Rural Renewal Programmes as a Factor of Social and Economic Transition of Rural Areas – Summary

Rural development policies influence contemporary transition of rural areas. These policies represent a policymakers’ vision and hence are dominant in shaping the rural reality. One element of these policies are rural renewal programmes, which are not typical development programmes, since they match economic aspects of development with social and cultural aspects.

The main aim of the doctoral dissertation was to explain the role of rural renewal programmes in the degree and specifics of social and economic transition of rural areas. This was done based on regional rural renewal programmes in Poland and with the use of K. Halfacree’s research model of rural space. Theoretical framework of the dissertation also comprises debate on defining the rural under post-structuralism.

The impact of regional rural renewal programmes is both tangible and symbolic. In the first case it is little, because of the specifics of projects and the fact that the projects were spatially limited and non-innovative. The projects also concerned infrastructure mostly and there are serious gaps between the theoretical and practical aspects of rural renewal. In the second case the programmes confirm mostly the positive images of the rural and perpetuate the rural myth.

The dissertation is a set of published and thematically related papers, in accordance with the article 187, section 3 of Higher Education and Science Act of 20th July. This set consists of seven papers, which are the main part of the dissertation. A commentary was also added to the set. Each of the papers was an independent work as well as an integral part of the whole set. For this reason to the present summary the summaries of all the papers were added – in an original version.
Village renewal is currently being more and more highlighted as an element of rural space changes, both in terms of practical and theoretical context. The way the village renewal has changed was conditioned by changing approaches to rural areas development. At the same time, the role of local resources in rural development concepts has been different and changed according to the concepts. The above-mentioned are overlaid by the issue of the use of local resources in village renewal actions. That issue has also been dynamic in the history of village renewal. There is no doubt that those three subjects (village renewal, rural development and local resources), strongly correspond to each other.

We have decided to undertake the description of these relations in order to systematise the state of art in the common ground for these three issues. The main aim of the paper was to present the embeddedness of village renewal in rural development paradigms, partly in regional/local development paradigms, and in other scientific concepts, as well as to present the role of local resources in village renewal processes over the years. The paper, based on literature review, is theoretical and open to further debate. The considerations included in the paper indicate that village renewal bases on local resources and simultaneously strengthens them. Local resources are recognised as key in regional/local development. In the light of current scientific concepts, it is a local community who shall decide about the utilisation of these resources, which could use external instruments for this purpose.

A literature review is an indispensable and integral element of each scientific work. Its quality conditions scholars’ state of knowledge, as well as it has got an influence on interpretation of the results of their own research.

In geographical studies an expert literature review has diffused. This method does not demand on authors to describe pre-defined search criteria, which makes a review arbitrary. One alternative method for literature review is a systematic literature review. In contrast to the expert one, it requires from authors a methodological rigour when it comes to literature studies. In this method, definition and description of search criteria (search strategy) are necessary, making the whole procedure replicable.

The aim of this article is to present and analyse the use of a systematic literature review in geographical studies on the example of rural renewal publications devoted to define and understand this phenomenon. In the article, the results of conducted review was also presented. Apart from that, the quantitative analysis (a meta-analysis of rural renewal publications) and the first stage of the qualitative analysis (an assessment of publications usefulness for the purpose of further definition and interpretation of a term “rural renewal”) had been done and presented in this work.

Using search engines available in the selected publishers’ databases and search engines available in the most important indexing databases, more than 2000 records were received, whence about 100 was recognised significant and unique. The conducted search procedure allowed, apart from defining the number of records and carrying out the quantitative analysis, to: define the number of records received in the particular databases, recognise duplicates in the databases, define the number of significant records by the used keywords, define the degree of the identicalness of results received in the publisher’s databases and received in the indexing databases. Basing on that, a verification of pre-defined keywords used in the search procedure and an exploration of the geography of rural renewal publications were possible. It was proved that that systematic review method allows to objectify the discussion on a phenomenon thanks to the use of a replicable search procedure. It allows to investigate meaningful information on a phenomenon basing on a meta-analysis of publications referring to it as well. Moreover, it can optimise future search procedures. Despite the usefulness of a systematic literature review, the method has got some limitations concerning an application in interdisciplinary studies and is not fully comprehensive.
Village renewal has been a broadly discussed problem in terms of changes observed in rural areas and development thereof. Despite its practical nature, village renewal has also been broadly studied by academics – research has been made, inter alia in Europe and the United States. Due to a regional character of these studies, different scientific approaches and aims, the meaning of “village renewal” was understood differently as well.

The aims of the article are the following: to review foregoing ways of understanding the term in international literature, to present the evolution of the meaning of the term, to attempt to systematise it and to compare the mentioned interpretations with the definition of the term found in selected Polish literature. Therefore, the article is a literature review on the one hand and a theoretical analysis on the other hand. Systematic and narrative literature review methods have been applied. The analysis included more than 2000 scientific works available in key bibliographic databases and publishers' online libraries.

The literature review resulted in a development of a model of village renewal issues – in relation to village renewal dimensions, aims of the renewal pursued in each dimension and a paramount aim of the village renewal itself. Also, the article attempts to explain reasons behind the multitude of meanings of the term. Selected afterthoughts regarding the nature of the village renewal, based on the review conducted, have been presented in conclusion.
4. “What is the Formal Representation of the Rural in Poland? The Case of Rural Renewal Programmes” (Studia Obszarów Wiejskich, 2019, 55, 7–25)

The paper presents results of the research concerning formal representations of the rural in Poland. K. Halfacree’s (2006) research model of rural space was applied. Theoretical framework of the study also comprises debate on defining the rural under post-structuralism and some considerations of rural renewal. The research employed content analysis of rural renewal programmes in Poland. The outcomes were interpreted and discussed in relation to a broader process of socio-economic and cultural transformation and the notion of change in the rural space. It was explained how the formal representation of the rural is created in the rural renewal programmes.

The formal representation of the rural in rural renewal programmes does not vary in regional terms, often being chaotic and incoherent. The rural is perceived through rural community and rural space separately, and as a broader concept opposite to the urban. Representation refers to, first and foremost, rural identity. However, it does not specify what defines such identity. It merely reproduces certain tags and slogans about the rural, and thus it is based on the rural myth. It also dissociates itself from agriculture as an economic function, but not as a culture-forming one.

Village renewal has been realised in Poland via regional village renewal programmes since 1997. The programmes have differed from each other and consequently they have implemented renewal in a diverse way. Moreover, one should note that there is a dissonance between what village renewal is in practice and what it should be according to academics.

The paper possesses two aims: 1) to determine characteristics of the regional village renewal programmes in Poland and to reveal how they correspond to particular village renewal dimensions (physical-spatial, economic and social), 2) to determine the extent to which the programmes refer to village renewal features and fulfil its aims in the context of the academic theory of village renewal.

More than 350 regional councils and boards’ resolutions and attachments to resolutions up to and including the year 2016 have been analysed. These include regions where the village renewal programmes operated in the past or are still in operation. Where appropriate, the author contacted respective marshal offices to obtain information. Moreover, literature review has been conducted.

Selected conclusions: 1) regarding general principles of the regional village renewal programmes -they are similar to each other, and the village renewal has got broad aims and contributes to each dimension, 2) the following types of the regional programmes can be identified: „incentive”, „subsidy” and mixed, 3) the general principles of the regional programmes many times overestimated the results of the operations conducted as part of the programmes, given the aims of the operations and their expenditure, 4) concerning the operations themselves, these fulfil only the physical-spatial and partly the social dimension of the renewal.
Village renewal, originally, is an innovative concept of rural areas development, which is manifested by, among others, a bottom-up approach, an empowerment of rural communities or an appreciation of the rural itself. Nevertheless, village renewal projects in Poland do not possess these attributes – practice is far beyond theory.

Because of the recognised gap, the aim of the article was to answer the following questions: (1) How much are the village renewal projects in Poland innovative? (2) What factors decide about innovativeness in the village renewal projects? (3) Does village renewal practice in Poland allow to realise real innovative projects? In the article a set of methods has been applied (including case study, expert evaluation or analysis of lay discourse).

Social infrastructure projects were dominant in the group of analysed projects. Only app. 2% of the analysed projects can be labelled as innovative. Due to their limited number, it is difficult to point out factors which lead to innovation; however, it can be assumed that abandoning a typical way of thinking about external funding and a proactive approach can be one of them. The institutional and financial conditions, which villages are settled in, counteract the innovations since they are non-standardised and “unsafe” for the previously-consolidated status quo reflected by relations between local elites, power and a local community.
Rural development at the local level is a complex process, in which various actors are involved and various practices are performed. Nowadays, an important role in this process is assigned to rural communities, whose participation is essential. While in terms of the programming of rural development, it is still the rural area which is in the centre of attention, the theoretical concepts of rural development suggest that the process is even more local and specific to each village. This triggers the discussion whether the interpretation of the practices of rural development can be different depending on which spatial analysis unit is selected.

The main aim of the paper was to empirically verify this hypothesis, on the example of the participation of local communities in the rural renewal programme in the Wielkopolskie Region. Hot spot analysis, based on spatial statistical methods, was performed. The discussion of the GIS tools – that can be used for this analysis – in the research on rural development was the second aim of the paper. The third aim was to contribute to the state of knowledge on the rural development fostered beyond the European Union policies.

The main conclusion is that the most engaged communities tend to cluster, and such clusters are a specific kind of networks, which exist notwithstanding the administrative borders of rural areas. Both neighbourhood effect and cognitive distance are crucial for participation. Finally, the difficulties in the application of the tools used were identified, and these are related to the quantification of social phenomena and the selection of parameters of the very spatial statistical analysis.