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Landscape as the tool of coherence in land management of rural commune

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Abstract: *Economic and social transformation of rural areas in Poland after 1990 reveals itself through disintegration of previous spatial order. Building a new pattern requires a vision, which would counteract complex causes of disintegration. The latter belong to institutional domain of planning strategies and the area of common practices. Therefore, agreement on aims and means between spatial policy strategies and tactics of space users would favour the protection and sustainable shaping of environmental resources. The attempt which will merge both aforementioned life domains may be successfully realized only within landscape and at the level of commune, where local development takes place. The article refers to symptoms and causes of deformations in rural landscapes. It describes landscape rurality as desired development vision and utility of landscape tools in space management of a small commune. The article defines the idea of public space in a landscape aspect and indicates directions and areas of explorations, which would need to be developed according to the suggested perspective.*

Key words: landscape, rurality, land management

Summary: Krajobraz jako instrument spójności w zarządzaniu przestrzenią gminy wiejskiej. *Transformacja gospodarcza i społeczna obszarów wiejskich w Polsce po 1990 roku ujawnia się poprzez rozpad dotychczasowego porządku przestrzennego. Budowanie nowego ładu potrzebuje wizji, która przeciwdziałałaby złożonym przyczynom dezintegracji. Należą one do instytucjonalnej sfery strategii planistycznych oraz do obszaru codziennych praktyk. Stąd wniosek, że uzgodnienie celów i środków pomiędzy strategiami polityki przestrzennej oraz taktykami użytkowników przestrzeni sprzyjałoby ochronie i zrównoważonemu kształtowaniu zasobów środowiska. Podejście, które scali obie wymienione płaszczyzny życia może być skutecznie realizowane jedynie na płaszczyźnie krajobrazu oraz na poziomie gminy, w której przebiega rozwój lokalny. Treścią artykułu są przejawy i przyczyny deformacji krajobrazów wiejskich. Opisana została wiejskość krajobrazu w roli poszukiwanej wizji rozwoju oraz użyteczność narzędzi krajobrazu w zarządzaniu przestrzenią małej gminy.*

INTRODUCTION

…only problems which can be seen may also be dealt with… [Usher, 2017][1]

The role of the commune as a local government unit lies in fulfilling the needs of governmental community and all the actions aimed at improving the quality and safety of living, including providing spatial order and environmental protection. At commune level, both institutional top-

[1] From the letter of Richard Feynman to Koichi Mano (1996)

down and community bottom-up actions and interactions are realized and then units affect them. The commune receives effects of external - national and global conflicts. Economic and social initiatives are created and developed in a favourable local environment. The quality of space in the commune faithfully reflects the entangled internal and external social phenomena. Therefore, general concepts of landscape management and its protection need to be considered mainly towards public policy of communes. This rather obvious statement has significant consequences for managing space in Poland, particularly in rural communes, which since the 90s. have remained a traverse of political, economic and cultural transformation of unstable and discordant image [Kowalewski et al., 2013].

The aim of the article is to prove landscape utility as a tool in public policy of rural communes, initiating special integrity. Firstly, a phenomenon of landscape disintegration in rural areas is described. Secondly, a preventive concept is presented. It is also proven how forming local development visions can be used and why it is important to base them on rurality image. The significance of landscape for rurality and the role of landscape design in integrated management of commune space are also described. Finally, an attempt to root the participation of landscape instrumentation in participatory space management is made.

SPATIAL ORDER DESINTEGRATION OF RURAL AREAS

Structures of non-agricultural functions and new arrangement of public places constitute visible, spatial signs of social and economic transformations. Current estates of migrants or holiday settlements, thematic villages, logistic centers, communication infrastructures and urbanized public spaces introduce a different than developed by agricultural community system of values and disassemble an established order to rural space. Experts indicate the participation of two processes: farming modernization, which has lead to diminishing the number of agricultural employees and excluding large plots from production, as well as influx of people from cities. However, growing migration and multifunctionality of the countryside do not result directly from the market opportunity given to other functions by retiring agriculture or political support mechanisms (such as Rural Areas Development Programme). Increase in demand for rural building areas is also a differentiator of changing expectations of urban middle class towards

their lifestyles. They refer to healthy eating, physical activity, clean environment and close contact with nature. These features are permanently associated with the countryside and more and more commonly desired.

Many analysts notice an ill-balanced course of spatial transformation of the rural areas. They mostly emphasize the irrational (in the long run) spatial policy of communes [Śleszyński et al., 2007; Kowicki, 2014]. In experts opinion excessive dispersion and fragmentation of building development increase the costs of both technical and social infrastructure and transport. They also restrict agricultural productivity and burden sensitive meadow ecosystems. They are a source of life and health threats due to risk of traffic accidents and increase of environmental pollution, as well as rapid natural phenomena (such as floods and landslides) and worsening weather or water conditions. They cause the loss of visual qualities of the surroundings and diminished tourist attraction. They favour decentralization of activity (e.g. places to work, spend free time or study), which inhibits local community integration and creation of new territorial identity among migrants and causes the increase in social exclusion.

At the same time, the built rural environment with decreasing number of farms is subject to urbanization. It offers fewer smells, tactile sensations and activities linked to agriculture and nature. This restricts the scope of individual and social experiences and reduces the choice of lifestyle in the future. Altogether it causes that predictable costs of changes, including future development lost possibilities, significantly exceed the currently achieved profits. Decisions of local governments, made with influence of opinions and operating economical needs, remain in blatant contradiction with constitutional aim of social and economic policy of the Republic of Poland, i.e. with the principle of sustainable development (Art. 5 of Polish Constitution), which prescribes to optimize environmental and social loss and profit towards achieving high quality of present and future life.

The assumption that a destructive for life quality spatial policy of the communes results only from managerial mistakes or speculations would be preposterous considering the common character of the described phenomena. It is necessary to search for more basic reasons, which may be found in a deep discrepancy of two inherent spheres of social life, namely the institutional

and individual ones [Sikora, 2014]. Local governments create legal framework for individual investment activity. They are a part of the democratic system of the country; they manage the space by using normative tools of spatial planning system and realize aims of government and inhabitants. Each decision, both within public area and everyday life are not made by the system but the man, who weighs the benefits and costs – both the measurable and the uncountable. The man makes a choice guided by own experience: gained knowledge, conviction or habit, association or emotions. If the acquired tactics denies the orderly political idea [Certeau, 2008; Sztompka, 2016], it is the beginning of a conflict, finally perceived as a lack of spatial order.

In the light of the facts and judgments cited, the likely, though deeply hidden source of the conflict is rooted in the public domain. The thesis is supported by the social illegibility of spatial concepts which refer to sustainability. This matter does not include communication, and therefore agreement between institutions and individuals. One side of the scene involves acting fragmentary and disintegrated legal operations of a system managing the built environment, namely studies of conditions and directions of spatial development, local plans, protection plans, conservation guidelines, environmental impact assessment, energetic audit, building permits etc. (What pays attention is the lack of a real - as opposed to dummy - support mechanism of a social dialogue included in the system, which would incorporate the strategic principle of sustainable development. Sometimes reliable consultations of local plans are conducted owing to support of the non-governmental organizations. The example is a project of the *Our Space. Our Deal*, Foundation for Rural Support, realized since 2015.) On the other side of the stage there are individuals, unconscious of threats and postponed consequences of their own spatial decisions, who therefore take the extremely pragmatic attitude both in private life and public matters. An obvious conclusion is that the successful realization of strategic aims (offered by intellectual elites based on the current knowledge and the common wealth principle) requires procedures and tools which could become a clear carrier of a commonly recognized and accepted development vision.

LANDSCAPE RURALITY AS A COHERENCE FACTOR

Nowadays, the rationale of the country is its rurality [Wilczyński, 2013; Górka, 2016]. Transformation of rural economy and lifestyle change are reasons for it should be perceived as landscape specifics, distinguishing the countryside from the city. Rural character of the countryside involves spatial features and relations shaped in the course of rural usage. It is also made of common images [Taylor, 2001], induced by direct and indirect experiences [Berleant, 2011], which decide on perceiving spatial features as rural ones.

Rurality of the landscape is a kind of image, which may be easily interpreted by the community as different from urban due to e.g. quantity and species composition of the greenery; type, scale, intensity, construction or detail of the development; accessibility of open landscapes; mutual relations between the greenery, development and topography; dominant colour; presence of animals, etc. However, the desired rurality should not be defined only by means of features and relations of a distanced view. The image of the surroundings, which we "keep in mind" may be a significant carrier of various kinds of information on the environment-human mutual influence. The condition of the observed elements of the landscape reflects the quality of the multidimensional relations between them. The commonly recalled expressions, such as "peace and quiet", "clean air", "beautiful landscape", "healthy products" "rural heritage", "close contact with nature" [Zawadka, 2013] or – rarely - "close relations with people" are used to characterize rural environment. The protection of these valued features is closely linked to following the rules of energetic effectiveness and using technologies restricting the emission [European Commision, 2014], counteracting against social exclusion and providing access to enjoyable gardening or the possibility to choose a walking route. The examples of projects aimed at protection of cited features of rural space are: local production and distribution of regional building materials, development of ecological agriculture, preventing scattered building development or native planting policy, etc.

The idea of landscape rurality covers images, knowledge-based opinions and experiences and emotions resulting from physical involvement in the environment. At the same time, it has the opportunity to build a connection between the image of a rural landscape and ecological, social, economic and perceptive prerequisites of its shaping – a specific, holistic environmental awareness.

NEGOTIATING LANDSCAPE FEATURES

The way the landscape is perceived depends on the viewers: their private stories, gained knowledge, opinions, habits and intentions, as well as their sensual experiences, appearing in the environment. Therefore, the same view may be differently perceived. It is influenced by the optics principles, but also a collection of associations induced by landscape stimuli. According to Meining (1979), observers interpret the landscape as nature, history, habitat, artifact, economic value, issue, ideology or system. As they do it depending on different experiences and intentions, various strategies are implemented. Amos Rapoport (1990) presents a similar opinion noticing that conflicting spatial actions result from different assessments of the surroundings and situations, as well as contradictory aims of those who start them. As space users we are stuck mainly in the landscape: through visual and corporal experiences, work, emotions, memory, knowledge, beliefs and images. Landscape perceived directly and in representations remains the only accessible and such a holistic medium of communicating individual and collective meanings of environment, images and visions, and therefore it is the best of all possible common ground. Consequently, social landscape policies, using the image and referring to experiences, would simplify the establishment of attitudes and building a common idea of spatial action in counties (such as commercials in case of spreading fashion tendencies).

High negotiating competencies of the landscape decide on its usage in creating the image of the place by the community. Such collective images direct the development and limit the risk of local conflicts in managing space [Pawłowska, 2008]. Therefore, they constitute the basic prerequisite of preserving continuity, identity and coherence by the community. Creation of image has to be preceded by a collective identification of surrounding spatial features and their imaging on maps, drawings or photographs. Common recognition of qualities in the inhabited area favours social integration around these values and encourages to participation in their development. Sue Clifford and Angela King (1996) emphasizes the significant meaning of the process of creating so-called *parish maps*. “Saving” important places and collecting familiar details (stories, legends, objects related to certain lifestyle, known people) reveals unique relations between a territory and its inhabitants. It also supports their actions made to preserve identity and improve the quality of

life. What is more, it brings a lot of joy to everyday life. Only the community, which gives its territory the range of a common ground and makes it a subject of collective knowledge, activity and responsibility has a chance to safely direct its transformations. The base of the process is a common judgement and image, which then transfer to the integrity of spatial management.

THE TOOL OF LANDSCAPE IN RURAL COUNTY SPACE MANAGEMENT

Nowadays, there are two approaches to landscape, and they stem from the 19th century. These are protection paradigm and consumption paradigm. The birth of the first one was linked to building national countries. The latter is based on domination of vision and images, and characteristic for the whole western culture; tourism refers to this approach as well. Both perspectives treat landscape as a form of past. The uniqueness of its elements – objects, places and areas – decides on their protection and attractiveness for consumers. As a result, only chosen, rare objects, and not integral entireties and phenomena are protected and perceived as valuable. The features and relations of common places, without exceptional elements, but with preserved specifics of traditional spatial relations and harmonious landscape, are not treated as worth preserving. As a result, they are not reproduced in the course of usage and then disappear.

Both cited approaches ignore landscape creators and their constant input in its change. Indeed, there is no possibility to protect the unchanged past at present. Even the selection of protected elements is arbitrary and depends on the past created for the use of our times [Ashworth, 2015]. It is proven by contemporary products of rural tourism, which creatively refer to chosen elements of the popular folklore and history of the country. It is therefore impossible to treat landscape only as a type of preserved resources, subject to protection and consumption. Landscape is changeable and constantly produced. It has real and mental dimensions. It is not only a form yet also a social process including a constant creation of new structures and values; a process which can be managed. Moreover, landscape being simultaneously a material subject of action, its conditioning and effect, determines the integrity of social life. The physicality and visuality of the landscape ensure legibility to its planning and course, and therefore favour communication and social engagement. The assessment of landscape character may combine visual perception and impressions, as well as functioning of ecosystems, technical and social structures. It allows to

recognize and compare quantitative and qualitative costs and benefits of the planned transformations in a better way. The conducted discussion results in a statement that designing landscape as a social process may be a kind integrated public policy and an effective tool in achieving spatial order.

The role of landscape design, considered as managing a built environment, would be a creation of a coherent character and visual shape of places. The image of a place is a social value. It builds the impression of durability which the continuity of the community depends on. This statement is particularly directed to design of public spaces, including streets and rural squares, recreation areas [Górka, 2012] and open landscapes. Standardization of common areas and limitation of access to open landscapes are source of spatial and social disintegration, as they inhibit the elaboration a unique image of the place (as the territory with known borders) by the local community. The aim of common places design should be their landscape specifics, compliant with the development vision established by inhabitants.

FIGURE 1.Common space, Brzeźno Wlk., Pomorskie Voivodeship, Poland. Autor's photo

FIGURE .2. Nobody's space, Rybno, Pomorskie Voivodeship, Poland. Autor's photo

A mission of public spaces design formulated in such a way is associated with the postulate towards the science. It would be necessary to start research over the integrated assessment of landscape quality method. This kind of judgement should take collective images and opinions into account and compare space user's expectations to their satisfaction. The connections between common spatial use, land development as well as features and relations of natural environment, should be searched for. The results should be applied at the local level. It is

particularly important to stop the progressing unification and primitive urbanization of many villages (Fig.1, Fig.2).

Management of the built environment through designing landscape requires expansion of the instrumentation. The need for counteracting fragmentation and providing integrity at commune and town level is the reason why the landscape as a tool may be potentially used bidirectionally and simultaneously in (a) *top-down* and (b) *bottom-up* approaches. Records of local plans have to realize mental and image vision established by the community. It is created as a result of (a) external stimulation and (b) bottom-up recognition of territory resources.

(a) The legal system of public planning in communes should be complemented by the concept of shaping landscape character, which would serve coordinating and integrating roles, as well as by a collection of dissemination developments (so-called good manuals), which would thoroughly and vividly present and explain the aims and principles of sustainable spatial policies in different aspects of life (e.g. the connection between developing common spaces with the aims of rain water management or the influence of wayside and private garden planting on saving energy, etc). On the basis of reliable social consultations, communes would be responsible for recognizing attitudes of space users and conducting series of trainings, workshops and meetings dedicated to negotiating a consensus. Truly process of social consultation, covering opinion surveys, presenting developed plans, finding agreement and final choice of spatial solutions, definitely needs an expanded (digital and traditional) visualization mechanism, which would include photographs, various cartographic developments, hand sketches or models. By using landscape instrumentation, the local government would more successfully realize the established sustainability strategy and stimulate desired changes.

(b) The aim of the *bottom-up* approach in landscape management would be to build social (civic and educational) attitudes of the process, and particularly a community-developed, specific set of images, opinions, beliefs and habits related to its surroundings. It would involve a collective, landscape model, with specified forms and functions and spatial relations. It would constitute a certain desired pattern or reference for the conducted investment actions. Common drawing of mental maps of town, student or civic landscape monitoring [Landscape identification. A guide to

good practice, 2006], thematic exhibitions of town photographs and drawings, various performative events and finally participatory planning and plans' implementing would allow to create or reveal and continue landscape expectations, beliefs and associations of individuals and groups, which is a preliminary condition to establish the local principles of shaping space by the community. These actions would develop "thinking through landscape" and "landscape awareness", give the opportunity to communicate aesthetical judgements and lay foundation to local spatial culture. They would allow to set a base of social trust and local knowledge towards building an agreement platform regarding issues of development directions and spatial development. It is a domain of a so-called third sector (i.e. non-governmental organizations) and informal leaders.

CONCLUSION

Landscape protection and management cannot remain the only domain of a legislator and professionals. If this is the case, the actions are doomed to failure or temporary effects. The landscape is a mirror, reflecting the linked results of political strategies and common investment practices. As a distorting mirror, it deforms political ideas, transferred to the educationally and consciously unprepared social ground. The restoration of spatial order in communes should be then started from establishing social development vision, aligned with local images and opinions and consistent with top assumptions. Harmonization of political ideas and spatial images, judgements and habits of people would have to be entrusted with a landscape instrumentation which could be the most effective tool of coherence in the spatial policies of communes. Its implementing to land management system depends on government initiative but its effectiveness depends on civic awareness and participation. Both landscape approaches - t*op-down* and *bottom-up* - lead to establishing local principles of sustainable management of rural areas, supporting identity, integrity and durability of the local communities.

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