



Journal of Geography, Politics and Society

2019, 9(2), 44–56

<https://doi.org/10.26881/jpgs.2019.2.05>



CLASSIFICATION OF RURAL AREAS IN POLAND IN THE CONTEXT OF REVITALIZATION

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Citation

Pałka-Łebek E., Kiniorska I., 2019, Classification of rural areas in Poland in the context of revitalization, *Journal of Geography, Politics and Society*, 9(2), 44–56.

Abstract

The article aims to show the classification of Polish rural areas in the context of revitalization process. This work shows the research making in Polish rural areas concerning this new, important process. Taking experiences from development of rural regions in European Union self-government created the programs called “Revival of the country” and revitalization. These are the most important and the largest regional enterprises implemented by the rural society and also for rural society. It had favorable influence on the preservation and development of the rural identity and integrity at their full range. Nowadays the revitalization process is very important factor of versatile rural economy development.

Key words

rural areas, revitalization, problem areas, classification

Received: 20 February 2019

Accepted: 31 May 2019

Published: 30 June 2019

1. Introduction

According to scholars studying rural areas, their diversity and directions of changes on the one hand come from: (a) current historical conditions of development, (b) current agricultural policy, (c) adopted strategies for prospective transformations of rural areas, on the other hand – multi-dimensional environmental, social and economic conditions (e.g. Bański, 2014; Knapik, Kowalska, 2014; Runge, 2017). The last thirty years emphasized various problems in these areas, which require external financing and

development of appropriate programmes. For this reason, the process of revitalization consisting of various remedial actions, taken in various aspects, is becoming crucial for rural space as the main goal of regional and local policies.

Revitalization of rural areas is composed of spatial, technical, social and economic changes. Its goal is to “resurrect” those villages that suffered from stagnation, economic degradation or the loss of their functions due to political, social and economic changes. Revitalization projects stimulate local communities to rebuild their social and economic potential.

This paper aims at supplementing insufficient studies on revitalization in rural areas. The problem discussed in this study is identification of revitalization as a method for development of rural areas. Revitalization is one of the biggest challenges for rural areas in Poland. Nowadays, it is undertaken by numerous gminas (LAU-2) to eliminate obstacles preventing or slowing down their development. Degraded area is such a hindering element. The process discussed in this paper, focused on solving different problems is one of the most important tasks financed with the EU funds for the period of 2014–2020.

Revitalization of rural areas meets the needs to respond to social, economic and spatial degradation and the resulting crisis phenomena. The subject of the study is revitalization of rural areas. The object of the study is the society (population) changing their space with this process. Spatially, the subject of the study covers problem areas in rural areas. The main goal is to identify revitalization in rural areas with their various categories taken into account. The study classifies the studied areas due to the need for introduction of this process. Based on the analysis of the literature and the authors' own experience, the thesis has it that rural areas in Poland are not homogeneous due to different previously developed socio-economic functions. Therefore, their characteristic features include a variety of problems to solve, also with revitalization.

The results may be practically used by local governments, NGOs, rural leaders or entrepreneurs since they provide information on ongoing revitalization processes, which may facilitate planning of development of the areas in question.

The main method of scientific research on revitalization in Poland is the analysis of theoretical and cognitive content. In order to solve the problem of this study, the authors used mainly scientific literature, with reviews of Polish and foreign publications. Moreover, territorial classification of rural areas was also used.

2. Revitalization of rural areas in scholarly studies

The works addressing the issue of revitalization evolved over time. Initially, they only documented and evaluated the effects of revitalization programmes in various regions. Recently, papers with theses and research questions related to revitalization have appeared. Moreover, practical revitalization also changed over time and referred to the evolution of its programmes, goals, activities and

policies. As many authors prove and experience shows, each revitalization leads to spatial and functional changes of the revitalized area, which results in its socio-economic development, improvement of spatial order, aesthetics and functionality, as well as elimination of pathological phenomena (Kaczmarek, 2015; Parysek, 2006, 2015; Lorens, 2007). Contemporary Polish scholarly studies emphasize strongly developed social element. This is crucial since it is the man who is in the centre of all initiated revitalization projects.

When assessing the works on revitalization focused on rural areas from the Polish literature, it should be emphasized that initially authors focused on general and cognitive issues, and later discussed results, consequences and problems of revitalization.

In Europe, the first scholarly discussions on revitalization of rural areas appeared with the first papers on village revival. First it appeared in Germany in the early 1960s and in the Netherlands (Renewal..., 1966; Röling, 1993). As a component of rural policy, revitalization in Germany has the longest tradition among European countries. That is why German publications provide the most knowledge concerning revitalization of rural areas. Following the literature, it was assumed that revitalization in this country is a comprehensive organizational and investment process, ultimately leading to a revival of degraded, neglected or dysfunctional areas (Strijker, 1993). It refers mainly to reversing unfavourable processes that systematically lead to the fall and degradation of these areas.

The first German scholar who showed the importance of revitalization and renewal of villages was G. Henkel (1979). In his later studies (Henkel, 1984, 2000), he emphasized the spatial aspect and proved that village centres as separate spaces (the so-called village cores) are public spaces where interpersonal interactions of residents are concentrated.

In the literature, there were works regarding harmful results of actions following the modernization paradigm for rural areas (Gulinck et al., 2001). This led to the transfer of patterns for urban development to rural areas (Knievel, 1997).

In 1990s in Germany a new wave of studies on revitalization of rural areas appeared. The emergence and development of new non-agricultural functions was an important issue discussed in the studies (e.g. Böcher, 2014). The sources of these changes were attributed with the urgent need to adjust the rural economy of that times to the applicable development requirements. After the German unification, while implementing revitalization projects there were efforts to introduce non-agricultural functions to villages. The emergence of new functions

in rural areas shaped the economic dimension of their revitalization and led to their multifunctional development.

The turn of the 20th and 21st century brought social focus in German studies. The role of social aspects of revitalization increased significantly, and they also focused on local society and its role in this process (e.g. Marsden, 1999; Crouch, 2006; Halfacree, 2012). Gradually, scholars emphasized its comprehensive character in the form of a specific activities programme, and they also began to appreciate the role of social participation and social capital (Magel, 2000; White, 2011). Therefore, revitalization began to be understood as a specific model of division of tasks between the state authority and society (Damyanovic, Reinwald, 2014).

Since the early 1990s, the development of rural areas, which is affected by local communities, has come into sharp focus in Western Europe and the United States of America (Hamedinger, 2004). It was suggested that revitalization cannot focus only on economic effects, but it must also take into account community revival, which is the primary resource for rural areas (e.g. Henderson et al., 2007; Zagrofos, 2007).

Instead of currently widespread studies of changes in the spatial and functional structure of rural areas, the contemporary literature, mainly British and American, emphasises the importance of social studies on rural areas. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that the revitalization model adopted in the West justifies subcontracting this process to specialized companies, which is typical to Western Europe, the US and Canada (Roberts, Sykes, 2008; Kort, Klijn, 2011). In Poland, such practices have not been adopted yet, and there are no entities offering such services.

Presently, revitalization has already been discussed as a problem of transformation and development of rural areas (Woods, 2005). Despite its mainly practical nature, it is the subject of numerous scholarly works. It was analysed mainly in European countries, but also in the United States, Canada, Japan, China, Hong Kong and Australia.

Currently, in Poland there are great expectations associated with the adaptation of patterns and experience from Western European countries where the development of rural areas followed the paradigm of revitalization using revival programmes for villages.

3. Genesis of revitalization processes of rural areas

Revitalization in rural areas was proposed as a modern concept of their development, related to degraded areas. It refers to areas where negative social, economic, ecological and spatial phenomena occur simultaneously. According to M.S. Cato (2009), properly implemented revitalization has an integrated character and includes comprehensive processes carried out in partnerships, revival oriented, binding together both technical activities and projects boosting socio-economic recovery. Presently, it is not possible to preserve all tangible and intangible resources of rural areas without revitalization. Moreover, specific nature of developed public space strengthens the identity of residents, making the entire community stronger.

In theoretical publications and statistical sources, there is no single, commonly used definition of revitalization. It refers to areas which were previously used and fulfilled specific functions; however, due to poor management they were neglected, lost their values, and presently constitute so-called problem areas. Problem area, a part of geographical space, is characterised by negative social, economic and technical phenomena, that cause specific anomalies of development and abnormality of a particular area (Zagożdżon, 1980).

Presently, the binding definition of revitalization in Poland was stipulated in the Act of the Polish Parliament on Revitalization of October 9, 2015 (Ustawa o rewitalizacji z 9 października 2015, 2015). It is described as "complex, coordinated, long-term process of spatial, social, economic and technical transformations carried out in a degraded area, initiated by a local government in order to bring it out of a crisis, mainly by providing it with new functional quality and creating conditions for its development, based on its characteristic endogenous conditions". According to this approach, the implementation of revitalization programmes for rural areas aims at preventing further loss of socio-economic functions and creating opportunities for their sustainable development. Numerous definitions of this process were developed for various strategic and operational documents.

In Poland, the term "revitalization" started to be commonly used in mid-1990s. However, even now this term seems to be overused or misused.

Another important issue is the fact that revitalization is a response to the crisis in problem rural areas, which occurs in many aspects of socio-economic life. It is also important to define transparent criteria for delimitation of degraded rural areas where

Tab.1. Primary and specific goals of revitalization in rural areas

Primary goals	Specific goals – selected examples
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – stimulation of economic development of rural areas with setting up and developing small, local companies and attracting external investors – decreasing unemployment rate – higher tax revenues of gminas
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – better standards of living for citizens – neutralising social exclusion and negative social selection – improved demographic situation – high level of public safety – restoration of social ties
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – limited interference in the natural environment – maintenance or improving of natural environmental conditions – larger green areas – reduced emissions of waste
Spatial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – integration with previously isolated rural areas – maintenance or improving of spatial order – shaped landscape of rural areas – expansion of infrastructure

Source: elaboration based on Pałka-Łebek (2019).

revitalization takes place. It must include actions with many interrelated elements in problem areas.

It should also recognise a variety of primary and specific goals of revitalization in rural areas (tab.1).

The implementation of specific and primary goals of revitalization is a necessary condition for achieving the main goal, i.e. to introduce permanent quantitative changes in the area covered by the revitalization programme (i.e. improvement of living conditions of the local population).

4. The idea and criteria defining rural areas

The transformation processes of rural areas in Poland were introduced several years ago, but many problems have not been solved yet (Kamińska, Pałka, 2009). There are various negative phenomena in these areas. Traditionally, rural areas were identified with agricultural activities. Since the turn of the 21st century, the scope of studies devoted to rural areas has changed. It was focused on analysing relationship between agriculture and development of rural areas (Zegar, 2012). In Polish and European literature there are numerous publications on historical changeability of the role of agriculture and transformations in rural areas.

In the current literature there is a clear deviation between rural areas and villages (Runge, 2017). While villages are settlement units, rural areas belong to a broader concept, covering both villages and their surroundings (Stanny, 2014a). Changing external conditions of rural areas often connect their definition to this external context and their relationship

to neighbouring urban centres (Runge, 2017). This is how rural areas are defined by M. Stanny (2014a), who proves that it is the place of residence and management of people forming a local community, where, compared to cities: (a) both social and economic activity (agricultural in particular) is spatially dispersed; (b) less diversified social and economic structures result from their lower competitiveness; (c) the availability of goods and services, especially public ones, is lower. Presently, the concept of “rural area” no longer means the whole vast territory, and is understood as a separate space distinguished due to its specific feature. Villages are usually treated as specific settlement units, while rural areas include the territory of villages and their neighbouring areas. According to J. Bański (2011), definitions of rural areas have undergone historical changes and they require some flexibility. Typically, they are agricultural areas with an emphasis on human economic activity, characteristic of agricultural regions (Kutkowska, 2011). With socio-economic transformations in rural areas in mind, their definition should take into account not only diversification of functional structure of the economy of rural areas, but also features of rural communities (Rosner (ed.), 2007). These features are usually taken into consideration in definitions of rural areas developed by sociologists (e.g. Kaleta, 1998).

An important methodological elements of studies on rural areas is the possibility to conceptualise issues addressed with the use of a specific explanatory theory (Mazurek, 2010). A review of contemporary literature on rural areas shows numerous references to the concept of multi-functionality as

the way leading to sustainable development of rural areas (e.g. Kostrowicki, 1976; Kłodziński, 1996; Korelewski, 1998; Adamowicz, 2004; Runge, 2017). However, it should be noted that this concept, developed in Western European countries at the beginning of the 20th century, aroused interest in Poland in the 1980s, and following the transformation of political and economic system it is enjoying its revival (Runge, 2017). Together with the concepts of order (social, economic and spatial), renovation of rural areas and small towns, development based on local initiatives and boosting development of local communities, it creates a set of so-called old concepts of development of rural areas (Siemiński, 1996).

5. Problems of rural areas

Problem areas are an integral part of geographical space. They are formed, in rural areas, with those parts of the country or region with high concentration of numerous negative phenomena that make the area handicapped and weaken their agricultural and non-agricultural functions. In many scholarly studies on problem areas in rural areas, terms are used interchangeably and they include the following examples: backward areas, retarded areas, peripheral areas, depressed areas, neglected areas, and declining areas. Sometimes, they are used as synonyms for "problem areas". This terminological freedom may cause serious confusions. In foreign literature, conceptual differences concerning the term "problem areas" and its derivatives (e.g. depressed areas, distressed areas, problem areas, etc.) are as wide as in Polish studies.

According to Z. Więckowicz (1989) the problem area is a part of geographical space characterized by specific anomalies of its development. The development of these areas is accompanied by certain anomalies with a negative impact on the entire area. This condition creates certain problems, which unfortunately cannot be solved with internal forces alone as they require external intervention.

Specializing in rural research, R. Kulikowski (1992) divided problem areas into two separate groups. These are:

- depressive areas, underdeveloped in comparison to surrounding areas, with similar environmental and non-environmental development conditions;
- conflict areas, with concentration of numerous economic functions (e.g. agriculture, industry, transportation, etc.), where one function develops at the expense of others.

Many geographers and specialists in agricultural sciences have attempted to define an agricultural problem area. J. Falkowski (1990) noted that it is characterized by low efficiency of its agriculture in relation to its natural, historical and economic conditions as well as investments in fixed and current assets of agriculture.

J. Bański (1999) closely focused on the territory of Poland to verify previously identified problem areas in rural areas. The author also attempted to develop appropriate criteria and methods for identifying agricultural problem areas. Based on his comprehensive review of the literature, he assumed that the problem area is a spatial unit characterized by some abnormality of one or many elements of this space. The problem area is characterized by concentration of negative phenomena that hinder its proper development (Bański, 2000).

A. Rosner (2000) separated rural problem areas in Poland. The author proved the thesis that funds from various sources aimed at stimulating socio-economic development and improving living conditions of the rural population, were transferred mainly to the most active gminas, where local governments were able to prepare realistic and well-founded applications. The analysis carried out by A. Rosner (2000) showed that there are three dominant types of problem gminas in rural areas in Poland. These are:

1. Gminas with extremely unfavourable development conditions in many respects.
2. Gminas with extremely unfavourable conditions determined by their demography and infrastructure.
3. Gminas with extremely unfavourable conditions; however, they are mainly determined by their demography and the factor related to the state of natural environment.

The author noted that problem rural areas should be privileged and receive the access to funds for equalisation of regional economic development earlier.

Comprehensive studies on agricultural problem areas in Poland were also published by J. Jadczyzyn and A. Rosner (2013). The authors attempted to describe the socio-economic characteristics of areas with features preventing development of their agricultural function. Analysis of the results showed that a large part of agricultural problem areas are composed of areas with socio-economic underdevelopment and poor dynamics of current changes. This applies primarily to lowland areas. On the other hand, in terms of agricultural function problem areas in mountain and foothill areas are characterized by relatively high dynamics and pace of socio-economic development. However, in these areas agricultural activity is limited or replaced by other functions,

including tourist function. The results showed that Polish gminas with no restrictions for the development of agriculture constitute 62.2% of all units, and problematic 37.8%.

An attempt to identify peripheral rural areas in Poland and to group them according to the similarity of their socio-economic characteristics was made by M. Stanny (2014b). The author defined the level of socio-economic development using six different spheres, which were described with the chosen variables. These were the spheres of: demographic structure, social situation, labour market, de-agrarization, agricultural and non-agricultural sectors. Such selection of indicators was made to reflect the most important problems of the regional structure of villages in Poland. The distribution of synthetic measure obtained in Polish rural space showed that rural areas in western Poland are better developed than in eastern regions. The leading, territorially spacious region, highly developed is

Wielkopolska and the neighbouring regions: the central part of Lubuskie Voivodeship, northern part of Dolnośląskie Voivodeship and south-western part of Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship. On the other hand, poorly developed gminas, classified as peripheral areas, prevail in eastern Poland and they include the following voivodeships: Podlaskie, Lubelskie, Świętokrzyskie, Małopolskie, Warmińsko-Mazurskie and Mazowieckie. They occupy compact spaces. However, in western Poland units with low levels of development are located point-wise. Based on the indicators of socio-economic development adopted by the author, using the taxonomic method, gminas were grouped into typologically homogeneous peripheral areas (fig. 1). This procedure produced three types of problem areas in Poland: 1, 2, 3. The types identified by the author are diversified (heterogeneous) and internally consistent (homogeneous):

- Type 1 gminas (so-called "eastern type") are concentrated in eastern Poland (Podlaskie Voivode-

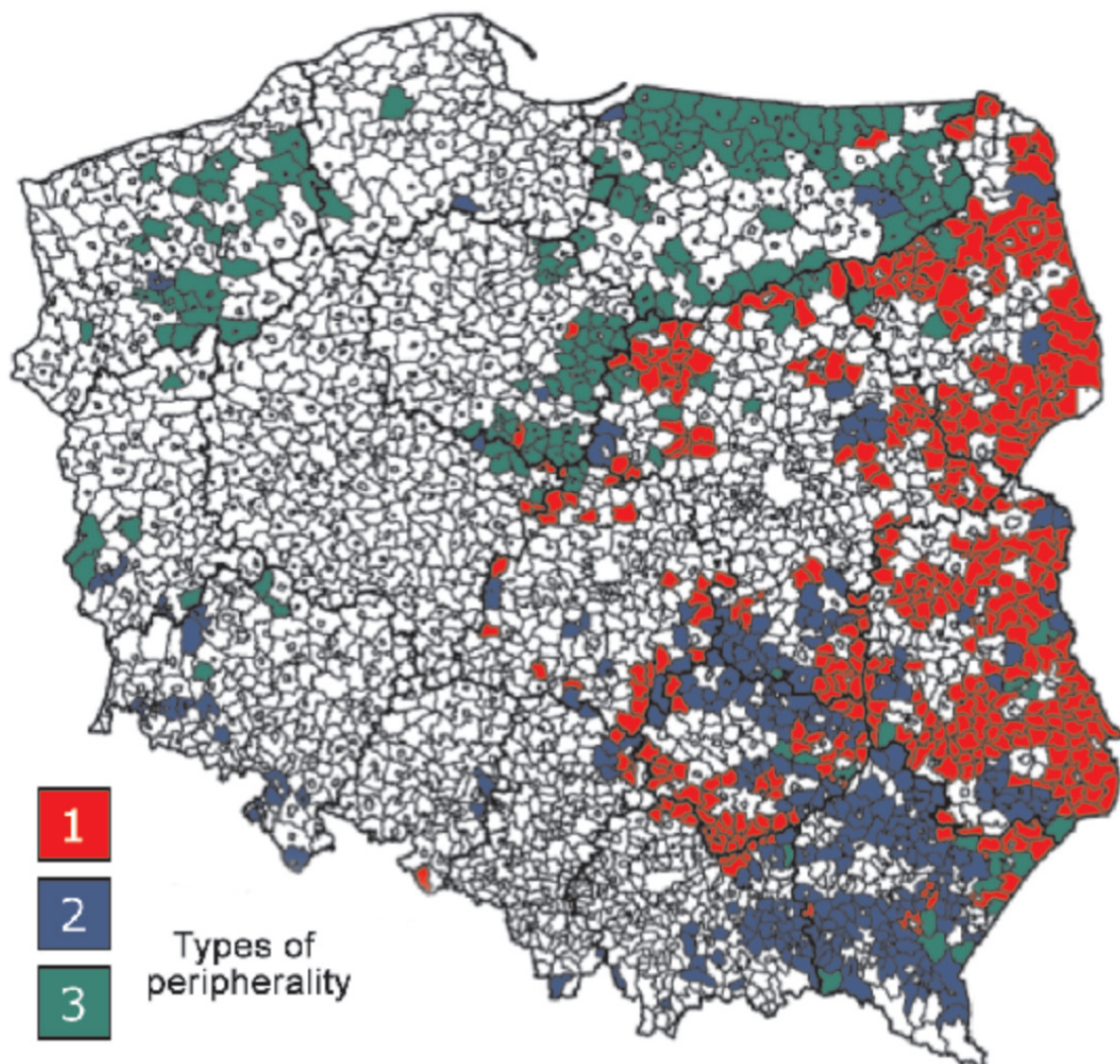


Fig. 1. Typology of peripheral rural areas in Poland in 2009, non-hierarchical method

Source: M. Stanny (2011), amended.

ship, Lubelskie Voivodeships, subregional zones of Mazowieckie, Świętokrzyskie, and Łódzkie Voivodeships) and they cover almost half of all gminas classified as peripheral rural areas in Poland.

- Type 2 gminas are located mainly in Podkarpacie and in the region of the former Central Industrial District (Pl. Centralny Okręg Przemysłowy). They were called „southern type”.
- Type 3 peripheral gminas of so-called „northern type” were named as post-state-owned farms.

The functional models of peripheral rural areas described by M. Stanny (2014b) are a successful attempt to group them according to the similarity of socio-economic features.

J. Bański (2014) presented an overview of contemporary typologies of rural areas in Poland. The concepts of typology of rural areas discussed by the author were based on two basic research approaches, i.e. location or structural. The classification procedure was applied by the author for rural areas. These areas were divided into smaller groups, which is justified in terms of financial perspective of 2014–2020, where the distribution of funds depends also on the type of rural area.

Functional classification of Polish gminas was carried out by P. Śleszyński and T. Komornicki (2016). They made it for monitoring of spatial planning in gminas. For this purpose, they applied a deductive-inductive method, the so-called functional typology. As a result, 10 categories (types) of gminas were identified, which the authors presented cartographically. Majority of Polish gminas were classified as agricultural types (approx. 47%). Over 10% of units showed extensive development. Environmental protection functions play a major role in these gminas. Among all other types, the most numerous is the group of gminas with other functions (e.g. tourist) (Śleszyński, Komornicki, 2016; fig. 2, p. 480). Functional classification presented by the authors is a good reference point both for spatial monitoring and other applications related to the analysis of socio-economic processes. The proposed classification gave the opportunity to identify spatial regularities.

The review of the distribution of problem areas developed for this study shows that due to the socio-economic structure there are strongly heterogeneous units in Polish rural areas. Therefore, their development problems differ. Moreover, this development cannot follow a commonly adopted model, as this could lead to even greater diversification. Generally, it is necessary to implement regional and local development policies, taking into account separate, original, local features and with greater involvement of local communities and authorities.

Following the review, the definition of problem areas was adjusted to the goal of the study. Thus, problem areas in rural areas are composed of those regions (i.e. parts of rural space) with difficult problems of social, economic, technical, environmental or spatial nature. They are the cause of various development anomalies. Problem areas understood this way create systems with pathological features, the development of which is accompanied by various irregularities that negatively affect the whole territory. Elimination of these negative features is not possible only using internal forces, but it requires specific revitalization measures.

6. Classification of rural areas in terms of their revitalization

Territorial classification is one of the key elements of socio-economic geography. As a result, its significance as an applied science increases. Various approaches to classification and typology of rural areas may be found in the literature (both Polish and foreign). A thorough review and assessment of the methodological background of contemporary typologies of rural areas in Poland was made by J. Bański (2014). The author wrote that the most important issue taken into account while choosing typology and classification methods is their goal.

The attempt to classify rural areas in terms of their revitalization in this subsection follows the structural approach. It includes the most important features distinguishing the contemporary nature of rural areas in Poland, their economic functions, as well as the need to solve various problems in risk areas.

Classification is connected with generalization and concise description. It is used to extract subgroups (subsets) in a specific group (set) of objects. It requires two main conditions, i.e. adequacy (i.e. the sum of subgroups (subsets) should equal the whole group (set)) and separability (i.e. subgroups (subsets) should not contain common elements) (Nowak, 2004).

Thus, classification leads to the division of the whole group (set) of examined objects or units.

J. Parysek (1982) also distinguished typological classification. It is understood as the best accepted variant of classification in a given study.

In this study, areas which require revitalization are understood as geographically separated territories with accumulated negative social, economic, spatial and natural phenomena, the solution of which requires special support. This fact seems to be justified since revitalization is a process aimed at boosting the development of problem areas.

Research procedure presented later on in the paper focused on the classification of rural areas in terms of the need for their revitalization may be treated, from a procedural point of view, as its specific type. The goal was to identify rural areas in Poland with a diversified need for revitalization. Three separate groups of rural areas were identified in terms of the need to undertake the above mentioned processes (tab. 2). These are:

1. Regions which require the most urgent revitalization.
2. Regions which require moderate revitalization.

3. Remaining regions where revitalization complements other processes aimed at solving problems in degraded rural areas.

The first group according to the need for revitalization is composed of:

A. Rural areas which require the most urgent revitalization.

The first group of rural areas includes those areas where due to the accumulation of problems there is a need for the most urgent revitalization (the most degraded areas). It includes those rural areas with numerous development barriers, i.e. those with simultaneous accumulation of numerous negative

Tab. 2. Classification of rural areas in Poland according to the need for revitalization

No.	Groups of rural areas	Distinguishing features of rural areas	Location
1.	Regions which require the most urgent revitalization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • regions where gminas with extremely unfavourable conditions determined by demographic and infrastructural factors (type 1 according to Rosner) form compact spaces, • peripheral gminas (included in eastern and southern problem areas) forming coherent and continuous groups of units, • problem areas of national significance, • gminas not participating in development processes and areas located away from functional urban areas, • underdeveloped areas, • highly agricultural regions, with dominating agricultural functions or with tourist and recreational functions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • voivodeships: • Warmińsko-Mazurskie, • Podlaskie, • Lubelskie, • Świętokrzyskie, • Podkarpackie, • eastern part of Mazowieckie (i.e. the following poviats: Pułtusk, Maków Mazowiecki and Ostrołęka), • eastern part of Małopolskie (i.e. the following poviats: Dąbrowa Tarnowska, Tarnów, Brzesko, Gorlice, Nowy Sącz).
2.	Regions which require moderate revitalization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • problem areas of inter-voivodeship significance, • underdeveloped areas, • peripheral gminas (included in southern and partly northern problem areas), • areas with high percentage of gminas with extremely unfavourable development conditions defined by factors of various nature, • regions with high percentage of gminas classified as lowland and mountain problem agricultural areas, • gminas not participating in development processes, • areas with dominating agricultural functions, with mixed functions and multifunctional transitional areas, • areas of degraded space for agricultural production conditioning development abnormalities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • central part of Pomorze region (Pomerania), • southern part of Mazowieckie Voivodeship (i.e. the following poviats: Lipsko, Zwoleń, Szydłowiec, Radom, Kozienice, Przysucha), • rural areas in Górny Śląsk region (Upper Silesia), • southwestern part of Małopolskie Voivodeship (i.e. the following poviats: Limanowa, Nowy Targ, Zakopane and Sucha Beskidzka), • western part of Dolnośląskie Voivodeship, • southern part of Lubuskie Voivodeship, • south-eastern part of Łódzkie Voivodeship (i.e. the following poviats: Opoczno, Tomaszów Mazowiecki, Piotrków Trybunalski and Radomsko).
3.	Remaining regions where revitalization complements other processes aimed at solving problems in degraded rural areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • areas where it is possible to identify degraded areas locally, • areas where it is advisable to solve existing problems, e.g. with revitalization. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • other rural areas in Poland, except for those included in the first and second groups.

Source: authors' own elaborations.

phenomena hindering proper development. Their most distinctive features are the most unfavourable demographic and social processes in Poland. There are abnormalities of elements of their space, and underdeveloped areas form compact spaces. In the eastern part of such a region, the percentage of gminas with extremely unfavourable conditions determined by demographic, social and infrastructural factors is very low. Accumulated problems in areas which require the most urgent revitalization make them lagging behind other areas. These are spatial underdevelopments in terms of dynamics of changes taking place, with insignificant own development potential, which require special management and appropriate development policy. The characteristics of rural areas from the first group include also a very low level of economic, social and territorial cohesion. Solving negative phenomena accumulated here requires intervention by local authorities and financing from external sources. Rural areas in Poland from the first group should be first to receive revitalization funds, and the implementation of projects aimed at this problem may bring numerous benefits. Revitalization projects should contribute to reducing developmental backwardness (underdevelopment).

They include:

- regions where gminas with extremely unfavourable conditions determined by demographic and infrastructural factors (type 1 according to A. Rosner, 2007) form compact spaces,
- peripheral gminas (included in eastern and southern problem areas – M. Stanny, 2014b) forming coherent and continuous groups of units,
- problem areas of national significance (according to T. Komornicki and P. Śleszyński, 2009),
- gminas not participating in development processes and areas located away from functional urban areas (Bański, 2014),
- underdeveloped areas,
- highly agricultural regions, with dominating agricultural functions or with tourist and recreational functions (Bański, 2016).

These are the most visible and complicated agricultural problem areas in Poland where pathological areas (i.e. those where their underdevelopment (backwardness) is so deep that farms deriving their income only from agriculture have no chances for development without external support) form compact spaces. They cover north-eastern, south-eastern and eastern parts of the Carpathian region and north-western functional region of Polish rural areas. They include the following voivodeships: Warmińsko-Mazurskie, Podlaskie, Lubelskie, Świętokrzyskie, Podkarpackie and the eastern part of Mazowieckie as well as the eastern part of Małopolskie (tab. 2).

The identified rural areas from the first group are extremely economically and socially incoherent. This is reflected in the lowest economic indices in Poland and the European Union. These areas require special development policies as they constitute the most significant problem areas in Poland. It is necessary to introduce revitalization as soon as possible to neutralize negative problems in degraded rural areas. These regions should be the first to receive support and preferences in the form of funds for development and equalization of economic development. However, due to long-lasting underdevelopment solutions to various problems in these regions cannot be fully provided quickly.

The first group of rural areas includes those areas where due to the accumulation of problems of various background there is a need for the most urgent revitalization (the most degraded areas). Therefore, revitalization can contribute to reducing their underdevelopment (backwardness).

The second group according to the need for revitalization is composed of:

B. Rural areas which require the most urgent revitalization.

This group of rural areas includes those regions where due to existing problems of various nature there is a moderate need for revitalization. It is composed of areas with unfavourable development conditions, mainly in social and spatial terms.

They include:

- problem areas of inter-voivodeship significance (according to T. Komornicki and P. Śleszyński, 2009),
- underdeveloped areas,
- peripheral gminas (included in southern and partly northern problem areas according to M. Stanny, 2014b),
- areas with high percentage of gminas with extremely unfavourable development conditions defined by factors of various nature (A. Rosner, 2007),
- regions with high percentage of gminas classified as lowland and mountain problem agricultural areas (J. Jadczyzyn, A. Rosner, 2013),
- gminas not participating in development processes (according to J. Bański, 2014),
- areas with dominating agricultural functions, with mixed functions and multifunctional transitional areas (after J. Bański, 2016),
- areas of degraded space for agricultural production conditioning development abnormalities.

They include: the central part of Pomorze region (Pomerania), southern part of Mazowieckie Voivodeship, rural areas in Górny Śląsk (Upper Silesia), south-western part of Małopolskie Voivodeship, western

part of Dolnośląskie Voivodeship, southern part of Lubuskie Voivodeship, south-eastern part of Łódzkie Voivodeship (tab. 2).

They cover the central part of the north-western functional region of rural areas, central part of the central region, Wyżyna Śląska (Silesian Upland) region, western part of Karpaty (Carpathian) region and south-western part of Sudety (Sudeten) and Wielkopolska and Śląsk (Greater Poland and Silesia) regions.

The above-mentioned group of rural areas includes areas where it is advisable to initiate revitalization processes due to various problems existing there. This fact may contribute to their development progress. Within the borders of rural areas, included in two groups of regions mentioned above, there are units classified by M. Stanny (2012) as gminas with low and medium level of socio-economic development (see Stanny, 2012; p. 111).

The third group according to the need for revitalization is composed of:

C. Remaining regions where revitalization complements other processes aimed at solving problems in degraded rural areas.

They are composed of remaining rural areas in Poland, except for those included in the first and second groups. These include better developed areas. Although they do not form problematic, pathological agricultural areas or areas with extremely unfavourable development conditions (determined by factors of various nature) on the national scale, but locally it is possible to identify degraded areas. Therefore, in these areas it is advisable to solve existing problems, e.g. with revitalization.

The classification of rural areas in terms of revitalization prepared for this study requires some generalization. This is mainly due to the fact that the classification procedure itself is a kind of generalization. The second reason is the lack of source statistical information in the resources of Statistics Poland regarding revitalization and problems in rural areas in particular gminas. The units developed for this study, due to diversified needs to initiate revitalization, differ between one another, i.e. they are heterogeneous, but internally consistent (homogeneous). Areas classified to the first and second groups of rural areas in Poland are particularly interesting. They are potential regions for implementing revitalization projects. They are introduced to areas of spatial and social degradation. In such areas revitalization should be introduced quickly in order to prevent degradation and negative changes from becoming irreversible.

The results of theoretical considerations presented above show that in rural areas in Poland there

are regions with diversified needs for revitalization. Of course, the boundaries between them are contractual, since it was assumed for greater simplicity that their problems are similar within entire administrative units. Delimitation of regions in Poland with different needs for revitalization was carried out in a purely theoretical way. It is clear that regardless of possibilities and benefits of revitalization, the final result – whether it will be introduced and what effects may be expected – depends on numerous different factors.

Each of the areas in the study with diversified needs for revitalization requires an individual approach, and the transformation processes occurring there must be considered in relation to local conditions.

7. Summary and conclusions

Nowadays, rural areas face processes of social, cultural, spatial and functional degradation and they occur continuously with varying intensity. For this reason, revitalization consisting of various remedial actions plays a significant role in shaping the space of rural areas. Its correct implementation is necessary for the proper development of these areas.

Poland's accession to the EU structures, and thus the possibility of using EU funds for various revitalization projects, enabled gminas to develop local revitalization programmes, which were obligatory documents when applying for funding (subsidies). Acquiring money from European funds currently provide a great opportunity for further socio-economic development at local level. However, it is important to remember that funds from the EU budget are not a ready solution guaranteeing stimulation of economic development in gminas. Their unfavourable locations may as a result generate costs beyond financial capacity. However, the proper use of European funds, taking into account current needs and financial capacity of particular gminas as well as long-term development plans, may directly boost their sustainable socio-economic development.

Going beyond economic, sociological or spatial aspects of the interpretation of the concept of revitalization, it should be clearly underlined that it has an immensely broad meaning. It takes into account not only the structure of the economy, various social conditions, a specific way of developing rural space, relationship with geographical environment. Revitalization is an individual and original category that plays a large role in the social, economic, political and cultural life of rural areas. Associated

phenomena, which occur in rural areas in Poland, previously occurred in developed western countries.

The complexity of revitalization manifests itself in its multidimensional (space, functions, society, economy, etc.) and multi-subject nature (local community, non-governmental organizations, local governments, entrepreneurs, investors).

The study proved that the thesis that rural areas in Poland are heterogeneous due to various previously developed socio-economic functions is true. Therefore, their characteristic features include a variety of problems to solve, also with revitalization.

Without any doubts, a positive consequence of revitalization in rural areas is the fact that it provides opportunities for economic, social and general development for inhabitants of degraded areas. Moreover, revitalization – by changing local conditions and improving the image of villages – can promote individual development of their residents. Therefore, problem areas may turn into development areas where various socio-economic problems will be solved. The actual benefits of revitalization processes, i.e. the activation and integration of residents, preventing social exclusion, complemented by the effects of infrastructural projects, are significantly higher than their costs, time spent and work. Therefore, efforts to prepare suitable documents to initiate revitalization processes are reasonable and necessary. Its approval will provide external funds that are so important for local communities.

Based on the what was discussed before, the following conclusions may be drawn:

1. Revitalization of rural areas is not the goal itself, but it makes sense as it is integrated into all socio-economic projects and adjusted to key tasks. It provides peripheral areas with special opportunities for their development.
2. The examined process, due to the costs and duration of its effects, is currently the most effective development-oriented activity integrating various development goals in rural areas.
3. Actions aimed at collecting funds for revitalization are particularly important at local level. Therefore, local authorities must initiate and develop partnerships to gather funds for revitalization.
4. Presently, revitalization plays an increasingly important role in shaping of rural space. It also affects the creation of social capital, which includes, among others, knowledge, relationships, skills, interpersonal contacts, etc.

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