

# Village Renewal as an Important Element of Integrated Rural Development

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## Abstract

*In the article the author presents the results of research and implementation works, concerning the possibility of widespread introduction in Polish conditions of the modern principles of the implementation of village renewal programs. Currently, these programs are implemented in a much shallower form, restricted only to investments in selected items of social and technical infrastructure. Apart from Opolskie Voivodship – and part of Dolnośląskie and Pomorskie voivodships—its full potential within village renewal of the building of social capital in rural areas is not used. In addition, a properly executed village renewal project may contribute to the protection and development of natural elements in rural settlements.*

**Keywords:** village renewal, rural development, social participation, conservation of countryside nature

## Preliminary remarks — current challenges for village renewal in Poland

Village renewal is a direction of rural development which arose in the western countries of the European Union, combining respect for tradition with the need to search for the place of the village in a changing world. Village renewal is a process, a constant adaptation to social and economic, internal and external changes. This should lead to the overall development of the living conditions of the rural population. The current pace of changes in the countryside and in the towns is faster than in previous centuries. On a global scale two basic trends can be observed:

- number of rural residents is decreasing, including those employed in agriculture
- for more than a decade more than the half of the world's population has been living in cities (Idziak and Wilczyński 2013, 4–6)

In Poland, the period of political transformation in the 1990s and times of economic growth associated with the integration and accession to the EU were characterized by the intensity of adverse changes in the spatial development of rural areas. Kolpiński summing up many years of research defined the following issues of development:

- chaotic building, especially in suburban areas
- uncontrolled suburbanization, resulting in the loss of open areas
- lack of respect for the natural and cultural heritage
- appropriation of public spaces
- deficiencies in equipment of residential areas in the infrastructure

From the point of view of the investor and the consumer, Polish space can be described as unpredictable, conflict-generating, ineffective and corruption-generating, and that the cause of the negative features is the mismanagement of spatial order. This assessment applies to a greater extent to the rules of law than to their execution.<sup>1</sup>

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1. See: Ład przestrzenny w Polsce — stan i problemy. Expertise prepared by Bartłomiej Kolpiński, Ministerstwo Rozwoju Regionalnego, Warszawa, 2011, pages 12–13.

In parallel, thanks to the membership in the EU, the paradigm of multifunctional development of rural areas became established in Poland. Its implementation, however, was reduced in practice to the diversification of economic activity. It maintained the practice of treatment of rural areas mainly as a sphere of production formed effectively in times of socialism. A coherent concept of spatial and pro-social development and shaping of rural areas has not been developed. These were subordinated to the implementation of the EU Common Agricultural Policy. Its second pillar dedicated to rural development has become a source of raising funds for individual investments, objectively necessary but poorly embedded in the broader context of development. This meant implementation of projects (mostly infrastructural), being the local interventions, not a way of dynamizing development processes (Idziak and Wilczyński 2013, 15), which should be done with the strong involvement of local communities in the form of bottom-up initiatives.

In countries being the homeland of village renewal, civic disagreement for impairment of the cultural environment and landscape were transformed into encompassing the entire community process of recognition of the value and creating the need for revitalization, blocking the trend of semi-urbanization of rural areas. In Poland, that process did not take place. Perhaps the new residents of rural areas coming from the cities will change this, when their idea of a “rural arcadia” will give way to unpleasant disappointment when the space surrounding their houses will become degraded. Today the former city dwellers are the backbone of many rural leadership groups. This injection of social capital will help to wake the villagers up to care for sustainable development and spatial order. However, this requires an understanding by all citizens for the following reasons:

- ensuring a high quality of life as an overarching strategy for rural area development (the village above all should be a sphere of life, and not only production)
- strengthening the community, as a condition of the development of social capital
- building of social capital being more important than of physical capital (avoiding the infrastructure trap)
- use of entities’ individualism to create specific local conditions and specialization of rural areas
- building of urban-rural partnerships, as an antidote to uncontrolled suburbanisation and pressure of investment corporations attracted by lower land prices
- internal development and revitalization of buildings and plan for the settlement of historical centres through a global village renewal (a village should be more than a cultural park, or “a bedroom” with a cluster of manufacturing or service companies on the outskirts) (Idziak and Wilczyński 2013, 16)

The essence of the process of village renewal is the involvement of the local community for the implementation of projects for the benefit of their own village. Local government should provide comprehensive support, mainly in the form of

- animation of the process of formulating the vision and goals of village renewal,
- employment of specialists for the development and implementation of projects, and
- provision of subsidies from different sources (PROW, RPO, the voivodship and own funds).

The villages and communes of the voivodships where the Regional village renewal programs are functioning as an additional source of funding (Opolskie, Dolnośląskie, and Pomorskie voivodships) will have the advantage. These programs help to stimulate and maintain the involvement of residents, through various forms of support to both project implementation, as well as the process leading to their emergence. Village renewal therefore represents a practical implementation of the principle of subsidiarity. As a development method, in an extremely efficient way, it combines bottom-up initiatives and the use of local resources with the support of public subsidies, including the EU Structural Funds. Activation of rural residents is accompanied by the use of own resources and bottom up establishing and implementation of the development vision using methods of strategic and spatial planning. On the basis of the process of village renewal the participatory commune model should form, in which the partnership of the local community and local authorities takes the form of participation in creating solutions and their implementation (Idziak and Wilczyński 2013, 26–27).

## 1 Village renewal in the light of normative acts

Village renewal is regulated in Poland by the Rural Development Programme (RDP) for 2014–2020 as part of an Activity under the name of “Basic services and renewal in rural areas” with a budget of approx. EUR 1 billion, allowing the implementation of projects in approximately 2,7 thousand villages.<sup>2</sup> The scope of action included:<sup>3</sup>

- preservation and protection of cultural heritage
- shaping of public space
- projects related to the objects fulfilling cultural functions
- support of the infrastructure development (local roads, water and sewage management) for improvement of living conditions and economic development and environmental protection (reducing water pollution)

The legal basis for implementation of village renewal in the whole EU is an art. 20 of the Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on Support for Rural Development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and Repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005.<sup>4</sup> The scope of village renewal consists of the following three sub-activities, in which are implemented a number of different types of operations:<sup>5</sup>

- investments related to the creation, improvement or expansion of all types of small scale infrastructure, including investments in renewable energy and energy saving
- studies and investments associated with maintenance, restoration and upgrading of cultural and natural heritage of the village, rural landscape and sites of high natural value, including the related socio-economic aspects and measures in the field of environmental awareness
- investments in the creation, improvement or development of local basic services for the rural population, including recreation and culture and related infrastructure

These sub-activities seem to meet the challenges of village renewal in Poland. But in RDP 2014–2020 there are no set rules for their proper implementation. It also does not point out the need for creation or strengthening of a bottom-up model of village renewal project creation.

## 2 The modern rules of the implementation of village renewal

In most EU countries village renewal is a project closely coordinated with other projects implemented in a given commune, which is complementary to an integrated approach to the development of its area, responsible for the creation of equivalent living conditions in rural areas and stimulating bottom-up initiatives. Parallel activities carried out under village renewal have a significant impact on the image of the village and its spatial development. This is because the investments generated within the village renewal have a strong impact on improving the aesthetics of the developed areas, which aims to stop the outflow of people and settlement of new residents and the creation of companies or tourist farms. A significant impact is noted by the new municipal infrastructure arising within village renewal. Unfortunately, not seen yet in the whole country is how village renewal can have an equally strong impact on development of rural areas. This is due to the presence in Poland of many genetic types of villages. Dominating are the villages of spatially extended building structures such as: the chain village, linear village, or villages scattered irregularly with simultaneous presence of hamlets. The form of the rural settlement unit has a very significant impact on the implementation of the village renewal project. In the scattered or linear villages, it is difficult to determine their center, the place where the most important investments are usually located. The large size of the built-up areas of a village also increases the costs of investment, especially in infrastructure.

2. [In the journal European practice of number notation is followed—for example, 36 333,33 (European style) = 36 333.33 (Canadian style) = 36,333.33 (US and British style).—Ed.]

3. See: Program Rozwoju Obszarów Wiejskich na lata 2014–2020. Minister Rolnictwa i Rozwoju Wsi, Warszawa, 2016, page 91.

4. See: Official Journal of the European Union L 347/487.

5. See: Program Rozwoju Obszarów..., op. cit.

In Austria and Bavaria where village renewal was born, built-up areas are compact in the absolute majority (fig. 1), comparable to the degree found in Poland in the centers of small district towns, with a clear center, where historically there was usually a square. Village renewal projects, which were developed and develop now, such as in the Opolskie Voivodship, owe their success largely to the arrangement of building areas, as nearly most often found in Austria or Bavaria compact villages with fork or radial development. In these villages the effect of the integration of the community also comes more easily, because most people live near the center and their efforts and social work at its progress is treated as an investment in their own advantage.



**Fig. 1.** Center of the village and layout of buildings in northern Bavaria

*Source:* Bavarian State Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Forestry

For example, in linear villages of Świętokrzyskie, Lubelskie or Małopolskie regions it would be difficult to achieve this effect. Therefore, the Opole program much better carried out the objectives of the village renewal, especially those in the social sphere. Whereas the analysis of the results of village renewal projects in scattered and linear villages (e.g., in the Małopolskie communes: Dobczyce, Michałowice, Miechów or Wiśniowa) show that they were limited to activities for infrastructure and investments in public use buildings. These projects were prepared and implemented mainly by the commune authorities, practically without the participation of the rural residents.

Important in this issue is the impact of the village renewal on spatial order. In the villages with scattered development creation of an attractive village center can cause a positive trend of “approaching” new buildings to it. When parallel to the concept of village renewal, a “program of arrangement-agricultural works” is being developed (in Lower Silesia an “Agricultural arrangements plan”) and is prepared with implementation rural development instruments—mainly including land consolidation, together with the post-consolidation development (agricultural arrangements)—they may be coordinated in such a way that without the need for establishing a new local development plan a functional concept of development of the village will be created, corresponding with the surrounding agricultural production space of the village.

In Western European countries, village renewal is implemented just as an element of concepts (plans) of integrated rural area development (IRAD), within which parallel projects are implemented in the fields of

- agricultural arrangements (consolidation together with infrastructure),
- agricultural water resources management (small retention, erosion, disastrous water drainage),
- actions for the protection of nature and landscape shaping and simply, and
- village renewal (Magel 2015, 57).

However, coming back to the programs of arrangement-agricultural works it must be stated that they are more commonly being prepared in rural and semi-urban communes in Poland. The main objective of these programs is to identify the assumptions for the multifunctional development of the commune, farm development, improvement of living and working conditions of the population, protection and shaping of the natural environment and preservation of the cultural values

of the landscape. These programs are potentially instruments for determining the strategic and economic goals for the comprehensive development of rural localities, although their preparation and implementation is not regulated by any EU programs or acts. This means that the communes are not obliged to draw up such programs (Pijanowski 2014, 60). The programs of arrangement-agricultural works can also have a stimulating effect on the municipal authorities to enact a local development plan to legitimize the new spatial order. These plans should take into account, among other issues, agricultural arrangements improving the ownership structure of rural localities.

The next section will discuss the provisions of the IRAD concept (plan) on village renewal, prepared for the village Strzelce Wielkie in the Malopolska Szczurowa municipality.

### 3 Village renewal under the concept (plan) of Integrated Rural Areas Development for Strzelce Wielkie

In the years 2014–2015 in the village of Strzelce Wielkie (municipality Szczurowa) Małopolskie Voivodship and the Bavarian Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Forestry implemented a project aimed at developing the IRAD concept (plan) on the specific example. As mentioned earlier, village renewal is one of several key elements of the IRAD next to

- agricultural arrangements,
- agricultural water resources management, and
- actions for the protection of nature and landscape shaping.

Strzelce Wielkie is an agricultural village, with a population of 835 inhabitants and occupying an area of approximately 1 600 ha. However, the local population no longer works mainly in agriculture. A large part of it commutes to work in the major economic centres such as Brzesko or Tarnów. Strzelce Wielkie has a rich history and great importance for the surrounding villages, as the parish church and primary school were located there.

To prepare the concept of village renewal in Strzelce Wielkie, the assumptions of the Bavarian development IRAD concept (plan) were implied. The method of survey, analytical and design activities for such concepts (plans) assumes the realization of specific steps, based on parallel work of the administration for the development of rural areas, experts and working groups consisting of villagers. These works usually include the following 3 thematic blocks:

- village renewal
- ecology and landscape
- agriculture and agricultural arrangements

In the first phase of work residents under the expert's eye have identified the weaknesses and strengths of the village followed by a common categorization of topics for further work for individual workgroups. For the "Village renewal" workgroup the following main and detailed topics were defined:

- infrastructure, including 4 specific topics
  - sewerage
  - stops
  - renewable energy
  - communication/traffic
- culture/social conditions, including 5 specific topics
  - kindergarten
  - home for elderly
  - library
  - associations "Kosynierzy" and "Złoty Kłós"
  - cooperation with the Polish community in the US
- image of village/buildings, including 7 specific topics
  - conservation of historic buildings
  - churches and chapels
  - multi-function hall
  - manor house

- local spatial development plan
- wooden architecture
- asbestos
- public spaces, including 3 specific topics
  - roads
  - lighting
  - squares

The next step was a series of working group meetings—including the “village renewal” group, which worked on all of the above specific topics, defining for each of them (for a total of 19 specific subjects) in sequence: existing conditions, perfect conditions, problems of achieving these conditions and as a result the real task. The following are real tasks defined for the specific topic “Wooden Architecture”:

- the use of regional patterns in contemporary village architecture
- the necessity to develop a vision of architectural and artistic development of the Strzelce Wielkie along with the architectural details (e.g., individual farms, houses)
- creation of the design concept of the open-air museum with the use of wooden houses from Strzelce Wielkie and a unique pattern of barn with walls made of braid
- proposition of functions of this open-air museum (e.g., school trips, weddings, festivals)

Then detailed survey works of the village resources were implemented in the field. The central element was a survey of all buildings in the village, and preparation of description of their qualitative and quantitative condition. It covered: functions and use of the buildings; distribution of location of historical and contemporary buildings; the concentration of vacant buildings and buildings that will soon be empty; the concentration of buildings in poor condition; the age of residents of buildings (especially single people over the age of 50 years); the spatial distribution of the different types of buildings; buildings important for the village; urban advantages and problems. In considering the image of the village it was also necessary to investigate carefully the historic buildings, and survey some of them, so as to know their mode of construction and lay down the rules as to how the new buildings should develop, to fit the historic image of the village and how old buildings can be maintained and further developed. All other objects important for the image of the village should also be surveyed—both those having the negative and positive impact upon it. These may include: bus stops, fences (traditional wooden fences, precast concrete, metal fences), gardens and their plants and green areas (Pijanowski and Zedler 2015, 49).

No less important was the urban analysis and evaluation of the provisions of existing planning documents, in particular contained in them the demand for new construction sites. In practice, often the existing and future buildings areas with a depth of approximately 50–100 m stretch along all roads. Often there is no obligatory, local development plan. This means that according to the law, with the consent of the municipal authorities in all these areas construction works can be carried out on the basis of a so-called “Decision on the development conditions.” But it cannot be the objective of sustainable urban development. It is therefore necessary to establish and adopt the so-called shaping guidelines (i.e., the rules concerning the permitted type and size of buildings). The area of real needs on construction sites must be defined on the basis of information obtained in the commune office regarding the annual number of new constructions in recent years. Usually, in the villages not being subject to suburbanization it amounts to up to 10 buildings a year. For a proper assessment of the area needed for new buildings it is also necessary to accept the average area of the building plot, which was built-up in recent years. It should be compared with the area designed for development, as set out in the study. After such analysis, it turned out, that in Strzelce planned construction areas grossly exceeded the actual demand. According to information from the commune in recent years the annual number of new constructions in the village averaged 3,4. The years 2010 and 2014 had the highest number of applications for building permits—4. In other years, the building activity consisted of 3 new buildings per year. If we assume a relatively large surface area of the plot of 1 000 m<sup>2</sup>, then optimistic demand for land for construction is 3 500 m<sup>2</sup> per year, which is 3,5 ha in 10 years and 7 ha in 20 years. Meanwhile, the closely built area was defined in the study on 1 000 hectares! (Pijanowski and Zedler 2015, 59).

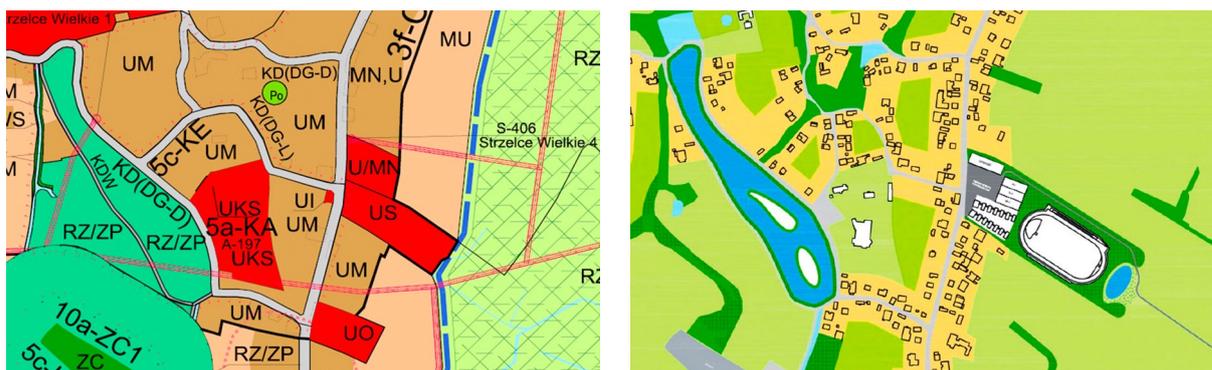


Fig. 2. Results of the urban survey of Strzelce Wielkie—fragment of the Study (left), fragment of the concept map (right)

Source: Pijanowski and Zedler (2015)

Figure 2 shows the central part of the village Strzelce Wielkie. In the left part of the drawing there is a fragment of the graphic part of the study, where oversized construction sites are visible. The right side shows a fragment of an urban concept presenting the sustainable development of building land (orange color). It also shows the planned investments in the village center and the development of green areas (ecology of the village).

#### 4 Ecological aspects of village renewal

The main rural advantage of Strzelce is a pond located in the centre of the village, around which the village was developing (fig. 2). Residents participating in the working group also drew attention to other valuable natural conditions and development of green areas. Important for them were old alleys and rows of trees forming entrances to the village, to the cemetery and to the manor house. Unfortunately, due to the fact that not all these sites are owned by the commune, the management of these precious places depended on the good will of the authorities.

Studies have shown various natural conditions related to the village. In contrast to the opportunities resulting from the presence of the pond, for example, leaf greenery in the center of the village is underestimated. In front gardens, on squares and the cemetery often it is displaced by coniferous shrubs and sometimes trees. This creates a strange image of the village, from which fruit trees, birch and linden disappear. This confirms that village renewal—in addition to the previously discussed issues—must also apply to the natural and ecological sphere. The works begin with the preliminary inspection, and then a detailed study of existing nature is carried out.

#### Conclusions

The results of research and implementation works in Strzelce Wielkie show that in Poland it is possible to implement village renewal in such a range as it is in the leading western countries of the European Union. An intense community involvement in the process is also possible, allowing its activation, integration around the problems of the village and strengthening of the community sense. To carry out the cartographic, architectural and cultural heritage analyses, the project team carefully studied Strzelce Wielkie. This was done on the spot by photographic documentation, sketch, wide surveying operations and plotting. It is also the result of available sources research. At the same time various problems of the village were analyzed with the active participation of its citizens, who have a key impact on its development. Bavarian experiences show that active social participation is one of the most important conditions of success. Residents of the village are somehow co-authors of the project on village renewal in their village.

It is extremely important, that village renewal must be an element of a larger whole—an IRAD concept (plan). It will then have a big impact on the success of such concepts, because besides improving the image of the village, protection of accumulated historical urban tissue and natural assets, it will have a major contribution to the integration and stimulation of the local community, contributing to preventing the outflow of—mostly young—people to the cities, or abroad.

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