
GEOGRAFICKÝ ČASOPIS

57

2005

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SUBURBAN AND PERIPHERAL RURAL AREAS IN POLAND: THE BALANCE OF DEVELOPMENT IN THE TRANSFORMATION PERIOD

J. Bański: Suburban and peripheral rural areas in Poland: the balance of development in the transformation period. *Geografický časopis*, 57, 2005, 2, 10 figs., 2 tabs., 9 refs.

The article speaks about the rural areas located in the suburban zone of big agglomerations and the peripheral regions. It provides an analysis of the changes in those areas after 1990, during the period of system transformation and the adjustment of the Polish economy to the European Union is requirements. Special attention is devoted to population processes and related phenomena. Besides generally acceptable statistical data, other data collected during field research in communes representing suburban and peripheral areas was used. The results of field research were also a basis of verification for general conclusions. The main conclusion of the paper is that the period of the last fifteen years has widened the gap in terms of economic and demographic development between both types of analysed areas. The dynamic development of rural areas located close to cities was accompanied by a very slow development or even stagnation of the peripheral regions.

Key words: rural areas, suburban zones, peripheral areas, Poland

INTRODUCTION

Rural areas located in the neighbourhood of big agglomerations (in the suburban areas) and further from them are an interesting field of research, due to the differences in the levels of their socio-economic development. The research

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is becoming even more important currently, as the underdeveloped regions, usually located peripherally, are to be provided with economic help, supposed to level the differences in development, whereas in the suburban areas, very dynamic changes are taking place, accompanied by phenomena and processes not encountered before.

Socio-economic changes in Poland were most dynamic in the cities, and much slower in the rural areas. They were characterized by a high level of spatial differentiation. This referred not only to the rate of transformation, but also to its quality and directions, as well as the benefits and losses they brought about. The aim of the present paper is to point out the differences in development between the rural areas¹ located near big urban agglomerations, and peripheral regions. The hypothesis is that the period of economic transformation (1989-2002) resulted in deepening the differences in development within the rural areas, bringing about usually positive changes in the centrally located regions, and negative changes in the peripheral areas.

The verification of the identified phenomena and processes was accomplished by detailed research performed in 2003 in some selected communes² representing suburban and peripheral areas (Fig. 1). Among the suburban communes, there were: Zabierzów (near Kraków), Kobylnica (near Słupsk), and Nieporec (near Warsaw). All of the sites mentioned have an administrative border with the city and represent areas with visibly differentiated economic functions. Among the peripheral communes there were: Wierzbica and Grabowiec in Lubelskie voivodship, and Dubeninki and Kryniki in Podlaskie voivodship.



Fig. 1. Location of communes selected for detailed research

¹ It is assumed in Poland, following the Main Statistical Office (GUS) classification, that rural areas are the territories located outside the administrative borders of urban units. Therefore, rural areas stand for 94 % of the total area of the country.

² A commune (*gmina*) is the basic administrative unit in Poland. A group of communes form a district (*powiat*), and a group of districts – a voivodship (*województwo*).

THEORETICAL ISSUES

Studying rural areas located in the zone of direct influence of a big urban centre, and the ones located far from important economic centres and characterized by economic underdevelopment, we relate to the theory of cores and peripheries, the theoretical basis for which were created by F. Ratzel as early as in the 19th century (1896). Ratzel's theory was later developed by Friedmann (1969 and 1974) who compiled the concept. The cores in this theory are the regions characterized by significant development potential and ability to generate innovations, whereas the peripheries are the regions of stagnation or slow development, dependant on the cores.

Whereas rural areas in Poland, located far from economic centres and usually underdeveloped, correspond to both connotations of the word "peripheries" (geographical and economic), suburban areas are more difficult to classify. In studying urban regions, suburbs will be peripheries in relation to the centre. Researching rural areas, it is difficult to consider suburbs a core on which peripheries are dependant.

The peripheral area and suburban zone are complex spaces and they do not have one universal definition. Their territory is defined based on a number of heterogeneous methods. Therefore, it is difficult to unambiguously identify where the suburbs end and the peripheral area begins (in the geographical sense), especially as there is another transitional zone between them – a typical rural area.

One of the first attempts to define the position of suburban areas in space was made by Burgess (1925), who developed the spherical-concentric model. The external sector in this model had a suburban character, fulfilling a housing function. Hoyt (1939) reasoned that urban space development does not create concentric spheres, but expands along the main communication routes and besides housing function, it also fulfils other functions, based on the local inhabitants' needs.

The attempts to define and delimit suburban zones were later made by a number of other authors. All of them, to a greater or lesser degree, referred to the strong relationship between the defined region and urban centre, and to the visible dispersion of the settlement system and socio-economic phenomena in connection to the urban areas. Therefore, it can be assumed that the suburban area is a transitional zone between the urban and the rural areas, characterized by a significant functional differentiation and strong social and economic bonds with the city.

In Poland, the theoretical and practical studies on suburban areas have a long lasting tradition. Peripheral regions were analysed somewhat along with other research and the body of literature regarding the theoretical aspects is not rich.

Rural areas are, in many ways (social and economic development, functional structure, geographical location, etc.), an opposite of suburban areas. Usually, peripheries, in the economic sense, are identified with the regions of small economic potential, located outside the zone of high economic activity. In the geographical sense, they are the territories located marginally, on the outskirts of a

region or country. This definition needs to be amplified by another important feature, the isolation of the region in terms of transportation.

Therefore, for the needs of the present paper, suburban zones and peripheral areas will be considered in geographical terms, whereas the result of the research performed should be conclusions regarding possible differences in development between these two categories of regions.

CHOSEN PHENOMENA IN SUBURBAN AND PERIPHERAL AREAS

Contemporary processes and phenomena in rural areas take place within three basic aspects: population changes, settlement development, and functional structure transformations (including mainly economic phenomena).

In the recent years, a new process was observed in the suburban areas: spontaneous influx of people, coming mainly from the urban centre the suburbia surrounded. Therefore, the suburban areas noted a positive migration balance. The highest dynamic of influx was characteristic for areas attractive for house building, with developed technical infrastructure and good communications with the central unit. It is prominently visible in the case of the Warsaw suburban zone, which develops in the western direction, which has better technical and transportation conditions (Fig. 2).

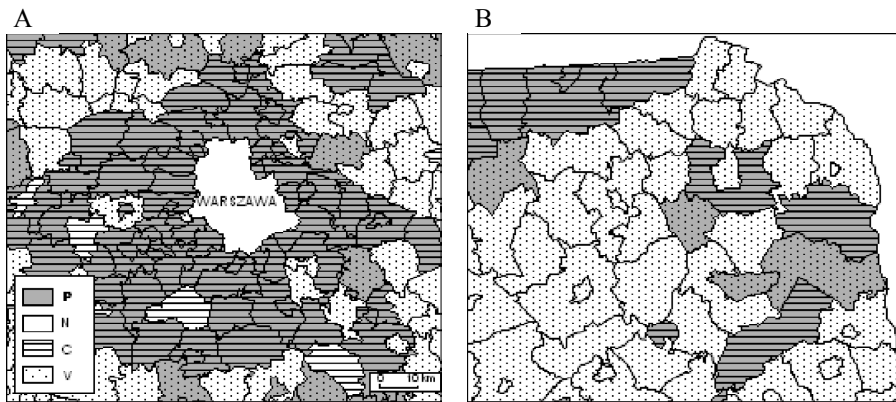


Fig. 2. Migration balance and directions of population influx in Warsaw neighbourhood (A) and in north-eastern Poland (B), 2002

P – positive, N – negative, C – areas with higher influx of urban population, V – areas with higher influx of rural population

The outflow of the urban population to suburban areas was not compensated for by birth rate nor by the influx of population to the city. Therefore, in the recent years, a decrease in the total number of population in big cities could usually be observed. The exceptions were Warsaw and Krakow, settlement places attractive enough not to participate in the general tendency of decrease in population. In these cities, further increase in population was observed, based mostly

on the influx of people. However, even in them, the dynamic outflow of population to the suburban zone was observed.

Peripheral areas were usually characterized by stagnation in population number. Until the early 90's, they were the regions with high outflow of young people. The process was largely paused by limitations of the job market and draining the peripheries of mobile population. Currently, high percentage of people in post-productive age and natural population decline are characteristic for peripheral regions (Bański 2002).

The process described took place in the areas selected for detailed research (Fig. 3). In the suburban communes of Kobylnica and Nieporęt, recent years brought an increase in population, whereas in peripheral Krynki and Wierzbica, population dropped slightly or remained on a similar level.

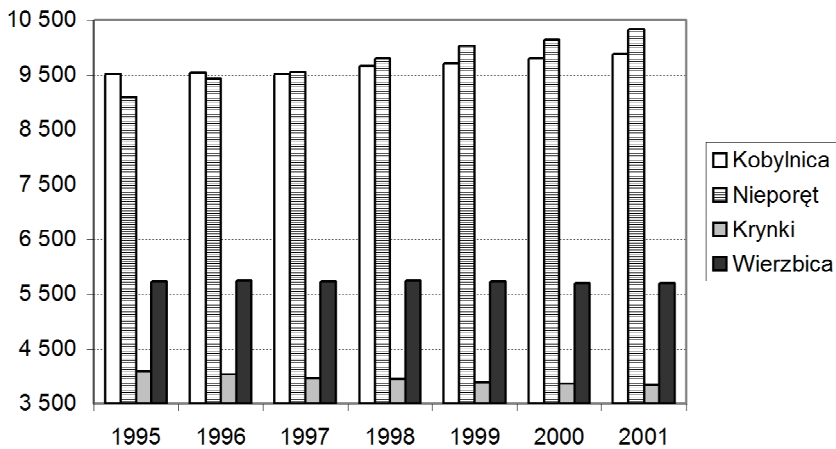


Fig. 3. Population growth of selected communes 1995-2001

Among migrants to suburban areas, the majority were educated people with good income. This creates good conditions for social and economical development of the commune, especially as the migrants have high expectations regarding ecological conditions, as well as social and technical infrastructure.

In peripheral areas, due to earlier migrations, the demographic structure was shaken and is now characterized by a relatively high percentage of older people and excessive male participation in the sex structure. Such regions are described as problematic in terms of population.

The demographic development of a certain region depends mostly on the 20-29 age-group (matrimonial age). Most women giving birth in the rural areas belong to this group (Fig. 4). Therefore, it would be advisable that the number of men and women in this age-group should be similar. It turns out, however, that the proportions are shaken due to higher outflow of women than men from the rural areas.

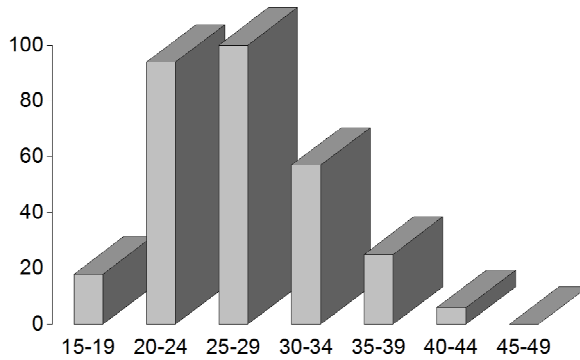


Fig. 4. Live births in villages per 1000 women, according to mother's age, 2001

The outflow of women from the rural areas, especially ones in reproductive age, was caused by arduous work in the villages or the lack of it. Women found it easier than men to settle in a city. Being usually better educated, they had better opportunities to find work and start families in a city.

Although the number of men and women in the suburban areas is similar, in peripheral regions a shortage of women is clearly visible. This is illustrated on the example of areas selected for detailed research (Fig. 5). Unbalanced sex structure proportions are currently a cause for a lot of negative phenomena in those areas. Except for the natural decline in population, the percentage of people in post-productive age is growing, and so is the number of bachelors with minimal chances to get married and the number of farms with no successor. Those phenomena result in other negative processes.

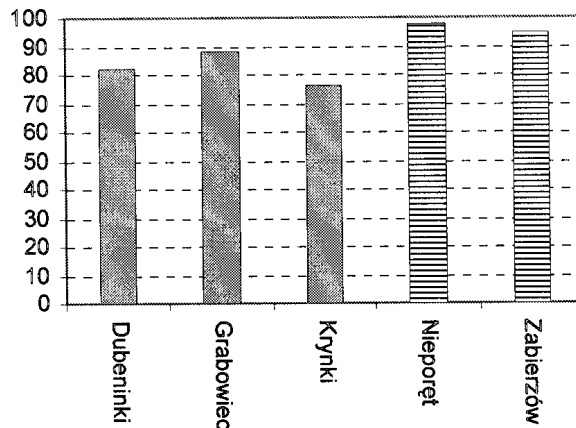


Fig. 5. Number of women per 100 men in selected communes, age group 20-29, 2002

The influx of people to suburban areas was accompanied by other processes, whose pace was accelerated in the 1990's. The main process was the development of housing construction. In suburban areas, housing construction was especially intense in the recent years. A lot of modern settlement areas appeared, consisting mainly of detached houses. Thus the housing function of suburban zone was amplified and in some communes became the main function.

An interesting phenomenon, related directly to housing construction in villages neighbouring big cities, was a rapid increase in the acreage of agricultural lands where farming was discontinued, since it turns out that the transformation of land from agricultural to commercial use can only be performed after several years of it being not farmed (although such transformation must be in agreement with a local master plan and the soil must be of poor quality). Therefore, temporarily unused land is waiting for a change of classification. The transformation is very profitable for the owner since the price of such land rises by a few times. The amount of unused lands in peripheral areas also rose, but it was usually due to the fall of the national sector and the fact that farming has become unprofitable.

The national sector owned large areas of land especially in the north of the country, and that was the region where the acreage of unfarmed lands grew most. They are usually arable lands of low quality, where agricultural production is not profitable. On some of them forests will be planted, whereas the rest will probably be used for farming again as arable lands.



Fig. 6. New buildings on lands until recently used in agriculture, Nieporet commune (near Warsaw), 2003

As opposed to the suburban areas, in peripheral regions, housing construction was minimal. There are a lot of communes in the eastern part of the country, where not a single new house was built in the last five years. Nonetheless, old buildings were modernized and were equipped with some components of new technical infrastructure. There is also a growing tendency of city inhabitants to take over old buildings and use them as so called second homes.

The 1990's brought a noticeable improvement in equipping the countryside with technical infrastructure. At first, mostly water-supply network was developed, but in the late 90's investments moved to refineries and sewage system.

The dynamic development of infrastructure components took place mainly in rich communes with dense settlement network. In regions with sparse settlement, building water supply and sewage network is costly and often unreasonable. The effect was a growing difference in terms of technical infrastructure between suburban and peripheral regions (Tab. 1). Nonetheless, improvement was observed in both types of areas studied.

Among the communes analysed, two noted a decrease in the length of sewage network (Dubienki, Wierzbica). This was due to the collapse of state-owned farms, which were using part of the network.

Tab. 1. The development of water-supply and sewage network in selected communes

Commune	Percentage of household connect to water-supply network		Percentage of household connect to sewage network	
	1996	2002	1996	2002
Kobylnica	60	88	11	76
Nieporęt	9	85	2	4
Zabierzów	156	218	29	114
Dubeninki	30	71	22	7
Grabowiec	23	25	0	0
Krynki	20	22	7	19
Wierzbica	19	28	10	7

The differences between suburban and peripheral areas also include the level of equipping households in some elements of infrastructure (Tab. 2). Information presented in Tab. 2 is based on surveys conducted in randomly picked households (about 100 households in each commune).

The 1990's also brought a dynamic growth of entrepreneurship in the countryside. It is a very positive phenomenon since it brought new sources of income to the rural areas, creating an alternative to farming, which until recently was largely the only available form of earning a living. Only in the years 1996-1999, the number of non-farming companies in the rural areas doubled, and in

1999 it amounted to 1,070 thousand (Kolodziejczyk 1999). The increase in enterprise number was notable in all rural areas, although most were created in the suburban areas, and least in the peripheries. Such disproportions were caused mainly by the fact that the growth of non-agricultural activity is largely determined by location in relation to the city and the level of infrastructure development. Besides, the population potential, especially demographic structure and education level, play an important role (Galczyńska 1995).

Tab. 2. Equipping households in elements of infrastructure, 2003 (%)

	Dubeninki	Krynki	Grabowiec	Wierzbica	Nieporęt	Kobylnica	Zabierzów
Heating	57	70	64	73	78	86	88
Bathroom	92	87	70	82	100	97	95
Toalet	81	86	66	83	100	98	96
Phone	74	75	61	77	79	75	96
Sattelite TV	40	38	18	8	24	55	0
Computer	20	29	29	20	56	29	36

In the city neighbourhood, the role of service and trade sectors, as well as minor-scale production, grew mainly at the expense of agriculture, which had to move its intensive production to regions located further from the city. The highest density of enterprises can be found in communes directly neighbouring the city, and gradually decreases with distance to the agglomeration (Fig. 7). The size of the zone with higher number of enterprises depends on the size of the city.

The lowest level of “saturation” with business entities occurs along the eastern borders of the country. The concentration of non-agricultural economic activities in the vicinity of towns and cities results from their fuller outfitting in technical infrastructure, as well as a more favourable structure to the population living there. In addition, many entrepreneurs “escape” to rural areas, first and foremost because of the very low land prices. As a result, the number of entities, for example in market services, as calculated per 10,000 people of productive age, was 910 in 2001 in rural gminas and 1205 in urban-rural gminas.

All of the phenomena analysed above influenced the differentiation in functional structure of rural regions (Bański 2003). In suburban areas, the agricultural function was disappearing and its place was taken by mixed functions with housing and services prevalent (Fig. 8). In peripheral regions, the agricultural function continues to dominate, although an additional tourism function appeared in areas attractive in terms of nature and culture. Apart from weekend tourism, the popularity of those regions for holiday tourism is increasing. The number of farms providing tourist services has grown notably. Agrotourism is an opportunity for peripheral regions, because it provides households with alternative sources of income. Attending tourists and other house owners facilitates the growth of trade, services (construction, repairs, food) and creates local market for farming products.

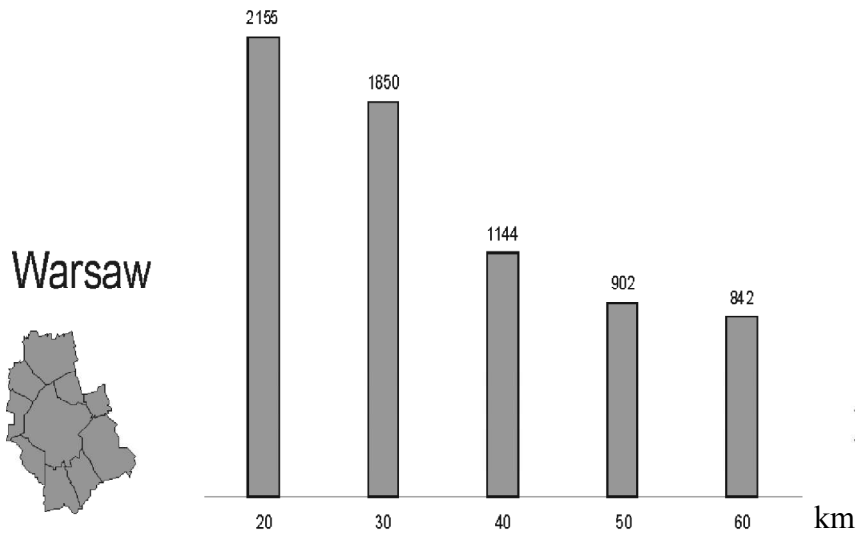


Fig. 7. Number of enterprises in a commune and distance from Warsaw, 2002

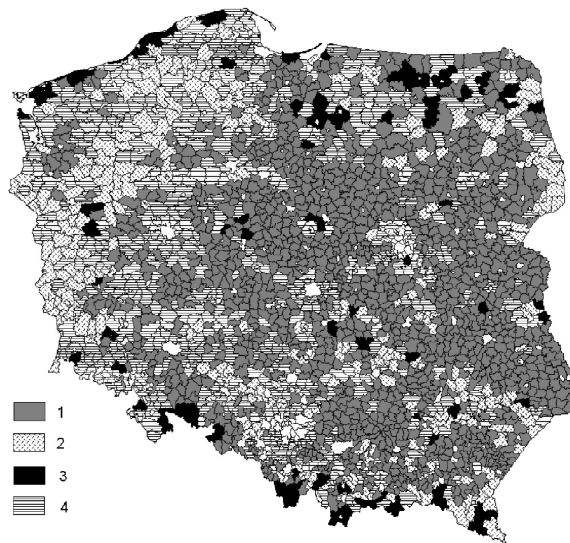


Fig. 7. Economic functions of communes, 1999
1 – agriculture, 2 – forestry, 3 – tourism, 4 – mixed functions

The functional differentiation of the two types of areas analysed is confirmed by the household income structure based on a survey conducted (Fig. 9). It shows that in peripheral regions almost half of the households receive their main income from agriculture. Only a very small number of households are involved in non-agricultural activity. Others receive their main income as hired workers or from pensions and annuities. On the other hand, in suburban villages, agriculture plays a marginal role. The biggest group of households receive their main income from working outside the household. The number of households involved in non-agricultural economical activity is also much larger.

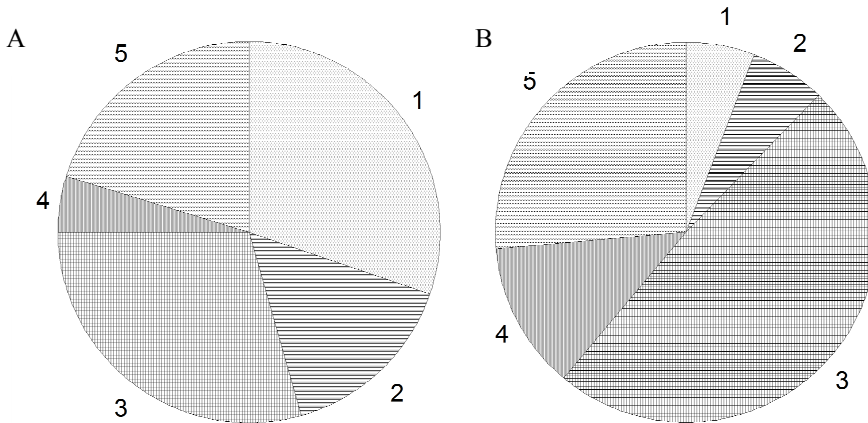


Fig. 9. Main sources of household income in rural regions

A – peripheral areas, B – suburban areas, 1 – agriculture, 2 – agriculture and other, 3 – work outside the household, 4 – non-agricultural work, 5 – other sources

The initial hypothesis that the development gap between suburban and peripheral village is growing receives clear confirmation in the opinions of their inhabitants regarding the changes that took place in their surrounding in the last decade of the previous century. They were asked whether after 1990 there were positive changes visible in their surrounding; over half polled from suburban areas answered affirmatively, which means they consider the changes to be going in a good direction. On the contrary, in peripheral areas, only one in five polled gave an affirmative answer. Therefore, the majority of peripheral village inhabitants were negative about changes taking place in their area.

This negative evaluation of contemporary transformations is based on the lack of ability to adapt to the new socio-economic conditions. Peripheral areas, usually mono-functional (agriculture), are not able to develop without outside help. Agricultural production became less profitable in the 90's and this resulted in growing poverty in peripheral regions. The survey results presented here reflect the frustration of the inhabitants of those regions.

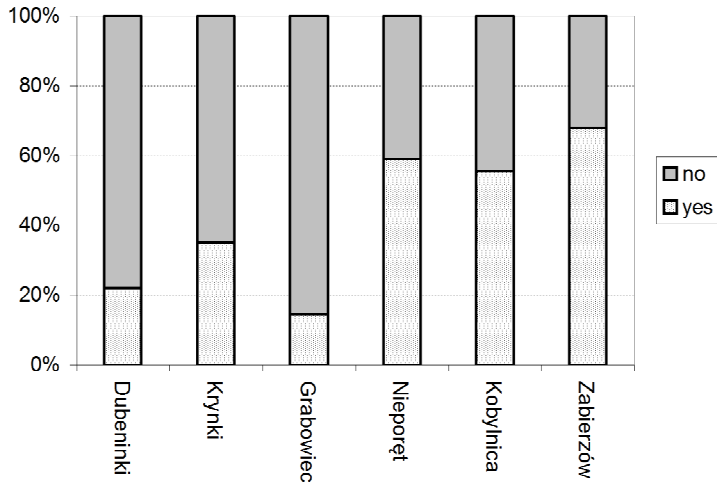


Fig. 10. Village inhabitants answers to question: Did positive changes take place in your surrounding in the 90's?

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis conducted on contemporary transformations in rural areas confirmed the afore mentioned hypothesis that the demographic and economic disproportion between suburban and peripheral areas is becoming greater.

One of the most important phenomena differentiating the socio-economic situation of analysed regions is, on the one hand, the influx of urban population (usually well educated and affluent) to suburban zone, and on the other hand, the outflow or stagnation of population in the peripheries, which makes the age and sex structure, already out of balance, even worse.

The influx of population to suburban areas was accompanied by dynamic development of housing construction and technical infrastructure. These phenomena had a positive influence on the economic situation and created good conditions for establishing new businesses. They were usually small producers or services providers. This prompted change in the functional structure of rural areas neighbouring big cities, so that the agricultural function became marginalized, and its place was taken mostly by housing and services. Agriculture, on the other hand, dominates in peripheral regions, being the main source of income for most households there, with a relatively small number of new business enterprises. Slow development of peripheral areas and the lack of perspectives for the future results in a high level of frustration for their inhabitants. This was confirmed by conducted surveys, which show that only one in five of peripheral village inhabitants is pleased with the current transformations.

In general, it can be said that the 1990's brought further peripheralization of the regions of Poland located away from central units. Especially the regions of eastern Poland and the areas where until recently state-owned farms operated experienced strong peripheralization. Closing the state-owned farms, which em-

ployed tens of workers, resulted in the collapse of local job markets, certain services and social allowances.

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PRÍMESTSKÉ A PERIFÉRNE VIDIECKE OBLASTI V POĽSKU: BILANCIA VÝVOJA POČAS OBDOBIA TRANSFORMÁCIE

Vidiecke oblasti v susedstve veľkých aglomerácií a ďalej od nich sú pre výskum zaujímavé kvôli rozdielom v úrovni ich socio-ekonomického vývoja. Cieľom tohto príspevku je poukázať na rozdiely vo vývoji medzi vidieckymi oblasťami blízko veľkých mestských aglomerácií a okrajovými regiónmi. Hypotéza znie, že obdobie hospodárskej transformácie prehlbilo rozdiely vo vývoji na vidieku a prinieslo pozitívne zmeny centrálnym umiestneným regiónom a negatívne zmeny periférnym oblastiam. Overenie identifikovaných javov a procesov sa uskutočnilo podrobným výskumom v roku 2003 v niektorých vybraných obciach, ktoré reprezentovali prímestské a periférne oblasti.

Analýza súčasných zmien na vidieku potvrdila vyššie uvedenú hypotézu, že demografické a hospodárske disproporcie medzi prímestskými a periférnymi oblasťami narastajú.

Jedným z významných javov, ktoré odlišujú socio-ekonomickú situáciu analyzovaných oblastí, je na jednej strane prílev mestskej populácie (občajne vzdelanej a bohatšej) do prímestskej oblasti, a na strane druhej odchod alebo stagnácia populácie na periférii, ktoré ešte zhoršujú už aj tak nevyváženú štruktúru obyvateľstva podľa veku a pohlavia.

Prílev obyvateľstva do prímestských oblastí sprevádzal dynamický rozvoj bytovej výstavby a technickej infraštruktúry. Tieto javy pozitívne vplývali na hospodársku situáciu a vytvorili dobré podmienky pre zriaďovanie nových podnikov. Boli to zvyčajne malí výrobcovia a poskytovatelia služieb. To urýchlilo zmenu funkčnej štruktúry vidieckych oblastí, ktoré susedia s veľkými mestami, v tom zmysle, že poľnohospodárska funkcia stratila svoj význam a jej miesto zabrali bývanie a služby. Pritom poľnohospodárstvo dominuje v periférnych oblastiach s relatívne malým počtom nových podnikov, kde je pre väčšinu domácností hlavným zdrojom príjmu. Pomalý vývoj periférnych oblastí a nedostatok perspektív do budúcnosti spôsobujú frustráciu ich obyvateľov. To potvrdil výskum, ktorý ukázal, že iba jeden z piatich obyvateľov okrajových obcí je spokojný s prebiehajúcimi zmenami.

Vo všeobecnosti je možné povedať, že deväťdesiate roky minulého storočia priniesli Poľsku ďalšiu marginalizáciu regiónov, ktoré sú vzdialené od centier. Týka sa to najmä regiónov vo východnom Poľsku a oblastí, kde až do nedávna fungovali štátom vlastné farmy. Zrušenie týchto fariem, ktoré zamestnávali desiatky pracovníkov, priniesli kolaps miestnych trhov pracovnej sily, určitých služieb i sociálnych dávok.

Preložila H. Contrerasová