Chapter 7

Title

Between City and Country

**Suburban Development of Rural Areas
in Lower Silesia, Poland**

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Introduction Lower Silesia is a region in south-western Poland. At the end of 2013 it was inhabited by little over 2.9 million people (National Census Report, 2013). There are 91 cities in the region and Wrocław, Wałbrzych, Legnica and Jelenia Góra are the biggest among them with a total population of nearly 1 million people. It is one of the most urbanized regions in Poland with almost 70% of population living in cities whereas the average urbanization coefficient in Poland in 2011 was 61.8%.

In the time between two censuses – in 2002 and 2011 – the distribution of population between urban and rural areas in the region has changed significantly. During this period nearly 0.5 million people left cities and moved to rural areas. This trend is called suburbanization and can be described as a process in which urbanized areas gain population but the increase in number of dwellers is more significant on the urban fringes then in the central districts. Suburbanization is preceded by urbanization and followed by de-urbanisation (Klaasen and Paelinck, 1979: 1095-1104). Suburbanization can be also described as deconcentration of population within the metropolitan area and as such is one of the most important socio-spatial processes changing the physical landscape and social tissue of Polish society. Other processes are: population growth in metropolitan areas and depopulation of peripheral (mostly rural) areas in Eastern Poland (Węcławowicz et al., 2006).

The number of people who moved to rural areas in Lower Silesia region is estimated at the level of almost 50,000 people. It is a very rough estimation since only those who registered (the act of registration is not obligatory) in the new location have been taken into account. As various research show (Kajdanek, 2012 and Śleszyński, 2011) the actual number of newcomers may be twice or even three times higher than estimated by the National Statistical Office.

The main purpose of this paper is to provide some insight into how the influx of newcomers affects the previously rural *locus* and into how newcomers go about their way of life in the suburban setting in selected areas in Lower Silesia, Poland.

Suburbanization in Poland – example of post-socialist suburbanization

There are some features of suburbanization in post-communist countries that aptly describe suburbanization in Poland, for example: relatively short history of the process and dynamics of the process since the mid-1990's, simulta-neity of suburbanization of retail, offices and housing, lower decentralization rate due to low or even negative population growth, denser but at the same time more chaotic suburban development, social differentiation of inhabitants (Stanilov, 2007: 187-188). S. Hirt also emphasizes consequences of lack of suburban periphery of cities during socialism (Hirt, 2007: 755) for suburban development as well as poor quality of suburban infrastructure like roads and sewage that is also true for many of Polish suburbs.

Some authors suggest striking similarity of Polish subur-banization to the phenomenon that could have been observed in the USA about 50 years ago (Jałowiecki and Szczepański, 2006: 276). Others suggest that suburbanization in Poland has its specific background stemming from characteristics of spatial organization of rural areas and also cultural fac-tors providing both reasons for individual mobility, social characteristics of those who moved as well as later models of

functional relations with the central districts (Marcińczak, 2012: 301-302).

First of all, suburbanization gained momentum in late 1990's after the return of housing market and location rent when many Poles were finally able to fulfil their housing aspirations that were postponed for many years due to economic and political constraints. Hunger for housing inherited after socialism and galloping deterioration of housing in blocks of flats on the outskirts and inner city tenement houses caused that suburbanization in Poland comes mainly from rejection of poor quality housing in the city rather than from a rejection of urban life or preference for living "the rural way". The Polish ideal of suburban living is based on economic calculation of costs and benefits that prioritizes price per square metre and home ownership, which is different from the case of eastern Germany (Nuissl and Rink, 2005). Moreover, Polish suburbs are typically based on the comparatively stable core of old rural villages despite its multiple patterns described by Zebik (2011: 173-188) and it relies more on individuals since only a minority of suburban housing is carried out by developers. Although suburban development is too dense to be called urban sprawl, it needs to get emphasized that planning policy focused on short-term profit from selling plots resulted in far too much space allotted for single-family

Figure 1. Karwiany

housing with very poor or literary no technical and social infrastructure provided by local authorities.

Between city and country. Consequences of Polish suburbanization

It is not possible to point out and assess the whole spectrum of consequences of suburbanization in Poland. One reason is the relatively short time scale especially since processes of urbanization are long-term and some effects of suburban development are only to be seen in the future. Another reason is related with the socio-spatial nature of the process. It means that it takes people who move (they are socially differentiated) and the place, which is chosen to become suburbanized. On an intersection of social and spatial characterises suburbia are created. They vary socially and spatially from one another and what is considered to be a serious social issue in one place may come unnoticed in another and so on.

Main consequences that are commented on in the following sections are:
- privatization of space,
- individualization of social life,
- imbalanced structure of commercial and social services,
- hidden potential of social capital in suburbia;

and it needs to be said that the aforementioned phenomena do not deplete the complex nature of suburbanization but draw attention to some of its aspects.

Figure 2.
Smolec

Privatization of space Emphasis on ownership, cultural preference for single-family housing as a "dreamed home" systematically reflected in all-Poland social surveys (CBOS 2006) and strong rejection of previously inhabited flats in high-rise blocks or neglected 19th-century tenement houses resulted in the emergence of a typical suburban habitat – single-family house built on a single plot. Interesting architectural design is expensive (and requires higher level of cultural capital) and therefore scarce – gabled houses, plastered in yellowish colours are most common. Houses are usually carefully fenced to mark physical and more importantly symbolic distance from others especially that "security" is not often referred to as the reason for leaving the city and choosing suburban settlements. Fences (natural shrubs, wooden fences, metal gates, etc.) guarantee living in the seclusion of one's own home and not being disturbed by people living next door nor strangers.

Since the history of post-socialist suburbanization in Poland is relatively short those who moved from urban to urbanizing rural settlements have no experience of their own and also very little opportunity to draw on the experience of previous generations that had moved between the early 1950's and the 1980's but in the opposite direction. Therefore, they employ impromptu invented strategies of getting used to living in suburban houses. These strategies usually involve extended DIY (do-it-yourself) and finishing works, garden design and gardening. As a result – sheds, gardening tools and garden hoses are a common sign of adaptation to suburban living.

Privatization of space can be also observed in how newcomers perceive space surrounding their suburban home. Rarely do they discern what can be called public space – open and accessible to everyone. If they know and go to places located outside their plot, they rather call them their own "magical places" even though these places (local ponds, forest paths, small glades) may as well be frequented by other people.

Individual-izationof social life Every suburban house can be put on a continuum of "togeth-erness" with an extremely individualistic attitude towards one's life on one end and deep conviction that it is vital to be a part of a carefully planned community on the other. Accord-ing to results of research published in Kajdanek (2011), 2/3 of interviewed newcomers to suburbs suggested that people only focus on their private life and do not lead any forms of collective life. Common situations when some collective actions are undertaken are some infrastructural problems that need to be resolved or minor social misunderstandings that are usually cleared up.

Suburbia in Poland are rarely greenfield investments. However, newcomers and old-timers live in two separate social worlds. They are separated both physically (by fences and distance between new settlements and cores of old villages) and socially because newcomers are perceived to be much younger, more affluent, better educated than the old-timers. The knowledge about one another is often stere-otyped but occasions to debunk myths are deficient since many of everyday activities that could bring people together

Figure 3. Private playground for kids

(picking up children from school, chatting at the bus stop, doing shopping, going to the church, etc.) are usually performed elsewhere, i.e. in the central districts. Social contacts are limited to a few people who live close and they are often also newcomers.

The lack of neutral, public spaces impedes the process of people getting to know each other. Traditional public spaces in rural areas (such as church forecourts, local shops, youth clubs where also the farmer's wives' association would meet) are not perceived by newcomers as interesting and potentially "ours".

Imbalanced structure of commercial and social services As it was mentioned earlier, the decision-making process on where to live does not stem from strong cultural preference for life in bucolic rurality and thus from a rejection of the central city, services available there and additional urban experiences it offers. In fact, most newcomers locate majority of their everyday and festive activities in the central city. It is understandable for the activities which simply cannot be carried out in the suburban areas because they are non-existent: work located in the city, secondary and higher education, more complex infrastructure of personal,

Figure 4. Private basketball court

social, cultural services, etc. However, an interesting pattern emerged from the data collected from the interviews with newcomers. They explained that they would travel to the city (to take children to a nursery or a primary school, to do shopping, to do jogging, to go to church) because, given the choice, they preferred the urban quality to suburban (rural) quality of (seemingly) the same services. Therefore, suburbs become mainly the place to sleep and to relax in the garden or the cosy interior of the house and not a fully developed habitat where most services can be fulfilled.

However, it is possible to discern some differences in strategies of organizing everyday life between newcomers to metropolitan suburbs (one example was the biggest city under study – Wrocław, the capital of the region) and to small town suburbs.

In the former, all social and commercial services are used in the urban core. There is a strong stigma of a much worse quality of services offered in the suburban areas as well as

Figure 5. Gardening

less convenience (i.e. there are only some services and they are dispersed). Finally, an argument that newcomers give to explain why they choose urban over suburban services is grounded on the force of habit and reluctance to try and change it. In the latter, most social and commercial services are used in the urban core but not all. For example, some parents placed their trust in local primary schools and eventually took to them. Heavily subsidized by EU funds, well-equipped, small and pupil-friendly local primary schools have also very good results in exit exams. Still, they do not offer such a wide range of extracurricular activities to keep children busy until late afternoon, which is a serious obstacle for many parents. However, "poor quality" argument has apparently become irrelevant. Also shops selling local products are more appreciated, especially local bakeries that provide newcomers with fresh loaves of bread. Since mass production of low quality bread has driven many family-run bakeries out of business in cities, high-quality bread is what newcomers miss and crave for. There is also more frequent usage of personal services such as hairdresser, beautician, etc. One possible explanation to this might be that the perceived disparity between the level of service in the central small town and in the suburban location is much smaller (and price more competitive) and therefore easier to accept than in case of metropolitan services that are seen as unrivalled.

Suburban-central city connections are presented by newcomers as *constrained* and necessary but in fact social preference for urban services translates into strong *voluntary* connections with the central city. It results in the multiplication of the number of trips from the suburban home to the urban core. The means of transportation, which is habitually used to cover the distance, is a car since public transportation in suburban villages is neglected and heavily underfunded by local governments. There is also no obligation in local planning regulations to locate new housing developments

near railway lines or other nods of efficient transport infrastructure. Public transportation is heavily underfunded by local authorities and does not seem like an interesting market niche for entrepreneurs, so routes and schedules of public buses are not fitted for newcomers needs and railway stations are (if at all) too far to be used on everyday basis. Cycling or pedestrian infrastructure is also incomplete and forces people into cars. There is a car in almost every suburban household under study (98%) and in almost 70% of households there are two or more cars (Kajdanek, 2012: 256). An accurate comment on the situation was made during an interview with one of the newcomers to Smolec – a suburban settlement near Wrocław. The interviewee said that when he moved in it seemed like living in a forested wilderness, but soon there were more and more cars, more and more traffic. And these days the place is noisy and polluted and he has to leave much earlier than he used to otherwise he will be stuck in the morning traffic jam (Kajdanek, 2011: 75).

It is also interesting that some services, which are normally located outside the household, are being embedded in

Figure 6. Sense of belonging through intense gardening

the suburban house. For example, some houses have their own swimming pools, saunas and indoor gyms. Some living rooms are equipped with high-quality audio-video systems that serve the purpose of a home cinema. In gardens there are sandpits, inflatable palaces, swings and basketball courts so that inhabitants can limit the number of occasions to leave the suburban house.

Dormant social capital in suburbia Social resources in the suburban locations under study are rather limited. People (both newcomers and old-timers) possess very little knowledge about each other and since there is little willingness and too few occasions to get to know each other the knowledge is often based on stereotypes and results in a biased image each group has about the other.

When neighbours have a chance to get to know each other, give and take a helping hand in everyday situations they strictly follow the reciprocity principle. They return favours immediately and do not allow themselves to be indebted to neighbours in order not to have any sense of obligation towards them. It impedes accumulation of mutual trust, growth of a mesh of interdependence and pool of reliability. Sense of community is only "turned on" when it comes to solving technical, infrastructural problems and minor crises. When the problem is solved, the sense of community is "turned off" until next time. Selective belonging and limited place attachment of newcomers also hampers reinforcement of social capital in suburbia.

One group that is particularly affected by the aforementioned phenomena of privatization of space, individualization of social life, imbalanced structure of commercial and social services and weakness of social capital in suburbia is suburban youth and children. Lack of social infrastructure in suburban settlements makes them play in private playgrounds within the borders of the plot. Community centres offer very little to children and youth so there are no magnets attract-

ing them to leave the house and meet peers. Unfortunately, many existing sport facilities are gender-biased and tap into boys' not girls' expectations (numerous football pitches). Not only do girls have fewer opportunities to make friends but also, given parents reluctance to let children go out and play, they are condemned to loneliness or parents' mobility as a condition of using social structures in the city. What is more, local schools and parishes are mono-functional – in a school one can only learn and pray in a church whereas these places should serve the purpose of local activity centres and be vivid generators of multi-generational activism.

Isolation from past and present peer groups can be only overcome owing to parents' individual mobility and growing dependence on cars.

Summary The study I have conducted in the suburbs of the city of Wrocław and of small towns in Lower Silesia region is one of the very first attempts of careful sociological consideration given to suburbs in Poland. Therefore, the main focus was on the exploration of the topic rather than on providing definite answers.

As the number of people moving into suburbs is constantly increasing, new questions of future co-existence of old and new residents and of the ability of local authorities to support and enhance newly enlarged communities acquire importance (Kajdanek, 2014). There is also the question of how particular groups of suburbanites (e.g. women, teenagers, and elderly people) find themselves in this completely new reality and how they form their own specific strategies, alliances, and coalitions. All these questions, among many others, deserve thorough study.

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