



# Transformations in housing construction in rural areas of Poland's Lublin region—Influence on the spatial settlement structure and landscape aesthetics

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## ABSTRACT

The analysis presented here concerns the influence of housing construction on spatial systems and the physiognomy of rural settlements serving various economic functions. In addition, the study offers an assessment of the influence new construction is having on the living conditions experienced by country-dwellers and the appearance and aesthetics characterising rural settlements. Particular attention is paid to modern housing construction, which only began to flourish in Poland in the period of economic transformation. A basis for the work has been provided by detailed research (field surveys, questionnaires and interviews) carried out in 15 villages located in Lublin voivodeship, eastern Poland. Changes in the spatial structure of villages under the influence of the new building are presented by reference to three villages representative of the residential, tourist-recreational and agricultural functional types.

The post-1989 process of economic transformation has magnified spatial differences as regards the kind of new housing construction taking place in rural areas. The intensity at which new building is taking place is very much a function of the size of the adjacent urban centre and the area's distance from it. Housing construction concentrates close to the main transport arteries, along which a belt of enhanced economic activity is to be found. Pressure from new investors is giving rise to a transformation of the natural environment, as well to the appearance of new conflicts between agriculture and housing. The development of new styles of building has led to changes in traditional configuration of villages.

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## 1. Introduction

The rural settlement process in successive periods was subject to a wide range of phenomena encouraging spatial differentiation. Changes involved both the settlement system as a whole over a certain larger area and the spatial structure of different settlement units. The result has been the generation of various different systems of rural settlement, as well as a diversity of morphogenetic settlement types. Residential buildings constitute a fundamental element here.

Rural settlement is a distribution of type and density depending on both natural and socioeconomic conditions. The natural conditions (most notably quality of land and its suitability for farming) are deemed to play the primary role where the onset of rural settlement is concerned (Sevenant and Antrop, 2007; Unvin and Nash, 1992). In contrast, it is the socioeconomic factors (*inter alia* major agricultural reforms and processes of migration) that shape the spatial structure of the settlement system in general, and individual villages in particular. Indeed, the role of the said social and economic factors became steadily greater in successive historical

periods, just as the importance of the natural factors declined. This conclusion has gained support over time from the work of Von Thunen (1842), Chisholm (1967), Cloke (1979) and Kiełczewska-Zaleska (1978), among others. Today's spatial structure to rural settlement is above all shaped by accessibility in terms of transport, and the density of the road network (Havbaker et al., 2004); location in relation to large urban agglomerations (Thorson, 1997; Hammer et al., 2004); outfitting in infrastructure (Bański, 2006); land prices (Ihlanfeldt, 2007); legal conditioning and so forth.

Agriculture represented the primary function of rural areas in the past, so it was characteristic for village construction to be dominated by farmstead buildings present at varying densities and in different spatial arrangements. However, as economic development progressed and rural areas became better equipped with social and technical infrastructure, economic functions other than farming developed. This went hand in hand with an intensifying process of urbanisation and ever-greater interest in the urban way of life, the overall result being a change in the way villages were being built-up that was noticeable in terms of both physiognomy and morphology.

The changes in question are most tangible in the satellite villages around the larger cities, and they have been following the same course irrespective of geographical location. The only differences are in dynamic and time of occurrence (Bański, 2005b;

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Bruegmann, 2005; Clapson, 2003; Douglas, 1997; Harris, 1943; Hughes, 1974; Pryor, 1968; Wasilewski and Krukowski, 2004). The universal phenomena include an ever-greater concentrating of residential buildings, together with an improvement in the living conditions within dwellings. Changes of this kind have been much more limited in the peripheral regions, many of which continue to lack factors capable of stimulating dynamic economic development (Bański, 2005a; Shucksmith et al., 2005; Woods, 2005).

Poland's rural areas represent an interesting research area when it comes to changes in landscape and spatial structure in association with new kinds of housing construction in villages. The period of just last 10–20 years has brought such major economic, social and cultural change that the contemporary village will obviously have been influenced by it either directly or indirectly. Indeed, the post-1989 era in Poland represents a unique situation in that it brought changes both in the political and economic system and a series of accessions to Western European structures. All of that ensured rapid change in rural areas, if changes differentiated from region to region and from one locality to another. Of course, similar processes and phenomena are also to be observed in other CEECs (*Agriculture and Rural Development in Transition Economies*, 2003; Fekete, 2005; Ingham and Ingham, 2002; Rey and Bachvarov, 1998; Swinnen et al., 1997).

The major cognitive aim of the paper is to point at the contemporary directions of the development of housing construction in the rural areas of the Lublin voivodeship as well as to determine the factors influencing its quantitative and structural diversity. The authors tried to explain the causes of the disproportions concerning the standards and equipment of housing and the development of new housing construction.

The research has been conducted with respect to the transformations of the physiognomy of housing construction. The research is to answer two of the most significant questions:

- how the currently conducted Polish economic reforms affect the scale and standard of the new building construction in the villages of the Lublin voivodeship?
- to what extent the new housing construction is a factor transforming the spatial structure of the region?

## 2. Study area and data collection

A three-tier administrative system is in place in Poland. The largest administrative unit is the regional-level voivodeship (of which there are 16). Each of these has between several and 10+ poviats (giving 373 in the country as a whole). In turn, each powiat consists of between several and 10+ gminas, or local authority areas (2489 in all).

Specifically, the study draws on detailed research carried out in 15 villages within eastern Poland's Lublin voivodeship. Data on residential buildings were collected in the course of fieldwork, plus surveys of households and interviews with representatives of local government. A total of 2627 households were studied.

Lublin (Lubelskie) voivodeship is among the administrative units in Poland that is considered to be lagging behind to the greatest extent. Prior to the EU accessions of Bulgaria and Romania, this was in fact the European Community's poorest region. It is at the same time the most agricultural region in Poland, with 40% of the inhabitants working in farming and 63% of the whole area given over to agricultural land use.

From among the 15 villages studied (Fig. 1), three considered to represent different functional types were selected to meet the needs of the analysis on changes in spatial structure (Stola, 1995). Jakubowice Konińskie is a satellite village in the immediate vicinity of the city of Lublin and hence serves residential functions first and

foremost. In turn, Krasne is within a naturally attractive area, close to a lake, and so serves recreational functions. Finally, Antoniówka is a village in a peripheral location, in which the agricultural functions continue to prevail.

Since the work has been concerned with housing/residential construction, it is necessary at the outset to define the two basic concepts of the residential building and the dwelling. Polish statistical sources regard a residential building as a building entirely given over, or at least 50% given over, to dwellings. The term dwelling in turn denotes premises of one or several rooms plus auxiliary quarters which have been specially built or made over to serve residential functions. It should be stressed that, in Polish rural areas, it is single-family construction that prevails, thereby ensuring that numbers of residential buildings are closely similar to numbers of dwellings. To put it another way, most residential buildings in villages comprise just a single dwelling.

## 3. Diagnose and discussion

### 3.1. A general outline of the development of housing construction in Polish rural areas

Post-War Poland witnessed more than a doubling in its housing resources. The number of dwellings in cities increased by more than 200%, while the number in rural areas rose by just 60%. However, while the number of town- and city-dwellers grew dramatically, the population of rural areas remained more or less stable. Furthermore, it was towns and cities that suffered most during World War II, so these were in far greater need of far-reaching reconstruction work.

State policy had a marked influence on the way new construction developed. The centrally planned economy was just that, the central authorities deciding on the allocation of funding for housing construction, the aim being to ensure comparability of living conditions across the country. The standards imposed from above harmonised the kind of residential building work that was being done nationwide. Nevertheless, the principle was more fully adhered to in urban than rural areas. Towns and cities were dominated by a model in which housing estates comprised many blocks of flats, each block bringing together many families in a single building. Nevertheless, the buildings in villages also had an appearance dictated at least partly by the standards set.

Once the War was over, the Polish authorities faced the tough task of configuring the settlement network of a territorially new country, as well as making good the severe losses in housing stock that had taken place. These tasks formed part of farm reform, as well as coming under the National Physical Planning Act 1946. Unfortunately, implementation in practice did not achieve the desired regulation of the settlement system. Rather, it encouraged a previous trend towards the over-dispersal or sprawling of built-up areas, as well as allowing new developments to take place with no heed being paid to environmental protection principles. It was only with the 1961 Act designating building land in rural areas that planning principles were put in order and built-up areas became less likely to sprawl out excessively.

The maximum growth in rural housing resources occurred in the 1950s, the activity reflecting the reconstruction of residential buildings destroyed between 1939 and 1945 (Table 1). It is estimated that some 35% of all residential buildings in Poland were lost during the War. The later decades did not bring such spectacular quantitative changes in the housing stock, though there were more marked qualitative changes, mainly entailing the replacement of old buildings with new ones, as well as the employment of better-quality, more-modern building materials. The architectural styles and appearances of buildings also obviously changed.

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