



Can urban sprawl lead to urban people governing rural areas? Evidence from the Dywity Commune, Poland



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ABSTRACT

Currently, new suburban settlements are often being localized in rural areas. As a result of this, rural areas have been taking on various urban functions, especially residential ones. Intense migration has been observed, especially in rural areas neighboring large cities. The urban population has been settling in the most attractive residential localizations, and thus creating new housing developments with a high population density, characterized by urban type of construction. Such a process, both favorable and inevitable, leads to other effects, including changes among the local authorities and thus, local policy. The main purpose of this article was to answer the question of whether new urban functions in rural areas resulting from urban sprawl can lead to urban people governing rural areas? If the answer is positive, what other consequences may this bring? The aim was accomplished through the careful examination of a selected area of Poland. The particular value of this study is that its structure and suggested scenarios of possible effects can help local authorities governing areas neighboring cities create suitable spatial plans that include residential areas.

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1. Introduction

The process referred to as urban sprawl has become very common, especially in the United States and Europe. The phenomenon of urban functions spreading outwards from a city to its outskirts, has been regularly observed and described since the second half of the 20th century. An exception are countries of the former communist bloc in Central and Eastern Europe, where the beginning of this process, in a form resembling that of western countries, is dated back to the '90s of the XX century (The Urban Dimension, 2012). Although it differs in its spatial layout in different continents (i.e. in the US, cities are sprawling in a wider manner than in relatively compact Europe), it is an inevitable and controversial process. One can even go as far as describing it as a major problem of today (Coisnon et al., 2013). It affects every dimension of rural areas. Moreover, as Anas and Pines point out (2008, p.408), it changes the functionality of the city, as it is contradictory to smart growth.

The nature of urban sprawl and the reasons behind its occurrence have been revealed by scientists who studied the phenomenon in different contexts, e.g. Anas and Rhee (2006); Brueckner (2000), Glaeser and Kahn (2004), Nechyba and Walsh (2004); Burchfield et al. (2006); Śleszyński (2013); Lorens (2005) or Jałowiecki and Szczepański

(2006). The fundamental drivers that have been attributed to sprawl are often connected with physical geography, the rise in household incomes, population growth, and lower costs of commuting. Drawing attention to the last factor, many specialists have established a link between the increase in mobility and the urban sprawl observed in the second half of the 20th century, first in US cities, and later in Europe (Mendiola et al., 2015; Bruegmann, 2005; Ojima and Hogan, 2009; Charmes, 2009; Komornicki, 2011; Wolny, 2016). Most observers seem to agree that the urban function most noticeably affected by this phenomenon, and strongly connected to transport mobility, is the residential one. Cities are sprawling because the mobile urban population is earning higher incomes, has relatively easy access to plots of land localized in rural areas and, simultaneously, a greater need for living space, enabling escape from the traffic and stresses of daily life (Almeida et al., 2015). As Claval (2005) puts it that most of the newcomers in the countryside appreciate above all the low population density and the ample space available. The presence of "genuine" nature and the possibility of finding new local communities are often secondary factors that attract them. The rural countryside offers a perfect multifunctional space for a mix of residential and recreational activities. Therefore, newcomers are usually people moving in from metropolitan areas, interested mainly in recreation and residing in the area [Bijker et al., 2012; Costello, 2009; Guimond and Simard, 2010 and Halfacree and Boyle, 1998]. As a result, modern rural areas are not only feeding, but also (or mainly) housing the urban population (Rothwell et al., 2015). Therefore, as city inhabitants move out to nearby rural areas, they also change

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the style of constructions raised in the rural landscape [Halfacree and Boyle, 1998; Primdahl et al., 2010; Woods, 2011]. The newly found residential function can be observed to take two major forms. First, new houses are built just outside the borders of the city, in the form of contiguous urban extension. If the main determinant for moving out into the outskirts of the city was greater living space, the dominant construction style takes the form of single-family houses with a garden. On the other hand, if the motivation was connected with lower prices, the rural landscape is built up with multi-family houses (e.g. multi-storey blocks of flats) with developed public space instead of private gardens.

The above-mentioned process is common yet controversial, as it brings various side effects. Besides changing land functions and shaping the natural, social and cultural landscape, urban sprawl introduces changes among the members of local authorities. When residential function is concentrated in areas with exceptional values, it results in a high population concentration in selected localizations. Residential value increases along with physical attributes, e.g. convenient communication with the city or an appealing landscape, and pro-residential management, e.g. the planning and development of infrastructure. Therefore, people from a sprawling city settle in newly-created suburban housing developments and consequently shape the population distribution of the entire rural administrative unit. The spatial layout of the population in turn affects other processes, including the development of the land policy, by changing the composition of local authorities elected in the direct elections. It can also lead to conflicts in the newly elected local boards among representatives of rural 'been-heres' and urban 'come-heres'. Rural and urban are traditionally regarded as two different realities (Cadieux and Hurley, 2011; Walker and Hurley, 2011; Bukraba-Rylska, 2008), thus the actions of decision-makers (planners, policy-makers, local governors, managers and developers) maintain material differences between these places (Hiner, 2014). Although suburban rural areas gradually take over urban functions, they continue to be a part of a larger unit still described as a rural administration unit. Therefore, urban sprawl creates a reality described as an urban-rural interface, inhabited by both rural and urban people. It happens that new densely populated neighborhoods create a type of enclaves, even to the point of resembling a form of residential clubs. In the situation when members of the club feel that their interests are not adequately met, they choose their own representatives for local authorities (McKenzie, 2005; Charmes, 2009). In effect, the candidates for local authorities include both, villagers and former city dwellers. If a country's legal voting regulations call for single-member constituency, the share of rural and urban people on the local board depends on the number of people living within each constituency. The composition of the local board, in turn, implies whose needs will be better fulfilled – those of the traditional communities of original village inhabitants or those of a club of people who have moved in from the city.

The aim of the present article was an attempt to answer the following question – can the process of urban sprawl result in urban people governing rural areas? The answers were provided by verifying the following hypothesis: in the case of a single-mandate constituency, the residents of a new neighborhood inhabited by people flowing in from the city can have a significant number of mandates in the council of the entire rural commune and in effect shape its policy. The hypothesis was verified on the sample area of the rural commune of Dywity, assuming that in the case of single-mandate constituencies, the described process will also take the same course in other areas of rural communes.

2. Materials and methods

This article describes the situation of urban sprawl and its effects on local authorities occurring around the city of Olsztyn, located in north-eastern Poland. The characteristic feature of all administrative units neighboring the 'core' (Olsztyn) is a stable population increase, accompanied by a slowly decreasing population of the city. To serve as an example, the authors selected one of the smallest administrative units in

Poland – the Dywity Commune (*Gmina Dywity*). The area under study was inhabited by almost 11,000 people and could be characterized by a relatively fast population increase resulting from rapid, and spatially uneven, suburbanization. The growing number of inhabitants was mainly determined by internal migrations (average of 70% in 2010–2014). The significant majority of newcomers (average of 82% in 2010–2014) moved in from the city. As a result, 1448 new residential buildings were constructed in Dywity Commune in the period from 2000 to 2014. The dominant form of construction were single-family houses. Newcomers settled mainly in the southern part of the commune, not far from the borders of the city. As a result, in 2015, over 40% of its inhabitants lived a maximum of 3 km from the borders of Olsztyn. Currently, an investment involving the construction of a multi-family housing estate (40 several-storey buildings), which is ultimately expected to be inhabited by 4000 new residents has been commenced in the commune.

Although data presented in this article are related to a particular local administrative unit (the Commune of Dywity), the findings and scenarios point to broader trends, and thus can be applied to other places, where new settlement takes a rapid course and is concentrated in selected locations, and representatives of local authorities are chosen in single-mandate constituencies. The paper examines the election of local authorities which took place in 2014, as well as a simulation of future elections upon completing the residential investment. Moreover, two different scenarios for rural areas localized in an urban neighborhood experiencing urban sprawl or, in other words, an inflow of the urban population, have been given. Materials used for the simulations were obtained from the Main Statistical Office in Poland and from the Dywity Commune Office. The authors applied the actual method used in Poland for dividing communes into single-member constituencies.

2.1. Historical determinants of urban sprawl in a post-socialist country – on example of Poland

Suburbanization in post-socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe is often considered as one of the most noticeable processes observed since the end of 20th century, mainly around capital and large cities. Such observations were made and described i.e. in Slovenia (Ravbar, 1997), Hungary (Timár and Váradi, 2001), Estonia (Tamaru et al., 2004), the Czech Republic (Sýkora and Novák, 2007), Latvia (Krisjane and Berzins, 2012), Eastern Germany (Nuißl and Rink, 2005) and Poland (Lorens, 2005; Kotus, 2006).

Urban sprawl in Poland can be described as rapid, uneven, and insufficiently controlled. This stems from the fact that it is a relatively new process, thus local authorities lack experience in directing it or predicting all of its effects. While Western Europe has been experiencing urban sprawl since at least the 1950's (The Urban Dimension, 2012), in countries of the former communist bloc, this phenomenon had been, for a long time, restrained by the conditions of the former system. In the case of Poland, the following can be included among the most important factors which, in the period from 1945 to 1989, formed a barrier preventing the sprawling of cities in terms of their residential function:

- the lack of a real estate market,
- low transport mobility of the citizens,
- the lack of a financial market,
- the lack of a building materials market.

An effective real estate market in Poland was created in the interwar period, when the institutional and legal framework was precisely established promoting free trade of real estate (Kucharska-Stasiak, 1994). During this time, the dominant form of migration was from villages to cities, while the suburbs maintained agricultural and recreational (summer residences) functions. During the post-war period (up

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