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The essence of urban-rural partnership management

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ABSTRACT

The urban-rural partnership is a concept of local and regional development, which emerged in EU studies at the end of 1990s. This partnership is to pose a bridge between the policy of regional and rural development. Purpose of the work is to describe the significance of rural areas for contemporary societies. Expectations towards the village and perception of the rural areas by the citizens, and the accompanying developmental opportunities and barriers, will exert long-standing influence on transformation directions of rural areas and their relationships with urban territories.

Keywords: urban-rural partnership; sustainable development; management

1. INTRODUCTION

One pillar of the new developmental policy paradigm, introduced by the recently accepted national strategic documents: The National Spatial Planning Concept 20130 (NSPC 2030) and the National Regional Development Strategy (NRDS), is the developmental policy. The territory-oriented approach is distinguished in this developmental concept of Poland.

The territory-oriented policy, apart of the obvious direction of actions considering the spatial context, i.e. geographical conditions, in other words - the endogenous potential - is based on regional and local authorities' knowledge, posing an objective value and exogenous potential [3]. By perceiving the developmental matters through the prism of functional relationships, objectives and instruments of the developmental policy can be more differentiated and adjusted to specificity of particular areas by broader exploitation of their

potential and more precise identification of developmental barriers. Planning and performing of developmental actions within functional areas must be the cooperation platform for various units and levels of management. Cooperation of various partners operating within functional areas is necessary for complex, cohesive and more coordinated and focused development-encouraging actions and settlement of conflicts.



Figure 1. Interdependence

[Source: Own work]

Urban and rural areas, regardless the assumed delimitation method, are not separate beings that function independently. Their mutual relationships are long-standing and complex. One of many, but at the same time a classic dependence between an urban and a rural area is perception of the city as an employment market, access to all services and goods of the higher level. In turn, the rural areas are a food supply, open space that is a basis for provision of tourism services [12].

The understanding of specific needs expressed by the rural areas has been on the increase, requiring a policy of integrated/complex approach; it was especially related to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The European Commission document entitled the Future of Rural Society of 1988 draw attention to the need for development of rural areas. The CAP market and price policy reform, started at the end of 1980s, embraced resources intended to convert into production of products that were not in excess, extensification of agricultural production and setting land aside [8].

This was related to environmental and landscape protection objectives. Between 1994 and 1999, the scope of EU actions to the benefit of rural development was expanded by inclusion of investments in tourism and craftsmanship development, renovation and development of rural housing estates, in relation to protection and conservation of their cultural heritage [3]. Within the scope of preparations for Agenda 2000, the European Commission assumed an integrated rural areas development concept. With consideration of spatial distribution of the “Rural Europe” in natural and socio-economic terms, it stressed the role of agri-environmental measures as a new instrument of the agricultural policy [4]. However, the EU document still emphasize the fact that internal problems of cities are a subject of much greater interest than rural development.

It is stressed that the term “urban” should be expanded with the matter of mutual dependence and relationships between cities and villages, thus the concepts of the “city-region” and “ecological system” appear. The EU agricultural policy is transforming gradually into the policy of rural development, however the economic system of those areas, based on the economy of smaller and bigger centers, does not consider the economic specificity of strictly rural areas to a sufficient extent.

2. URBAN-RURAL PARTNERSHIP ACCORDING TO EU

The EU member states common policy concepts appeared within last few years, considering the “urban-rural” relationships not in the category of subordination of rural area to the development processes of the urbanized centers, but according to the principles of rural-urban partnership. Together with popularization of the sustainable regional development concept, based on an assumption of a polycentric model of a sustainable urban system, a thesis on the necessity to strengthen the partnership between the urban and rural areas appears as a significant component of this process [1].

Here, the urban-rural partnership is understood as a mechanism for redistribution of profits and benefits from the spheres of dynamic growth of urban centers within their rural background, for limitation of the negative effects of this development polarization and strengthening of local initiatives within rural areas. The following assumptions are adopted here: - the regional perspective assumes the partnership between cities (regardless of their sizes) and the surrounding rural areas; - the supraregional perspective, in case of vivid divisions between urban or metropolitan territories and rural areas, the partnership’s purpose is to achieve balance between various interests in the scale, considering both economic, environmental and social aspects; - while considering supraregional and supranational aspects, the partnership is intended to provide a possibility for experience exchange and mutual learning on examples of cooperation between cities and rural area, regarding particular projects and initiatives [5].

European Spatial Development Perspective assumes a series of initial conditions for a successful urban and rural partnership. Practical partnership should materialize itself via cooperation and coordination; and this requires: - equality and independence of partners, - free participation in the partnership, - consideration of differences in administration conditions, - common responsibility and benefits. The partnership means sharing with costs and benefits, e.g. related to provision of costly high-standard devices of infrastructure or protection of areas supplying water to the residents. The new forms of partnership offer a possibility of re-orientation of the service exchange between urban and rural areas, according to the principles of sustainable development, among others by creation of a regional “service fund” for local services. Emphasis is also put on the need to engage various “actors” in the urban-rural partnership; it should - apart from the partnership between local administrations - also establish partnership networks between the enterprises that have great significance for the regional economy. All of these procedures are intended to fight the traditional dualist approach “city - village”, and replace it with a concept of an integrated economic, social and technical-spatial system, based on the sustainable development principles [6].

Hence, the understanding of specific needs expressed by the rural areas has been on the increase, requiring a policy of integrated/complex approach; it was especially related to

the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The European Commission document entitled the Future of Rural Society of 1988 draw attention to the need for development of rural areas. The CAP market and price policy reform, started at the end of 1980s, embraced resources intended to convert into production of products that were not in excess, extensification of agricultural production and setting land aside. This was related to environmental and landscape protection objectives. Between 1994 and 1999, the scope of EU actions to the benefit of rural development was expanded by inclusion of investments in tourism and craftsmanship development, renovation and development of rural housing estates, in relation to protection and conservation of their cultural heritage [9]. Within the scope of preparations for Agenda 2000, the European Commission assumed an integrated rural areas development concept. Taking into account the spatial differentiation of the “Rural Europe” in natural and socio-economic terms, it emphasized the role of agri-environmental measures as a new instrument of the agricultural policy. However, the EU document still emphasize the fact that internal problems of cities are a subject of much greater interest than rural development. It is stressed that the term “urban” should be expanded with the matter of mutual dependence and relationships between cities and villages, thus the concepts of the “city-region” and “ecological system” appear [15]. The EU agricultural policy is transforming gradually into the policy of rural development, however the economic system of those areas, based on the economy of smaller and bigger centers, does not consider the economic specificity of strictly rural areas to a sufficient extent [9].

3. URBAN-RURAL PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Transformations of the rural space, evaluated through the prism of spatial and architectonic order, landscape aesthetics and preservation of material heritage resources and forms, pose the best indicator of social attitude towards rural areas, and an expression of the society’s expectations [2]. At the same time, the spatial and architectonic order together with beauty of the landscape are the best measure for sustainable development. The rural space and its shape pose a resource that is most important and crucial for the society, the changes of which are of a long-lasting, almost irreversible character, and made mistakes are clearly visible and highly expensive. This is a meeting point of interests of the rural and urban residents, and the sphere, where individual and group activity encounters the national development policy - legal regulations that govern the framework of that activity [10,16-19]. Hence, this is the best way to influence transformation of attitudes and to direct the expectations.

The countries where renovation of rural areas has intensified, subordinated the rural development to the paradigm of revitalization, i.e. providing the old forms and structures with new functions adequate for the changed social and economic needs [2]. Within such a process, the farm buildings constructed for the needs of growing or storing crops are given a second life - they are transformed into apartments, studios, production facilities or business premises, as well as public buildings for rural residents [13]. Similarly, village centers are becoming rural markets - areas where services - especially those public ones - are concentrated. It is impossible to maintain the full material and non-material cultural resources in a village without revitalization [7].

Additionally, the shaped specificity and quality of public space strengthen identity of the residents, contributing to the strength of the whole community. The revitalization process takes place within the regional rural revitalization programmes. A genesis of those programmes is the citizens' disagreement to loose the regional values of the cultural environment and landscape, resulting from the awareness of economic losses and the threat of loosing identity of the communities and the places they live in. The rural revitalization programmes have transformed into a process of recognizing values and triggering the need for revitalization, and stopped the trend of urbanization of villages [7].

As assumed, the urban-rural partnership has a dimension of a tool supporting sustainable socio-economic development on a local level. It consists in combination and effective utilization of varied and mutually complementing potential of urban and rural areas. A basis for emergence and operation of the partnership is accessibility of resources from one area for the residents of the other area, most often conditioned with quality and density of road infrastructure. While the rural areas are to derive benefits from cooperation with urban center thanks to strengthening of their participation in the local economy [14].

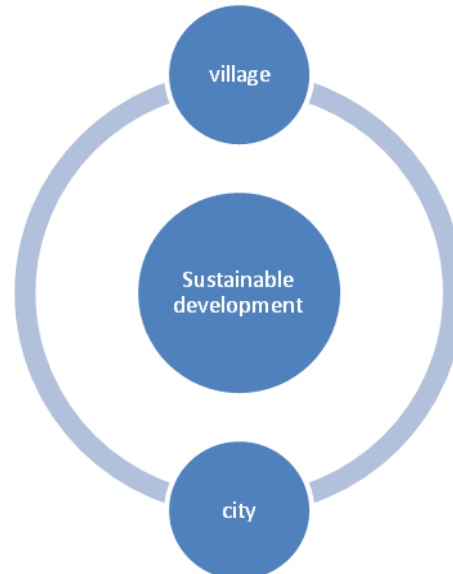


Figure 2. The impact of urban-rural partnerships for sustainable development
[Source: Own work]

Development is generally identified only with the economic growth, which is why the rural areas are evaluated through the prism of productivity, which is and will be lower than in the cities, by its very nature. For example, a market value of the agricultural sector products does not reflect the sum of economic, environmental and social advantages of agricultural holdings operation, farming and breeding, such as the value of a forest is much higher than the value of wood, which can be acquired from that forest at a given moment [6]. Therefore, proper evaluation of rural areas requires understanding for development within the area determined by the following vectors: economic growth, life quality and values constituting the society. In such an approach, we deal with development (not growth) when the sphere of individuals and groups freedom becomes expanded.

Nowadays, the dominating approach to development, including the mechanisms of EU cohesion policy, is based on specification of results brought by economic actions. Non-materials categories are usually non-measurable. The subjective feeling of happiness has no physical measurement, and it would be the best indicator of life quality. It is worth realizing that society of a given region or country can become increasingly richer, but at the same time older and smaller, i.e. "declining" not "developing". This example reflects weakness of the economic development indicators well [11].

4. CONCLUSIONS

The urban-rural concept is achieving a rank of a common spatial and socio-economic policy of the EU member states. It is interesting that the documentation on this notion undertakes an attempt to evaluate possibilities for realization of the concept also in the accession countries. It is stressed that the starting position of the accession countries should not be perceived only as a source of problems, but as a possibility to avoid mistakes in the spatial policy, made by EU member states in the past, and as a perspective to base the developmental strategies of those countries on the sustainable development principles [12]. It is also emphasized that the accession countries that treat EU membership as a national task, understate the significance that should be provided to diversified regional strategies. As a result, the accession countries do not have sufficiently developed studies and strategies within the regional dimension, which could allow implementation of varied development policies. According to the European Union, it is accompanied by a weak position of local governments. It seems that the pressure on perceiving the concept of the urban-rural partnership in the context of regions should become a subject of not only discussion but also reliable studies and strategic programmes for common development of urbanized territories and rural areas in particular regions of Poland.

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