provide public and market goods while maintaining their unique natural, scenic and cultural values for future generations. Villagers will have broad access to quality education, employment, health care, culture and science, information society tools and necessary infrastructure. Rural areas will retain their unique character thanks to the sustainable development of competitive agriculture and fishery*”.

Formulated in the 2004-2012 national development strategies it is postulated that *rural areas should become a competitive place to live and run business for the inhabitants of Poland*. It is proposed that the development policy towards rural areas should take into account both agricultural and non-agricultural rural development. Among the purposes of determining beneficial trends in rural areas, the following are mentioned:

- entrepreneurship and non-agricultural activity development;
- increase of farms’ competitiveness;
- development and improvement of technical and social infrastructure in rural areas;
- enhancement of the quality of human capital and professional activity of the rural population.

In the development strategies for the Polish economy that emerged in the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is unequivocally stated that Poland will not reach territorial cohesion if development policies do not take into account the *rural regions, which are often marginalized in the economic, social, educational and cultural aspects*. The need to prevent rural marginalization processes and the usage of rural growth potential are also emphasized, but in the context of the advocated development policy based on metropolitan structures, one cannot be sure how far they are verbal formulation. Depopulation and marginalization processes including relatively large rural areas, both across the country and inside the region, require adequately elaborated and appropriately targeted interventions to release the social and enterprising potential of the village.

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<sup>6</sup> Rural development is reflected both in the *National Development Strategy 2007-2015* (NDS) and in the *National Regional Development Strategy 2014-2020. Regions, cities, rural areas* (NSRD).

## 5. Concepts of change and direction of transformation for Polish rural areas

In Poland, the rural population accounts for about 38% of the population, but rural areas cover more than 90% of the country. The combination of these two values indicates that the density of the rural population is relatively small and the dispersion of rural settlements is significant. It is worth noting that, although for some time, the number of people living in rural areas has not been decreasing, the changes in rural areas have a bidirectional character – in the wider surroundings of agglomerations the population is growing (often significantly), and in peripheral areas, poorly linked with the cities and less attractive (*e.g.* in terms of landscape or ecology) the rural population is decreasing. Both processes are predominantly impulsive, and their profound implications for the management of rural space are, unfortunately, negative.

Recent development trends of rural areas, position retardation spheres and spheres with low dynamics of growth, in the regions located peripherally in relation to the main city networks, as well as more frequent in eastern than western Poland. In the transformation period, of both factors determining the spatial variability of rural areas, an increasingly significant role was played by location issues, centre to periphery, rather than historical issues (the partitioning process and shifting of borders after World War II) [Rosner, Stanny 2007, pp. 327-338].

A synthetic grasp of the characteristics of spatial structure in villages and rural characteristics that favour multidisciplinary socio-economic development allows their collection under the following statements [more about these Heffner 2002, pp. 27-48]:

- only some settlements in rural areas are susceptible to socio-economic development, concerning, in particular, districts of concentrated and dense character, whereas most villages require action initiating activation;
- due to programs and initiatives renewing or activating villages, development processes can be significantly improved, some of which are of fundamental importance, others less crucial;
- a favourable characteristic is high communication accessibility and the possibility of penetration of morphological structures forming a rural settlement unit by a strengthened system of roads and streets;
- a higher number of inhabitants defining the demographic potential of the countryside (at least 300 people, approximately 100 households or dwellings) justifies the maintenance of the primary economic sector and creation of public space;
- lack of negative trends in demographic development (which always lead to the degradation of rural spatial settlements and negative economic impact);
- diverged functional structure of rural areas (versatility of functions), preferably without the domination of agricultural function and to a lesser extent residential domination;



- lack of dispersion of rural infrastructure is a factor that facilitates social integration and determines the accessibility of the countryside, especially from the outside;
- morphological complexity of a village, possible only in systems involving a concentrated and dense building system, with consequences analogous to a lack of dispersion, but improving internal communication availability (departures, contacts, use of opportunities as they arise);
- existence of the centre element in the village with a junction character that is usually associated with more complex morphological structures (linear settlements, oval settlements, haufendorf – irregular conglomerate village, market village, industrial village and marginalized town);
- a number of new facilities, including those of non-residential and non-agricultural functions and the presence of service buildings, industrial buildings and multi-family buildings.

The spatial development concepts associated with the regulation of the suburbanization process in the impact zones of large urban areas in Western Europe are based on strictly followed principles of spatial order conservation, maintaining cultural continuity, sustainable development and raising the integrity of rural settlements [Antrop 2000, pp. 21-34]. The actions and projects undertaken do not generally affect the identity of the village, while they maintain social ties and activate rural community (revalorization of historical buildings, preventing uncontrolled dispersion of building, creating a system of public space, *etc.*) [Williams, Shaw 2009, pp. 326-335].

Back in the 60's, rural regions in Poland were predominantly of monofunctional agriculture character, and were supported by numerous, small local centres (mostly small towns, former towns or larger villages). Later on, the functional structure of the village became gradually complicated, and in the view of fast growing urban centres, the number of inhabitants increased and social and economic systems in rural areas were altered (*e.g.* moving away from agriculture, new industrial services, occupation shift, work in the city, "second homes", access to new retail and service centres). On the whole, the location of second homes in rural areas in Poland is combined with the particular tourist and recreational attractiveness of the village (to a lesser extent, with the tourist attraction of the whole region). The more attractive, in terms of nature and landscape, the location is, the more willing the investor is to commute to the second house, but the availability of land is also an important factor (supply of ground), which in practice determines the purchase of the land<sup>7</sup>.

Many of these phenomena were of an uncontrolled character and a number of negative effects of urbanization were frequently described (often referred to as urban sprawl) in rural areas:

<sup>7</sup> Crucial, in this regard, is the *Act on the Protection of Agricultural Land*, in particular its interpretation, as well as allotment activities conducted at the local scale (municipal administration, private contracts, the Agricultural Property Agency, *et al.*).

- disproportionate increase of non-agricultural land and forestry and disproportionate development of building;
- land consumption is growing faster than population density, wasteful demand for new land, incommensurate with the size needed for a given activity;
- dissemination of planning patterns to promote low-density usage (apartments, offices, services, industry, tourism), in market conditions resulting in the expansion of land to outer areas, villages with good communication accessibility (agricultural, forestry, ecological land);
- difficulties and risks for sustainable development policy.

In terms of space, urbanization in rural areas results in low density building development, lack of continuity and imbalanced land use, excessive local concentration and unilateral use of land, low centrality of spatial organization and a large distance between different forms of land use (the issue of reduced local availability) [Lisowski 2005, pp. 91-100, see also Couch *et al.* 2005 pp. 117-136].

The most important factors in this process include local government policies, developers' strategies and housing preferences of a relatively small group of the middle class. The process of urban expansion contributes to the accumulation of a number of problems – the destruction of forested areas, increased pollution of the natural environment, road restoration, loss of historical and morphological systems of villages, weakening bonds of neighbourliness that traditionally unite inhabitants of small towns and rural areas, and increase of municipal costs. More and more village areas that lie near large cities are occupied by new housing developments, shopping malls, supermarkets, office and service complexes, warehouses and logistics centres, industrial plants, roads, car parks, sports and recreation centres and other types of non-agricultural activities. New forms of management exist almost exclusively in conjunction with the cities, and in rural areas close to the cities, availability of agricultural land and its complexity are reduced [Bański 2008, pp. 29-43].

## **6. Continuation of the suburbanization process and urban sprawl**

There are indications that spontaneous processes intensifying the direct impact of large cities (not only metropolises) on adjacent territories, mostly rural, in functional urban areas, will persist for at least 30 years. The range of functional areas, closely related to the major cities, is growing, adopting and continuing the trend of urban sprawl in the neighbouring open countryside area. This is both a form of building and an urban lifestyle, as well as the increasing dimension of commuting to urban centres. In practice, the strategic policy documents recognize that the process of departing from the traditional division of settlement structures into urban and rural areas, due to the continuing urbanization of rural areas (especially those located in the vicinity of the cities), serves as the model, and the increasing diversity of village functions reduces the importance of the agricultural function.

In Poland, the process of development and land use in rural areas located in large urban environments, and even beyond, has the character of a spontaneous rise of dispersed building, despite many formal regulations, and often enters into open areas, which are ecologically and scenically valuable. The desire to attract external investment at all costs is publicly accepted and is characteristic of the local structures, leading to the duplication of initiatives, opening areas for new projects, which results in the dilution of spatial village systems, degradation of their compactness and deepening difficulties in securing access to infrastructure and communication. An indirect consequence of these phenomena is a massive shift from public transport to individual transport and a near complete disappearance of the railway system. These shifts have a negative impact on the natural environment and the forms of rural area development; they increase operating costs for the rural population and have a negative social impact. Moreover, they are a source of serious economic problems in urbanized areas in the countryside, as well as transitional areas, and in the marginalized areas, resulting in population exodus, depopulation and frequent degradation of the rural settlements.

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