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## Landscape Rurality: New Challenge for The Sustainable Development of Rural Areas in Poland

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### Abstract

The standard of country living was a matter of Polish elites' concern from the eighteenth century. In different historical conditions different concepts of the rural renewal were formed. Today in rural areas of Poland some spatial processes that threaten the quality of life occur. The disadvantageous changes are the result of national or local governments spatial policy and they are an inhabitants' response to it. The political transformation, launched in 1989, included the Polish countryside to The Rural Development Program, which involves the participation of local communities in the implementation of sustainable development policy. Participation has made the quality of life in the countryside a common problem of intellectual elite, institutions of government and other stakeholders. The bottom-up principle has given importance to the common rural landscapes. As a result, present degradation of rural landscapes informs about the need of a distinctive and collective vision of rurality to cooperate with the sustainable spatial policy as the test of individual spatial decisions. Selected cases of the countryside improvement will be presented to prove the presents of ideas level and grass-roots level in the physical landscape. It shows the ideological and social background of the renewal. Contemporary examples of rural settlements demonstrate that contrary judgments, as to what is rurality, are responsible for the unsustainable development.

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Then the possibility of participation of physical and mental landscape in creating a positive, collective image of the rurality, which could interact with the sustainable development policy will be considered. The importance of sensory experiences that come from the landscape in a contemporary vision of rurality formulation will be analyzed. Grass-roots implementation of spatial

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policy requires ordering, social vision. Due to the facts that sustainable development remains rather a concept of intellectual elites and that the landscape is the framework of the perceptive experiences, it should be regarded as the foundation of the wanted social vision of rurality.

## 1. Introduction

Rural areas have been perceived as the main beneficiary of the transformations in Poland since 1989. The change of political system and Poland's accession to the European Union caused deep social transformation in the country [14]. These events resulted in reconstruction of economy, including agriculture. However, the balance of modernization process has not been clearly positive. Spatial problems are the consequences of changes. Once again in Polish history the country becomes a matter of concern – this time not due to economic and social backwardness, yet because of aesthetical issues [3]. The unique rurality – a set of characteristics and spatial relations commonly treated as landmarks of rural areas – is disappearing [17]. The value added to rurality comes from common images. It still needs confirmation in individual aesthetic experiences which stem from the landscape. Preservation and reconstruction of landscape rurality mean a new challenge for the policy of sustainable development.



Fig.1. The gate to open landscape, Sławutowo, Pomorskie Voivodeship, Poland.

## 2. Spatial issues in rural areas

### 2.1. Manifestations and results of landscape degradation

Contemporary countryside is a place of living for people of various trades. House owners are very often people who work in the city and rest in the country. New inhabitants are not interested in the surroundings the way a farmer is, as the latter has had to look after the balance in productive landscape. The spatial consequence of reversing direction of migration is a process of an excessive and chaotic change in the status of farm land (from agricultural to residential), as well as expansion and dispersion of housing development. During the past twenty years' numerous solitary habitats and "sub-rural estates" have been created [9]. A regular network of streets and small plots is included in areas of proprietary agricultural land without considering the logic of both natural conditions and spatial development. The amorphous increase of residential function threatens the productive value of rural areas, is economically irrational and favours social exclusion. It activates self-perpetuating mechanisms of increasing infrastructure expenditures, which destabilise commune and country's finance [11]. It restricts access to values associated with the countryside, such as open landscape, the green, peace and quiet or rural smells and animal sounds. The space is transformed according to urban pattern. It is filled with hardened surfaces of private yards and rural squares, high, concrete fences and buildings deprived of local features. Tourism development has popularised the phenomenon of the country's thematic speciality. This introduces new, increasing incoherent trends into the space of rural amusement parks, so-called thematic villages

and private gardens. The neighbouring stylised villages, minimalist glass villas and plastic figures of gnomes represent the fortuity of supply and demand instead of spatial order purposely realised by the community. New structures of technical infrastructure are built in rural areas. They evoke new dangers, along with improved access to goods such as jobs, culture or information. They constitute the source of pollution, noise or unpleasant smells and lengthen access to farmlands, exclude agricultural or tourist function. They are the reason of many anxieties and conflicts around lifestyle change and lower people's sense of security. Life in modernised environment impoverishes individual, sensual experiences. In social perspective, the spread of urban spatial patterns in rural areas leads to disappearance of regional variety, which violates the foundation of development.



Fig.2. The pattern of landscape degradation, Bogatka, Pomorskie Voivodeship, Poland.

## 2.2. Recognizing reasons of landscape degradation

Consecutive editions of the Rural Areas Development Programme, which is a part of the Common European Agricultural Policy, have established the direction in renewal of the Polish countryside. This European project follows the policy of sustainable development. Its Polish edition is restricted by elementary, mainly economic, ecological and heritage protective tasks. Selective policy strategies are responsible for increasing imbalance [18]. Their objective aspects can be determined as both quality and lack of local spatial law. Temporary and fragmentary spatial policy leaves a lot of space to the market. Emotions of actors playing the market have an influence on business decisions, so well-known to the economists. Meanwhile, spatial planning strategies often evade the influence of opinions and images of users on the realisation of planning postulates [12]. The habit and aesthetic opinion are still permanent choice factors. On the one hand, the attitude of users is shaped by pragmatism, on the other hand it is influenced by desires and dreams. The arguments of experts are ideological and based on knowledge. Intellectual elites care about “sustainability”, “environmental protection”, “preservation of heritage” and “spatial order”. The arguments of professionals fall into conflict with utilitarian and aesthetic motives of inhabitants, who try to outsmart planning strategies [5]. However, this conflict is usually noticed only when architectural or urban freaks hurt someone's aesthetic taste.

## 3. Historical outline of countryside renewal

### 3.1. The idea of cooperatives

Actions undertaken by elites towards improving the existence of peasantry in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century were connected with the development of cooperatives idea. The enlightened Paul's Republic, established by the priest, Paweł Brzostowski in his property in Lithuania in 1769, was meant to be a huge social experiment. It brought a unique (as in those days) improvement of both quality of life among the villagers and spatial quality as well. The existence

of the Republic was finished with the defeat of November Uprising in 1830 [1]. The spokesperson for the cooperative movement in Poland was also Stanisław Staszic, who created The Agricultural Society in his Hrubieszów area property in 1816 [6]. The society continued to be active even through the first years after the World War II. In the interwar period, spectacular successes were achieved by so-called exemplary villages. The most famous of them was Lisków near Kalisz. The achievements in Lisków were given a large propagandist meaning, although Lisków inhabitants owed them mainly to many years' determination of one man, priest Waclaw Bliziński. Under his rules a shop, bank, several schools and roads were built. The village was electrified, the houses began to look better, yards were taken care of and trees were planted in the common area [10]. After the World War II social movement could not be continued, while its previous achievements had been forgotten. These were only the change of the system and Poland's accession to the European Union when pro-social ideas and activities could be reborn.

### *3.2. Reconstruction of the country and villages*

During the World War I Polish architects set up a Civil Committee for Reconstruction of Cities and Villages. As a result of their activity, in 1915 an album of projects called "The reconstruction of Polish countryside", edited by Władysław Ekielski was published [7]. This pattern did not influence shaping the rural development to a large extent. In the interwar period a partial modernization of the rural development was conducted. The result of this parcelling settlement action is (significantly dilapidated) wooden farms in numerous villages of northern and central Poland. The building of Piaseczno near Warka in 1945-1950 was an attempt to connect village reconstruction form war damages with its rational remodelling [19]. The idea of an experiment village proved top skills of architects and was the last example of a purposeful continuation of a village in a traditional shape.

### *3.3. Socialist content and urban form*

In socialist Poland, the village as an amalgam of fields, forests, little churches and wooden huts equalled backwardness and poverty and was opposed to a vision of a modern socialist village, which reflected in the landscape. The aspirations of village inhabitants were directed to the city. In the 70s the boards of public design studios were full of cheap projects of detached houses. In the country of peasantry and working classes they were a trivial version of suburban villas, which were supposed to replace poor, peasant huts, proving social equity at the same time. Blocks of flats in State Agricultural Farms are landmarks of the socialist era. The early development of SAFs followed two-folds and fours of gentry estates, and their spatial system continued good urban examples from the interwar period. The vulgarisation of development and management of the country due to the fall of architectural concept, lack of building materials, as well as a consequence of an established social policy revealed later in the public space.

### *3.4. Relocated rural estates*

Villages relocated due to large engineering investments constitute clear patterns of changing political strategies. The building of Czorsztyn Reservoir, which had been planned before the war, began in the 70s. The inhabitants of Stare Maniowy - mainly farmers, were relocated to the southern slope of Gorce to the estate deprived of any agricultural outbuildings. The story of this village is linked to the drama of people forced by local authorities to leave their patrimony and change their lifestyle [13]. The history of a new estate in Odargowo started ten years later due to the building of a nuclear power plant in Żarnowiec. In this case, the realisation of a deep social and spatial reconstruction was abandoned. In Odargowo, the inhabitants from old Kartoszyno who wanted to remain farmers, were provided with new, rather traditional farms. They all had identical houses and differed only in size of farm buildings. The innovation was limited to trivial aesthetic actions. Designers suggested blue rooftops and walls made of plastered white brick. Nieboczowy in Silesian Voivodeship are the newest example of a relocated village. The investor of the Racibórz Dolny Reservoir gradually buys out plots in Nieboczowy, and the present inhabitants happily relocate to houses in an estate built in Dąbrowa settlement in the village of Syrynia. The unit is a non-agricultural, rather eclectic combination of provincial and suburban spatial systems and building forms.

## 4. Results and Discussions

### 4.1. Landscape as a spatial policy tool

The increase of migration to the country may prove a growth in social significance of the difference between the city and the country [8]. The choice of living in the country often results from the fact that the country, while offering a standard of living which is comparable to the city, also offers the green, peace and quiet and clear air, so limited in the city. The conclusion is, that lasting from the 90s, demographic comeback to the country, serves as realization of certain sensual experiences, available only in the country. Contemporary significance of the country lies also in the rural landscape enabling certain specific and desired type of spatial experiences [16]. They are codetermined by nature, agriculture, cultural heritage and social relations. The green, peace and quiet and clean air are almost synonyms of a rural landscape. Material landscape provides or frustrates the effect of silence, connection to nature or feeling of closeness to a place. The landscape seen as surroundings learnt with all the senses – where we move around, which we observe, listen to, smell and touch, which we know from stories and recognise in photographs, which provokes memories and emotions, is the perfect, most versatile medium [20]. The concepts of the country and landscape have always stood in strong agreement. They covered nature, land, patrimony, scenery, view, country, nation, home, identity and homeland. Despite that, the image of agricultural, green or rural surroundings has limited application in social space. It significantly serves the promotion of healthy, active lifestyle. A house in the country does not depend on the landscape in a similar way. Therefore, landscape as a tool of a bottom up spatial policy stays useless. As a result, new housing investments in rural areas are not created according to the necessary opposition of urbanity and rurality, but multiply suburban estate patterns. Facing a rapid, spatial rural transformation we are left without an ordering, legible image, quite strong and receptive so as to become a common surface for social actions and could reverse trends which are unfavourable for rural landscapes.

### 4.2. Rurality as a sustainable category

Rurality that is both complementary towards urbanity and socially attractive may become a useful category provided that it is perceived as a collection of affirmative images and satisfying sensual experiences, determined by the character of the surroundings. Only then it will be located in the landscape. This type of rurality describes areas which are less transformed than cities, as well as enabling safer, simpler, low energy technical solutions. It refers to areas of more spontaneous actions and not completely organised places, where variety, freedom, multiplicity and unpredictability win over control, sterility and legible order. The work of farmers, energy of immigrants and tourist behaviours jointly and severally create rural space. They are complemented by feelings and emotions, resulting from carnal and mental involvement in the environment [4]. The quality of life depends on the quality of these relations to a large extent [2]. Therefore, everybody has the right to enjoy them. A material, user-satisfying landscape, which mediates in creating a positive image of the country, may serve as the idea of rural spatial development. Such a vision would organise individual investment activity. Established by local society, it would inspire and motivate bottom up actions and constitute support for sustainable development policy.

## 5. Conclusion

Each of historic stages of rural reconstruction was supported by a social vision, which came from the intellectual elite. It expired along with the change of socio-economic relations, in spite of the fact that it was often based in social desires. The renewal of the country in Poland after 1989 has been accompanied by neither top-down nor bottom-up created image, which would enable to positively distinguish spatial forms of the country. Chaotically located estates, thematic tourist enterprises as well as suburban or pseudo-regional building forms prove social uncertainty towards what is rural. In order to improve order and safety it would be better if people could understand and accede towards opinions of experts, who suggest more sustainable practices. This is where the importance of the communication between the elite idea and local knowledge, as well as necessity of a relevant interface come from [15]. The image of rurality as a carrier of the sustainable development idea needs the landscape to serve as a platform of communication.



Therefore, landscape should become a socially significant concept. The means towards the achievement of this aim is identifying country life with a satisfying “existence in landscape”, which restores the meaning of experiences gained in physical relations with environment. Local spatial policy should notice this landscape aspect using appropriate tools. These may be village maps drawn by the inhabitants or other performative spatial practices. Thanks to them, rurality will find its way towards a collection of social images. The restitution of positive rurality is of great social importance, as contemporary country “touches” everybody: directly, through home, workplace or place of rest, or indirectly, though submergence in cultural memory.

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