

Dysfunctionality vs. urban-rural solutions: Can it work?

Jadwiga Biegańska^a

^a Nicolaus Copernicus University, Faculty of Earth Sciences, Dept of Urban Studies and Regional Development, Lwowska street 1, 87-100 Toruń, Poland; jadwigab@umk.pl

Abstract

The most important message of the concept of sustainability is social justice expressed in the environmental, economic and social efficiency of undertaken actions. This, in turn, means that each of us has the same responsibilities when it comes to caring for the environment, economic growth and life quality, but also the same rights to access environmental, economic and social resources. Such broadly perceived equal rights policy entrenched in the globally understood sustainability may, however, be differently construed at the local level.

In this vein, this presentation focuses on two case studies from Poland and anchors them theoretically in the concepts of urbanity and rurality. One case is a formally urban post-military estate located in the city of Toruń, which until 1989 was a unit of the Soviet Army. The other case is a formally rural estate which in the years 1945–1991 functioned as a State Agricultural Farm. At the onset of system transformation, the urban estate was given the status of a communal flat estate and was populated by the poor residents with low social capital at their disposal. Contrarily, the formally rural estate experienced the closing of the State Agricultural Farm – the sole employer and only source of income for the inhabitants. When analysed from the perspective of the residents' everyday lives in the socio-economic and material dimensions, both estates have shown to exclude the aspect of dysfunctionality in several dimensions. What is more, with respect to the discursive dimension, the results suggest that in the eyes of the residents both estates manifest features generally considered as both urban and rural. Despite this streamlining, both estates, depending on their formal rural or urban status, are subject to completely different ways of local and regional governance with regard to improvement of life quality. This presentation problematizes whether such actions are capable of solving socio-economic problems; whether it makes sense to introduce different welfare programs for people with similar needs on account of the formal status of the estates they live in; and, finally, whether a formal distinction between urban and rural problems and, consequently, between urban and rural solutions, means understanding sustainability differently.

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