



Young Researchers and the Problems of Polish Rural Areas

editors Katarzyna Zajda, Sylwia Michalska

Pamela Jeziorska-Biel, PhD

Department of Rural and Urban Sociology
University of Lodz

**THE “RURAL RENEWAL” PROGRAMME
AS A MECHANISM OF PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT OF MUNICIPALITIES IN POLAND.
AN EXAMPLE OF THE LODZ VOIVODESHIP**

Introduction

The diversity of rural areas is determined by many factors, including geographical location, the level of economic development, employment structure (including the percentage of people employed in low-income farms), capitals available to residents of rural areas (including human and socio-cultural ones).

Depending on the specifics of a given village, the encountered problems may vary. Most of them concern the problem of diversification of the economic structure, i.e. the development of non-agricultural jobs posing chance to reduce the level of unemployment and the problem of low-level activation of its inhabitants, meaning low participation of citizens in setting the vision of rural development and the pursuit to implement it. A variety of activities funded by the European Union help to alleviate these problems.

The guiding idea of all these activities is sustainable development. It is noted that this development is: a) stable in time, with constant dynamics of its course; leading to the protection and replenishment of the resources, b) self-sustaining, based on different fields of activity in rural areas, and c) integrated, interconnecting own resources with obtaining funds for development from outside (see: Pearce et al. 1990; Juroszek 2008: 54). Its characteristic is to strive for balance between the development of social, economic and environmental protection, conservation of natural assets (McMichael 2004; Wieruszewska 1992: 11; Hawkins, Wang 2012). One of the programs which attempts to compensate for the problems of the Polish countryside (taking the principles of sustainable development into account) is the “Rural Renewal”¹.

¹ The term Rural Renewal written in capital letters means the program itself; while written in lower case – the process of renewal as such.

The article outlines the issue the importance the above-mentioned program for the development of sustainable rural communities located in tone of the Polish voivodeship (the Lodzkie Voivodeship). It presents the results of research carried out in the period: 2013–2014. Their goal was to answer the following questions: 1) What are the characteristics of the Rural Renewal Programme, implemented in the municipalities of the Lodzkie Voivodeship in the context of sustainable development? 2) What are the functions served for sustainable development by Rural Renewal programmes of these areas and which components are strengthened (social, economic or environmental)?

The analysis included 131 projects implemented by all rural communities that implemented the programme in the programming period between 2004–2006 and were located in Lodzkie Voivodeship. At that time, Poland received the first tranche of EU funds (within the Sectoral Operational Programme “Restructuring and modernization of agriculture and rural development 2004–2006”) to support the Rural Renewal Programme, and the majority of Polish municipalities joined the programme then, for the first time.

The techniques used in the study were content analysis, free interviews with experts from selected municipalities from the region area – Nowosolna (as the area most active in the activities Rural Renewal). The documents analyzed were provided by the Marshal’s Office in Lodz (i.e. the unit responsible for distributing funds from the Rural Renewal Programme), such as application forms submitted by municipalities, where their objectives were outlined, on which they intended to spend the raised funds. On this basis, the typology of projects was created, by their implementation object. The projects were divided into 6 basic types, the seventh type of projects is the “other”, and the eighth type includes multi-projects, which is about several types of objects.

Ten free interviews were carried out. The selection of respondents was intentional. Among the speakers, there were representatives of local government – the commune head as a person involved in the process of restoration of villages in the municipality; The President of the Municipal Council – as a person who lives in front of one of the completed projects and is personally involved in its functioning; Nowosolna commune office worker – responsible for raising external funds in the Municipality; as well as representatives of the local community – the leaders (six of them) from rural locations where projects have been implemented under Measure 2.3 SOP 2004–2006. Interviews were also conducted with people directly involved in the operation of certain projects (among them the Director of Wiaczyn Dolny Secondary School, the Director of the Centre for Social Welfare in the Municipality).

“Rural Renewal” – the development of the European idea

The cradle of the “Rural Renewal” is Bavaria. In 1976 the name was introduced, although these activities were previously practiced at the local development in rural areas. Combined with the assemblage of land, “Rural Renewal”

was the state policy one way of equalizing opportunities in less developed regions (Próll 1995; Idziak 2004: 26). Due to the system implementation based on the structure of the national government, the Bavarian “Rural Renewal” is defined as a “top-down” (Scheiber 1997). In the similar way such activities were carried out in a different German state, Rhineland-Palatinate (cf. Wilczynski 2000: 20).

With the beginning of the eighties of the twentieth century, the “Rural Renewal” began to spread to more lands of Germany, and in 1981, as it was taken in Lower Austria. The success of the implementation of the “Rural Renewal” in Lower Austria was the result of changes in the procedures for implementation of projects. The attentively and the commitment and contribution to the action of local communities and NGOs started being appreciated. The “bottom-up” initiatives became a unique differentiator of lower Austrian “Rural Renewal”, as opposed to “top-down” process management method, implemented in Bavaria and the Rhineland – Palatinate. The participation and involvement of its citizens in the renewal of their town has been recognized as an important element and distinguishing the implementation of this process.

It should be noted that the Europe Rural Renewal programs are more effective and have greater impact in those regions where their shape, approach and instruments used are an expression of the community self-support for rural development policy, regardless of the financial activities of the EU. However, this applies to those countries, regions and federal states where Rural Renewal programs are widespread in terms of quantity of currently participating villages (municipalities), their complexity (planning, animation community participation, soft and investment projects), support for a wide variety of projects, with a wide range of beneficiaries (public, private and religious entities). In these countries, a high level of investment allows the control of the process of Rural Renewal by the directed flow of resources and thus grants that support to a wide range of selected areas and a number of projects allowing to carry out a comprehensive renewal of the area.

In Poland, “Rural Renewal” was initiated in the 1990s in the Opole Voivodeship (see Map 1). The objective of the programme was to take action related to space adjustment in terms of technical and social infrastructure, landscaping, architecture and services and the execution of projects raising the standard of living (Wilczynski 2000). The intended result of this kind of actions was the enhancement of living conditions in the country, investments, development of services, and through that – the creation of new jobs and better livelihoods also outside agriculture. However, the core of this program was to activate the rural population (Wilczynski 2000). Rural Renewal is defined here as: planned development process implemented by the community based on local resources and using external support (debate 2012: 7). Rural Renewal was to focus on: improving the standard and quality of life of rural residents, preserving the identity

and integrity of the village and its economic development (Wilczynski 2000). Local (endogenous), and external (exogenous) resources were to be used in the socio-economic development. The Rural Renewal Programme was supposed to be comprehensive, i.e. corresponding to the different problems of the entire municipality/village and not just selected groups of citizens or one field, as well as be based on the participation of residents in the development process and making use of the potential of external institutions for expert assistance in solving local problems (*ibidem*: 15).

The issue of rural renewal in Poland considerably gained importance after the accession to the European Union and the emergence of the possibility of using the available funds to support programs in rural areas. Rural Renewal while in the first term programming in the Sectoral Operational Programme “Restructuring and modernization of food sector in the years 2004–2006” (hereinafter SOP) has been linked to and entered into the framework of Sustainable Rural Development. Scheduled financial support for the measure 2.3 “Rural renewal and the preservation and protection of the cultural heritage of rural areas” was then 90 million Euro (Kowalczyk 2007). With this action across the country 1 199 municipalities have benefited, that is 55.20% of all eligible units have benefited from the aid support. In the Lodz region the percentage was 47.17%.

The rules of Rural Renewal refer to the neo-endogenous development principles, which includes the endogenous and exogenous forces in the development process (Ward et. al. 2005: 5). The main role, according to the British village sociologist, C. Ray, are being played into the development of human and social resources, so the local community and structures created by it: organizations, associations or LEADER type initiatives (Ray 2003, 2006). The local social agents perform the role of the main change catalyst through collective action. The animation of the development processes must be based on a grassroots initiative and take into account a bottom – up approach, as well as distant factors (extralocal) (Gorlach 2013: 106). As pointed out by Ray, it is not possible to guarantee the integrity of the development at the local level, by cutting off the community from the outside world, as it sometimes is accented in extreme endogenous development concepts (see Klekotko 2012). Therefore the neo-endogenous development emphasizes the participation of community members in the development and implementation of development practices and the use of local environmental and social values. This perspective also highlights the impact on the future of their community, both through the use of local resources and creating mechanisms for sustainable development, initiated by an external stimulus (Gorlach 2013: 106).

Rural Renewal Programme can be considered as one, with the aim of sustainable development, accomplished by:

- “The rejection of the principle of domination of the economic sphere over the socio-cultural and natural sphere,

- The realization of the principle of subjectivity of the village and its inhabitants,
 - Change of social location of agriculture (recognition of sustainability of the family farm, the farmer’s recognition as the manager of the natural and cultural heritage and material compensation for performing these duties),
 - Recognition of modern information and communication media as an essential instrument for economic and social development of the rural area,
 - Strengthening and rebuilding of the cultural identity of the inhabitants of the village, as a guarantor of the protection of cultural diversity of the united Europe” (Kaleta 2007: 82).

The sustainable development of rural areas within the confines of the Rural Renewal Programme is active in three areas:

1) social – involving the creation of community planning concerned and the pursuit of positive change in the place of residence by:

- activation – the process of stimulating the local community to act; triggering civil initiatives and participation in them,
- education – teaching; examples of good practice,
- integration – the creation of a rural community (formation of social ties); focusing local communities around common issues and problems,
- strengthening cultural identity – through the preservation and protection of cultural heritage (customs, rituals, costumes, local products);

2) environmental (natural) – by seeking to preserve the natural values of the area, but also spatial, concerning ensuring the “superficiality” of the village, its spatial design, aesthetics and functionality, to meet modern requirements while maintaining local cultural heritage. This is done by:

- protection of the natural environment – ensuring the quality of the environment (according to the spatial planning of the village),
- revitalization, maintaining or restoring the appearance of the village maintaining traditional specific structural elements, taking into account the manifestations of the progress of civilization, creating a space for recreation for the village population, also outside the village itself;

3) economic – consisting of the development of the economic sphere of the municipality:

- developing entrepreneurship, local investments,
- creation and safeguarding of jobs,
- attention to obtaining financial capital etc.,
- attention to the improvement, development of rural infrastructure (according to the preapproved urban planning of the village).

In this sense the Rural Renewal Programme is in line with the concept of sustainable development. The social, cultural and natural – environmental aspects of the village are taken into account in the economic development.

Implementation of the “Rural Renewal” in the Lodzkie Voivodeship and the sustainable development of the area – typologies of projects and their specificity

Lodzkie Voivodeship, in comparison to other regions in Poland, is a specific area. Intensive development of the Lodzkie Voivodeship, the capital of which is the city of Lodz, began in the nineteenth century as a result of the development of industry, especially textile. The processes of industrialization has led to the emergence of a great industrial – urban agglomeration (Wójcik 2013: 43). The collapse of the industry in the early 90s led to significant changes in the economic structure of the region. The processes of migration of rural residents to Lodz lost their intensity. The average size of farms which is about 10 ha does not allow for the professionalization of agriculture. De-agricultural trends cause the need to look for alternative sources of income. The inhabitants of this region are characterized by a low level of social capital (see Starosta, Frykowski 2008) while the level of their self-organization intended to overcome the problems of their home village is low.



Map 1. Location of the Lodzkie Voivodeship on the map of Poland

Source: <https://www.google.pl/search?q=województwo+lodzkie+mapa> [date of access 25.03.2015]

According to the guidelines of the Rural Renewal Programme, the implementation of projects would yield concrete results in regeneration (recovery) of

economic, social and natural spheres. In the light of the programming documents, the implementation of the measure 2.3 “Renewal of the village ...” SOP for the years 2004 to 2006, was designed in particular to:

- 1) raising the standard of living and working in the countryside,
- 2) increasing the touristic attractiveness,
- 3) increasing the investment attractiveness,
- 4) meet the social and cultural needs,
- 5) development of the rural community identity and heritage conservation (SOP: 82).

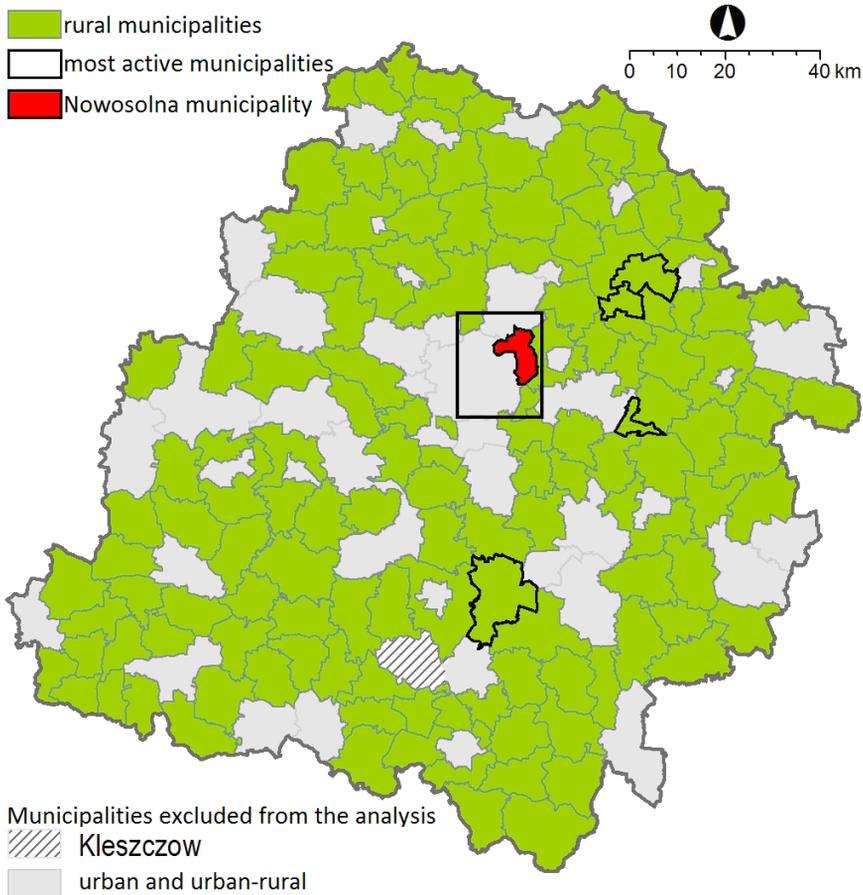
Financial support could count projects involving:

- 1) the investment in the modernization and equipping of cultural, recreational and sports facilities;
- 2) restoration of historic buildings typical of rural building traditions of the region and their adaptation for public purposes;
- 3) modernization of the public space of the village;
- 4) public infrastructure contributing to the development of tourism in rural areas and activities related to the promotion of the region (SOP: 82).

In the Lodzkie Voivodeship in the years 2004–2006 235 applications were submitted for support for rural development from this initiative. 141 were approved, and 131 implemented. Projects were submitted by 75 local governments and 3 institutions of culture. The average number of completed projects in the municipality, is: 1,75. Most of multiple projects have been implemented in five municipalities of the province: Budziszewice, Lipce Reymontowskie, Makow, Wola Krzysztoporska (4 projects each) and Nowosolna (six projects).

Among the 131 projects submitted by local rural and rural-urban communities (as a result of the analysis) 8 types were isolated.

- 1) renewal of the village centers, i.e. squares, parks;
- 2) the renewal or buildings from scratch of sports and recreational facilities: sports fields, squares, playgrounds, stadiums. This type of investment was mainly aimed at children and young people, with the aim making use of their free time, but ultimately served the whole community;
- 3) renewal of cultural life through repair or adaptation of premises for the centers, cultural centers, including community centers and libraries;
- 4) spatial infrastructure renewal, so the construction of paths, sidewalks, parking lots, in order to fill the gaps in infrastructure, but also, for example, in order to increase the touristic attractiveness of the area;
- 5) renewal and preservation of the cultural heritage of the village. The composition of this type included projects such as the renovation and revitalization of the historic museum park;
- 6) renewal of environmental values, such as reconstruction or development of water reservoirs.



Map 2. Division of the Lodzkie Voivodeship into municipalities, including rural communities most active in the activities of Rural Renewal

Source: own research

The seventh type (“other”) consisted of projects, which could not be unambiguously assigned to one of these types, and the last, the eighth consisted of projects that included in scope more than one type of project.

Most of the projects carried out in the Lodzkie Voivodeship was for the renewal of a third type: cultural life (57 projects, it is close to half of all rural renewal projects in Lodzkie Voivodeship). The second place were the projects of the second type, on the renewal of sports-recreational, it consisted of 26 projects. Together, these two types of projects accounted for 63% of all projects.

Below (Table 1) is the lists the types of projects and their reference to the components of sustainable development.

Table 1. Types of projects in Rural Renewal and the components of sustainable development

Type number	Type name	Number of projects in type	Reference to the components of sustainable development
1.	RENEWAL of the village centers, i.e. squares, parks.	12	social, environmental (spatial aspect)
2.	RENEWAL or building of sports and recreational facilities: sports fields, squares, playgrounds, stadiums.	26	social
3.	RENEWAL of cultural life through repair or adaptation of premises for cultural centres, including community centres and libraries	57	social
4.	RENEWAL of spatial infrastructure, so the construction of paths, sidewalks, parking lots	5	economic, environmental (spatial aspect)
5.	RENEWAL and preservation of the cultural heritage of the village	8	social
6.	RENEWAL of environmental value	3	environmental (protection aspect)
7.	Other	3	–
8.	Mixed: 1&4; 2&3; 1&3&4; 2&4; 1&3; 1&2; 1&5	17	social, environmental (spatial aspect), economic
Total		131	

Source: own research.

Therefore, the Rural Renewal Programme in the scale of the entire region of Lodz (between 2004–2006) was aimed mainly at the social sphere, less on the economic (only 5 projects related to renewal of the technical infrastructure and spatial), and the least – natural (only three projects related to health strict environmental values municipality).

Projects linked to the social component of sustainable development were primarily aimed at the integration of the communities, their activation by creating a forum for the exchange of experiences, recreational space for the utilization of free time not only children and adolescents. This shows that rural areas still lack such sites or that they are not sufficiently retrofitted to be able to perform these functions (integrating, activating). Strong desire to have such places is reflected in the amount of projects. The projects aimed at enriching the economic and environmental spheres of selected municipalities appeared later. Compared to projects that enrich the social component, they accounted for a small proportion and were in the vast minority.

This situation demonstrates the dominance of projects whose expected results support the implementation of the social component of sustainable development. It is therefore a renewal aimed primarily at creating conditions for social integration, strengthening contacts, building social capital.

The statements of the respondents (experts from Nowosolna municipality) are the confirmation to the above conclusions. Respondents evaluated the importance of both the entire Rural Renewal Programme, as well as individual projects (for example: the common room built in the village Byszewy and the urban planning design for the centre square in the Moskwa village).

The commune head stated: *Thanks to the Rural Renewal implemented under the Sectoral Operational Programme, people are more aware of the changes they are experiencing. Approach to projects such as the common good, value of the environment, are more integrated. It's a good start for a civil society, which could be involved in the joint management of the municipalities, districts, and province [...] The leader is most important in Rural Renewal. With my knowledge, which I gained... with what I learned, what I implemented, what I practice, I wanted to hand it over to the residents, and include them in the process. Because Rural Renewal is not only is the revitalization of the space, but also of the disappearing idea. Residents themselves participated in the implementing of the projects [...] You have to realize "living" projects which people really benefit from, that meet specific needs, e.g.: village centres, school grounds.*

The community leader from village Lipiny added: *The cool thing about Rural Renewal is that you can learn from the examples of others, pry, observe, and then think about what to move to your area. We travelled with a delegation to the village of Biesowo, where the mayor and the priest acted very promptly. They started the Rural Renewal, and pulled the residents with them. Now it all works very well, people care about all these projects and others can learn from them.*

In the opinion of community leader from village Byszewy: *With the construction of the activity centre common-room [...] I think some stereotypes are less prominent, the environment has become more homogeneous. In the common-room we have meetings, celebrations, for all. For example, those who have not come, had the opportunity to come and see that it is good. I think of these higher values as the abolition of the divisions in the community.*

The Chairman of the Municipal Council of Nowosolna and a resident of the village of Moskwa stated that: *Maybe there is just a fab that people go to this place ... adults or children. This square is very utilized. The square has a bower and in the bower we meet. Besides, Moskwa does not have a activity centre [...] In fact, anywhere else, nothing happens, but everything happens in this square ... meetings ... so we have an open lounge.*

The same chairman (who was also a resident of the village of Moskwa) stressed that: *In my opinion, it is the integration that is the best in the Rural Renewal. Because when something starts, this same man will not do everything... someone has to help him and talk it over. And when a few people that did not get along start to do so, it already is a big plus. The most important thing is the atmosphere in the community. If you are lacking this atmosphere, you cannot do anything.*

Summary

The “Rural Renewal” has been operating in Poland since the late nineties of the twentieth century. Its essence is to provide financial resources for solving problems of local communities, taking into account the principles of sustainable development. They also take into account the harmonious development of the three spheres of human activity: economic, social and environmental. The success of sustainable development cannot be linked exclusively with economic and natural capital. Equally important is also social capital. The development is in fact initiated by activating the human and social resources.

In its principles, the implementation of projects in the field of Rural Renewal, under the Sectoral Operational Programme 2004–2006, aimed to contribute to the sustainable development of the areas included in the project. It was assumed that the Rural Renewal financed from the first EU funds, will harmonize the development of the natural, social and economic areas of deficit in its own way, but with a chance to develop. It was an aid scheme. As it is shown in the analysis of the types of renewing projects implemented in the Łódzkie Voivodeship, it was dominated by those of a social nature: Renewal and development of the socio-cultural; Renewal of sports – leisure centres, Rural Renewal. These projects consisted of investments in human and social capital of the village. A question arises whether the Rural Renewal Programme contributes to the sustainable development of rural areas or just specific parts of it? In the light of the results presented it should be stated that in the municipalities of the Łódzkie Voivodeship Rural Renewal supported only one area of development. Social sphere has been recognized by the applicants (more or less consciously) as a key factor. The social capital built has given way to other ventures in the economic and natural, which may be implemented by the community in order to harmonize development. Supporting the development has a broad social dimension and is aimed at local communities. Sustainable local development should therefore be considered in terms of the development of rural communities, and this, by definition, should be used for proper implementation of the Rural Renewal Programme.

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The aim of this publication is to look at the problems of Polish rural areas from the perspective of the young generation of researchers, to show what problems they are interested in and what study methods and techniques they use to describe the phenomena occurring in Polish villages. The results of their studies were also presented to underscore the importance of these phenomena for the development of knowledge concerning the dynamic transformations in Polish rural areas. The Authors represent different fields of study (sociology, ethnography, economy and geography) from renowned academic centres such as University of Lodz, Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development, Polish Academy of Sciences (IRWiR PAN) in Warsaw, Life Science University of Poznan, Technical University in Warsaw, Institute of Urban Development in Krakow, and Maria Grzegorzewska University. What they have in common is interest in the problems of rural areas and their residents. They focus on the new model of rural development, very often identified with concepts such as multifunctional and sustainable development, on social innovation, the subject of transformations in rural residents' social roles, including rural women serving public roles, as well as on the strategies of coping with the reality used by residents of marginalized villages. The articles introduce the Readers to selected problems of development of Polish rural areas and help them to understand their complexity.



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