

REPRESENTATIONS OF RURAL SETTLEMENTS IN THE DEBATE OF MULTIFUNCTIONAL COUNTRYSIDE. EXAMPLE OF POLAND

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to interpret the image of the contemporary Polish countryside remembered in the consciousness of inhabitants and reproduced in the form of freehand sketches. The issue of perception and space images was initiated and developed mostly in cities, as works referring to the social perception of space in the countryside appeared later and were rather seldom. Freehand sketches of three Polish villages presented and interpreted in this article are examples of representations of the countryside, expressing contemporary multi-dimensional understanding of the 'countryside' and 'rurality'. However, apart from the theoretical and methodological context, social perceptions of the countryside might be included in the debate on the emergence of a multifunctional rural regime, which is observed in Poland since the beginning of the market economy in the 1990s. Space in the perspective of its representations is full of symbols, presents meanings and values attributed by people to specific rural locations which are the subject of dynamic changes due to globalization as well as the increasing consumption role and potential of the countryside.

Keywords

representations of the rural, countryside, freehand sketches

Résumé

Le but de cet article est d'interpréter l'image de la campagne polonaise provenant de souvenirs dans la conscience des habitants et qui est reproduite sous la forme de dessins à main levée. L'enjeu de la perception des images de l'espace a été initié et développé surtout dans les villes. Indépendamment d'une recherche des expériences et de la mémoire spatiale, les dissertations qui se référaient à la perception sociale de l'espace rurale sont apparues plus tard et elles étaient plutôt rares. Les dessins à main levée de la campagne présentés et interprétés dans cet article sont des exemples de représentations de la campagne, étant l'expression de la compréhension contemporaine et multi-fonctionnelle de la «campagne» et de la «ruralité». L'espace au point de vue des représentations spatiales est plein de symboles et exprime des significations et des valeurs attribuées par les gens à des endroits spécifiques.

Mots clés

représentations, campagne, dessins à main levée

I. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary human geography has a very diverse and pluralistic character. It follows a number of different concepts considering the scope of the geographical research. Apart from the main, classical dispute between naturalism and anti-naturalism in human geography, there are also inner tensions between the objectivist and constructivist character of social space. The first one accepts the existence of reality independent of the human

imagination, while the second approach assumes that reality is interpreted by people as a product of themselves. Since the 1960s, there were many different concepts emphasizing that the world is socially constructed (Berger, Luckman, 2011 [1966]). This perspective is well represented in the writings of H. Lefebvre (1991) and his geographic interpreters. H. Lefebvre has focused on the social production of spaces within which social life takes place. His three-fold understanding of spatiality has been widely outlined and further developed

in various locations (e.g. Gregory, 1994; Shields, 1999).

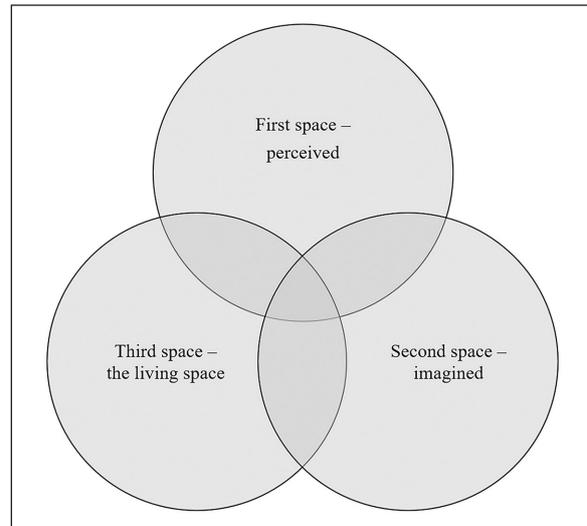
First, there are spatial practices, associated with everyday perceptions of space. They structure our everyday reality, being at the same time rooted within that reality. As such, spatial practices can also be traced to rules and norms, and to the space as lived. Second, there are representations of space, defined as formal conceptions of space, articulated by planners, scientists, developers. They are conceived and abstract and expressed through ‘arcane signs, jargon, codifications’ (Merrifield, 2000, p. 174). Third, there are spaces of representation – a major interest for Lefebvre (1991). Although they have clear links with perceived space, they refer to vernacular space symbolically appropriated by its users.

As mentioned above, this conceptual triad of H. Lefebvre was widely outlined and developed in geography in the turn of the centuries, both with reference to cities as well as the countryside defined as social and cultural phenomena.

The co-founder of the Californian school of cultural geography, E. Soja (1999, pp. 265-267, after Wójcik, 2016, p. 129) devised a model of ‘trialectics of spatiality’, which was the basis for his considerations over a city in three contexts of individual and collective being (‘trialectics of being’), i.e. continuity and time (‘historicality’), space and place (‘spatiality’) as well as social reproduction (‘sociality’). On this background, E. Soja introduced three kinds of space, which easily might be adapted in the studies of the rural settlements (Fig. 1).

The first space – perceived – refers to the manners in which people shape and experience space and is an expression of the relationship between social arrangements and space. The second space – imagined – is more subjective when compared to the first one. It is socially imagined as a result of being given a symbolic character. It takes a form of spatial projections – ‘thoughts about space’ and ‘images of space’. This article presents this kind of space through images of the chosen rural settlements in Poland, presented in a visual form of freehand sketches prepared by their inhabitants. The third space – the living space – belongs to the notion of ‘everyday life’ as the basis for various practices of an individual life. Experiencing space

Figure 1. Trialectics of spatiality



Source: Authors’ self-analysis on the basis of: E. Soja (1999) after: Wójcik (2016).

is an important element of the everyday life both from the perspective of an individual and the whole local community.

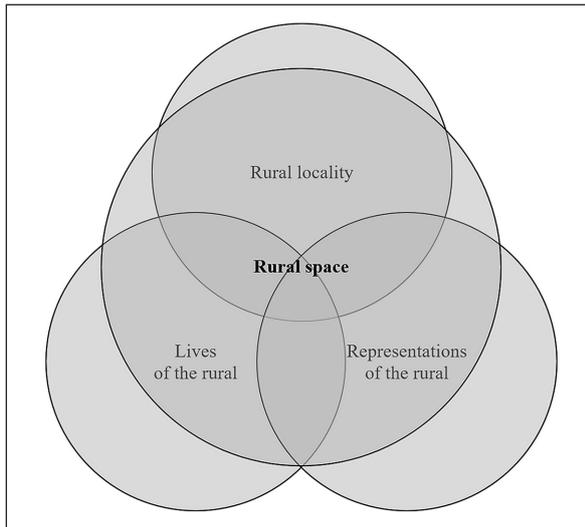
The ‘cultural turn’ in geographic research of rural areas is associated mostly with British works in the 1990s. Geographers started then to consider dimensions of ‘rurality’ and tried to put them in the context of traditional terms. A British geographers, K. Halfacree (2004, 2006) presented a heuristic framework broadening and enriching our understanding of the rural space. In his concept of the three-fold model of rural space one can easily find links to previous ideas of H. Lefebvre (1991).

First, there are rural localities inscribed through relatively distinctive spatial practices, which might be linked to either production or consumption activities. Second, there are representations of the rural, referring to the way the rural is framed and commodified in the exchange value terms. Procedures of signification and legitimation are vital here. Third, there are everyday lives of the rural, which are incoherent and fractured and incorporate both individual and social elements (‘culture’) in their cognitive negotiation and interpretation (Halfacree, 2006, p. 51).

Freehand sketches of rural settlements presented and interpreted in this article are examples of the second space – imagined in terms of E. Soja’s

concept, and at the same time they might be distinguished as representations of certain places, specific forms of knowledge and construction of the countryside, which are the concept element of the ‘three-fold architecture’ of rural space by K. Halfacree (2004, 2006) (Fig. 2).

Figure 2. Threefold complexity of rural space



Source: Authors’ self-analysis on the basis of: K. Halfacree (2004).

Space in the perspective of its representations is experienced every day and is a subject to structuration in human minds, according to guidelines of social constructivism. The sketch of close space (in case of the rural settlements this is mainly the neighbourhood) is full of symbols, expresses meanings, but also values attributed by its inhabitants to specific places.

As K. Halfacree (2006, p. 51) underlines, also referring to H. Lefebvre’s concept, each of the three facets cannot be understood in isolation from the other two but in a relationship with them. Moreover, these three facets of space are intrinsically dynamic, as are the relations between them. As A. Merrifield (2000, p. 175) argues, ‘the spatial triad must always be embodied with actual flesh and blood and culture, with real life relationships and events’.

In Poland, just like in other European countries the debate about changing rural space takes place within the international context of ongoing rural and urban changes, outlying two key interrelated dynamics, i.e.: globalization and the increasing

consumption role and potential of rural places. (see: Champion & Hugo, 2004). Consequently, since the beginning of the market economy in the 1990s, we observe in Poland the emergence of multifunctional rural regime which influences the rural landscape, new non-productive functions in local economies and new lifestyles. However, besides dynamic changes of rural spaces and rural lives, many elements remain stable, permanently inscribed into the rural landscape and social relationships.

The aim of this paper is to interpret the image of the contemporary countryside remembered by inhabitants and reproduced in the form of freehand sketches, stressing the balance between new forms, functions and meanings, as well as traditional elements of the rural space. Firstly, theoretical and methodological issues concerning collecting and interpreting data during the research undertaken on rural imagery will be introduced. Secondly, in the empirical part of the paper, the method of freehand sketches’ analysis will be discussed on the example of three Polish villages. Finally, the paper draws conclusions about cognitive and practical goals of using this form of spatial representations in studies of relations between people and their life space in times of very dynamic changes of the countryside.

II. FREEHAND SKETCHES AS THE EXAMPLE OF RURAL SETTLEMENTS’ SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS

A. Theory and methods

The pioneer for research concerning images of space was K. Lynch (1960), who developed and applied the method of freehand sketch analysis – a graphic form of reconstructing spatial knowledge mostly based on visual perception. According to K. Lynch (1960, p.131), ‘The creation of an environmental image is a two-way process between the observer and the observed. What he sees is based on an exterior form, but how he interprets and organizes this, and how he directs his attention, in its turn affects what he sees’. Besides the issue of attributes of space allowing their easy identification by people, K. Lynch (1960) paid great attention to the meanings of individual places and objects being the effect of their practical and emotional evaluation: ‘An environmental image may be analysed into three components: identity, structure and

meaning. In reality they always appear together (...)' (Lynch, 1960, p. 8).

On the basis of his research carried out in three cities: Boston, New Jersey and Los Angeles, he distinguished five elements which make up the image of the physical structure of urban areas, that is: 1) Paths, which are described as channels, that the people move along. These can be streets, sidewalks, bicycle paths or railway lines. In the image structure of many people this is a dominant element because they observe the city while moving along these paths, whereas the remaining elements are added to the sketches and remain in close spatial relation with paths.

2) Nodes are defined as objects, which can be entered, or which constitute strategic points serving navigation and orientation in the city. These could be street crossings, roundabouts, transit points in public transport, bus or tram terminus. Nodes can be significant 'events' while moving along paths, therefore their concept is strongly connected to the concept of the first element distinguished by the author. At the same time, they often indicate the centre of areas, therefore their role is very significant in the shape of the city's image.

3) Edges usually constitute some kind of barrier, space limitations or distances between areas, though in some cases they connect with each other. These are most often waterfronts, walls, railway dykes, rivers.

4) Areas constitute medium or large units with individual character distinguished in the city space. Besides paths, they are the second element, which can dominate sketches prepared by respondents. According to the author of the method, this depends not only on the individual features, but also on the city space.

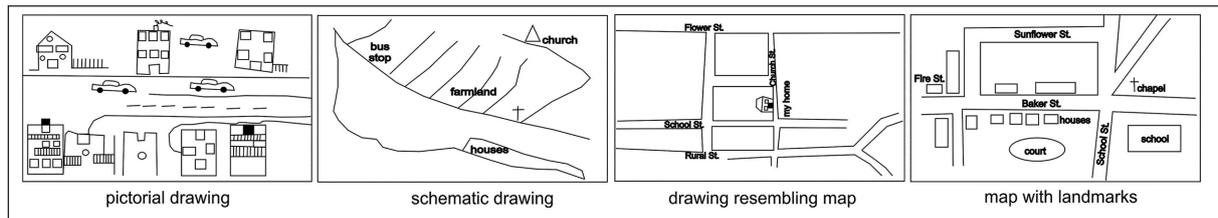
5) Landmarks are, similar to nodes, waypoints used in navigation in the city. Usually they are constituted by buildings, signs or other urban details, which fill up imagination of most users of the city space. Part of them can have a local character, part – especially if they tower over the buildings of the whole city thanks to their size, determines the perceptive dominant – and become a symbol.

The analysis of freehand sketches presented by K. Lynch (1960) initiated the so-called structural (descriptive) aspect for research of city space imagination connected with their physical structure as well as relations of subjective image with reality.

Both quantitative as well as qualitative analyses were subject to: content, internal structure and style of sketches, but also their spatial range and orientation according to the directions of the world. K. Lynch (1960) indicated two elementary features in the landscape of the city significant to the process of constructing sketches and final shape of these images: 1) legibility, which means ease with which respective parts of the city are recognized and organized in consistent picture and 2) imageability – specific feature of the city combining physical-spatial elements with events in the social life and personal experiences of people taking place in these elements (Lynch, 1960).

Although K. Lynch (1960) conducted his research in urban areas his main findings on the structure of sketches, as mental constructs of our surroundings, could be easily adopted in the research of rural areas, as this method has not been that commonly used there. In his study of rural areas, the case of kibbutz in Israel, using the method of freehand sketches, Bar-Gal (1980) confirmed that the perception of elements in the rural environment does not differ from that of the urban areas. However, cognition of the environment of the rural population is built around nodes and districts, while that of the urban population is built around paths and landmarks. The explanation of this difference is rooted in different landscapes and in different personal activity within cities and the countryside. The scope, complexity and the number of details possible to draw on the sketch of a city and a village differ.

An interesting attempt to interpret imagined space of fragments of the city is the proposal of sketch typology presented by F.C. Ladd (1970). The author did not ask respondents to draw the whole city, but only the area around the place where they lived, their neighbourhood. As a result she obtained sketches with a much lower spatial range, but at the same time much more detailed and often much more resembling the drawing, which presents the typical city landscape rather than a map. Among the sketches of the neighbourhood, F.C. Ladd (1970) distinguished the following four types: 1) pictorial drawings, which most often presented a street; 2) schematic drawings, which included information about streets, areas, but the way of presentation was rather general; 3) drawings resembling a map, which could serve as a map and help in the orientation in a particular area, but included a small num-

Figure 3. Types of sketch maps of neighbourhoods

Source: Authors' self-analysis on the basis of: F.C. Ladd (1970).

ber of elements; 4) maps with landmarks, which allowed recognizing the neighbourhood and could help to find oneself in the area (Fig. 3).

This paper presents an attempt at analysing and interpreting of freehand sketches of rural areas invoking to the image elements distinguished by K. Lynch (1960) and, due to the scale of the settlement units under analysis, classification of neighbourhood sketches proposed by F.C. Ladd (1970). The method of freehand sketches was a part of a semi-structured interview focused on images of particular villages, most significant elements of their structures, contemporary changes in their landscape and their social evaluation. The collection of significant places, connected with granting the space a symbolic dimension in the individual as well as collective sense makes up the notion of cultural space in contemporary human geography (Lisowski, 2003).

B. Case studies of three Polish villages of Sacin, Rzuców and Sulmierzyce

Research concerning images of rural settlements with the use of freehand sketches was conducted in twelve villages located in central Poland, in Łódź, Mazovia and Greater Poland provinces. In this article, three villages of Sacin, Rzuców and Sulmierzyce, differing with regard to their size, historical development and dominant economic functions, were chosen as case studies. Selection of people participating in the research had a quota character. It was attempted to retain proportions of elementary socio-demographic features of the population of individual settlements, such as: age, sex and education. A small number of respondents – about a dozen of people in every village, was justified for the reason of conducted research, which was the initial exploration of phenomena, as well as its qualitative character (Babbie, 2004). The inhabitants were asked to prepare freehand

sketches of the village in a way that would present their surroundings, including the most important elements of space, according to them.

The structure, order of drawn elements and the spatial scope of village sketches are different from the sketches of urban areas described in literature. Cities are characterised by much bigger complexity of forms, functions and meanings, and their users experience usually only selected fragments, which is reflected by the character of their images. Sketches of cities, depending on the accepted drawing strategy, are started by the inhabitants from drawing their own places of living and the closest surroundings (then the range of the sketch covers a part of the city, but includes more details) or from the central parts, that have a representative, symbolic meaning – both in the individual and collective perspective (then the range of the sketch covers more often the whole city, but the included elements are generalised) (Bar-Gal, 1980; Tobiasz-Lis, 2013).

Irrespective of the character and specific features of particular villages, and the socio-demographic features of people taking part in the conducted research, their images in the form of freehand sketches of the nearest area were different and can be classified to all types distinguished and described in literature by F.C. Ladd (1970) – starting from pictorial, presenting only the most important parts of settlements, and finishing with maps with orientation points, which reflected the whole villages, indicating and naming neighbouring areas at the same time.

The types of village sketches, their shape, structure and content can be interpreted in the context of two fundamental issues – 1) size, character of development and contemporary functions of the village, especially the quality of social infrastructure and 2) strategy for making sketches adapted by individual people participating in the research. In

the first case – the bigger diversification, the richer images, taking the shape of expanded schematic sketches, sketches resembling a map or maps with landmarks. In the case of strategy for drawing up sketches one should refer to the classification of imaginative maps of G. Rand (1969 after: Mordwa: 2003), who distinguished sketches of the ‘taxi driver’ type – presenting fragments of space, including sets of roads resulting from every day, individual experiences – in this case the main road in the village and the most important objects located along, as well as sketches of the ‘aeroplane pilot’ type – more abstract and internally integrated, covering in this case bigger parts or even whole villages.

Sketches of all villages, irrespective of the represented type, were started from the main road, along which the settlement was developing. Depending on the size of the village, one or several streets were taken into account, nevertheless concentrating mostly on objects with important social functions, i.e.: churches, wayside shrines, cemeteries, schools, bus stops, fire stations. It was these elements that dominated in all images of villages. Besides the network of roads and significant nodes, sketches included also living areas, often highlighting own place of living or houses belonging to relatives. Interestingly, especially in the perspective of contemporary socio-economic changes of the Polish countryside, it seems rather rare to draw farmlands, which appeared only in every tenth sketch and mostly served the function of ‘filling’ the empty space on the checker. Only the village of Sacin, with very strong agricultural functions was exceptional in this respect. In other areas, it was only farmers who drew farmlands in their sketches.

Sacin is a small village, located in the Nowe Miasto upon Pilica commune, in the Grójec district, in the Mazovia province, inhabited by only about 170 people, with very strong agricultural functions dominated by the development of orchards. The road network of Sacin was mapped precisely, however streets were given perfectly meridional and latitudinal course (Fig. 4). Along the paths drawn on sketches, people included road chapels and crosses which are the places of great importance for the social lives and local identification of rural communities (Fig. 5 - Photos 1-4). A dominant economic function of agricultural production is reflected in freehand sketches as they present the

farmland and orchards spreading in the landscape of Sacin and the whole district. Also, the former Farmer’s Club was included mainly by older inhabitants of the village, longing to this meeting place as they remember it from the past (Fig. 6 - Photo 2). Although it has a long history as a settlement owned by the local gentry since the late renaissance, there are no remains of former manor farms in its contemporary landscape. The main natural feature of the landscape included in freehand sketches of the village is the small river Lubjanka. Additionally, the pond was an important landmark in all mental images presented by the inhabitants (Fig. 6 - Photo 1). The settlement lacks basic local services. Apart from dominant agricultural functions, there is a bakery and a relatively newly established plastic factory (Fig. 6 - Photo 3).

Rzuców is a village located in the commune of Borkowice, in the Przysucha district, in the Mazovia province, inhabited by about 570 people. The most distinguishable feature of this settlement is its long industrial past and an interesting cultural heritage recalling the exploitation of iron ore and the development of metallurgy since the 16th century. Nowadays, the industrial functions of the village are still important as the local iron foundry employs about 90 workers. Rzuców has also well-developed local services. It is a rather extensive, multipath village with irregular set of roads, where buildings are distributed chaotically. For this reason, the most distinctive features of this settlement constituting all sketches were not roads but the river Jablonica, over which the village developed, and ponds. Their legibility is reflected in well oriented and not distorted images of this settlement. Furthermore, these linear elements were like a backbone for the people preparing sketches, and made it easy for them to draw accurately nodes and landmarks presenting important places of individual and collective importance in every day experience of rural living there (Fig. 7). People included and often highlighted their family houses and houses of their relatives or friends as well as objects with important social functions, i.e.: the school, the shop, the fire station, the church, the cemetery, the doctor’s practice. Apart from these, also the village’s industrial functions, since the early 16th century, may be read from the sketches presenting “the factory” or “the foundry” (Fig. 8).

Figure 4. The village of Sacin – aerial photograph and freehand sketches

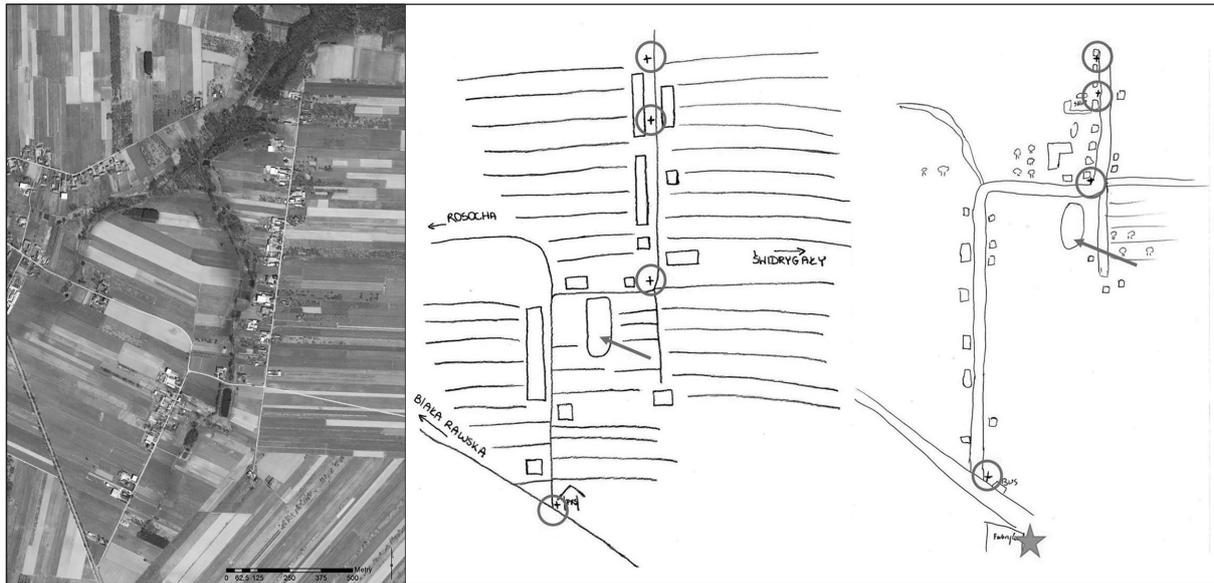


Figure 5. Photos 1-4. Road chapels in the village of Sacin. Author: A. Traczyk.

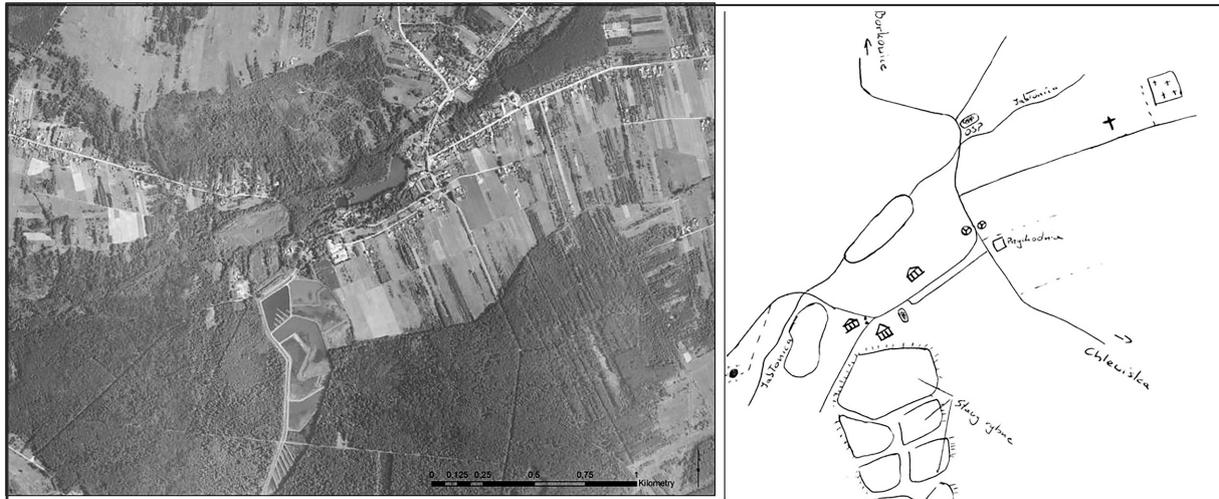


Figure 6. Photos 1-3. Legible elements of the rural space of the village of Sacin: the pond, the farmer's club, the plastic factory. Author: A. Traczyk.



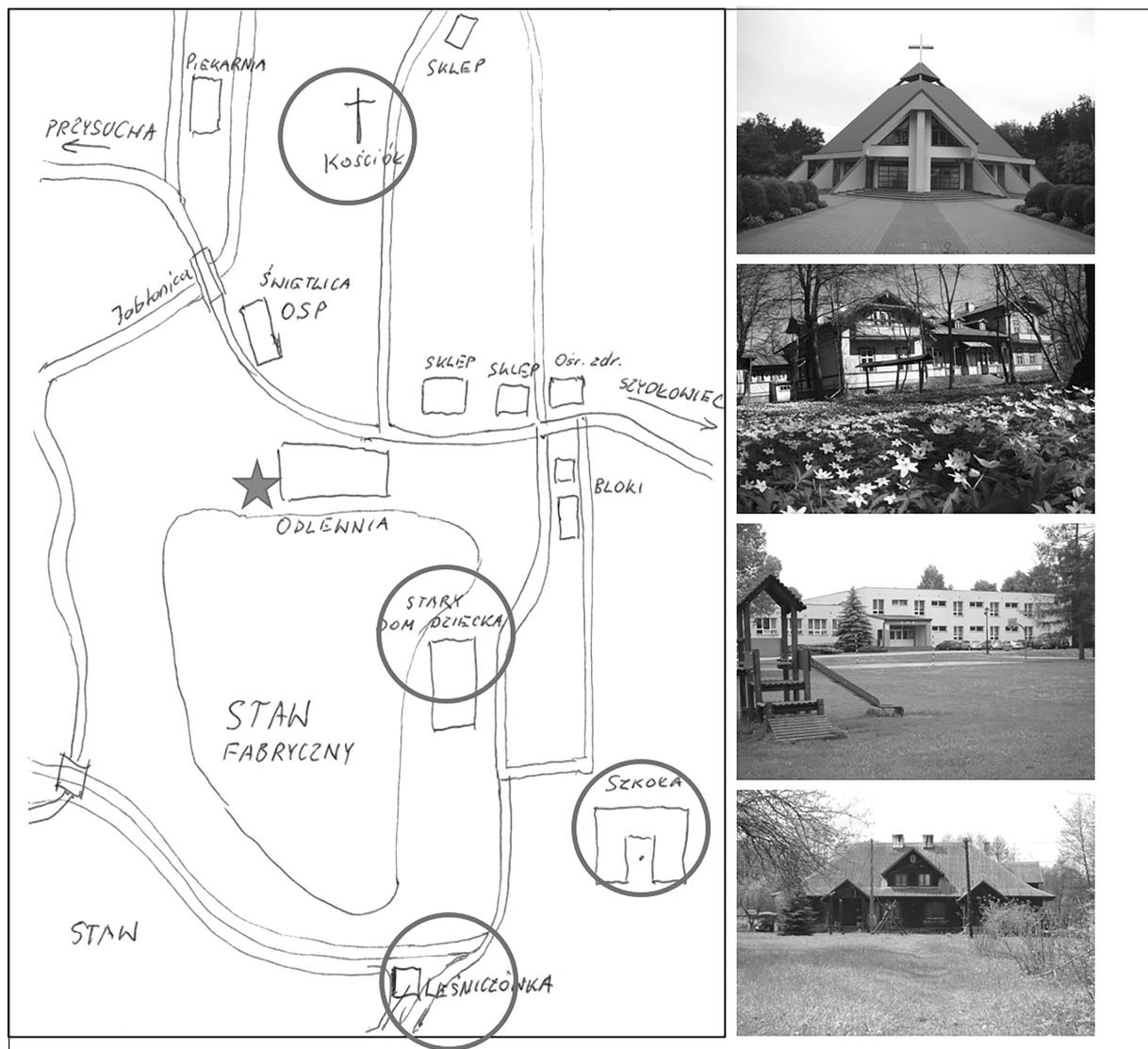
Source: Authors' self-analysis.

Figure 7. The village of Rzuców – aerial photograph and a freehand sketch



Source: Authors' self-analysis.

Figure 8. Legible elements of the rural space of the village of Rzuców: the church, the former orphanage, the school, the wooden house



Source: Author of photographs: Małgorzata Dworak.

Figure 9. The village of Sulmierzyce - aerial photography and freehand sketches



Source: Authors' self-analysis.

Figure 10. Photos 1-3. Diverse buildings in the village of Sulmierzyce



Source: Author of photographs : Anna Szcześniewska.

Sulmierzyce is a relatively big village with the population of about 1400 inhabitants, located in the Pajęczno district in Łódź Province. It is a municipal centre holding local administrative functions, and as a consequence, characterised with very well developed local services. The spatial structure of the village is clear, especially in the central part of the settlement (Fig. 9). However, due to its large size and different forms of spatial development (Fig. 10 - Photos 1-3) people included only selected fragments of the village in their freehand sketches. They focused mainly on the local market square where objects of social infrastructure, i.e: the church, shops, restaurants, park, stadium, medical services and municipal office, were located. It may be interpreted as the confirmation of the way people think about their neighbourhood – not necessarily by its physical, legible or illegible structure, but mainly by its social meaning.

The analysis of the presented sketches confirms, that the perception of space, also in the case of rural settlements is the effect of: 1) identification, that is recognising the components of environment and distinguishing some elements from others, 2) their structuration, that is defining the spatial relation between components of environment as well as on 3) evaluation, that is defining meanings of individual elements for the perceived entity. It seems that in rural areas, where people are stronger attached to their territories and local communities, the social meaning of particular places becomes most important in construction of the mental image of villages.

Nodes which were predominantly drawn by people in all villages to illustrate their places of living, represent the meeting points of networks ‘constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus’

(Massey, 1996, p. 244). In addition, symbols of the past recorded in the space of rural areas as elements of their cultural heritage, constitute a vital element in creating local identities and positive relations between people and their surroundings. It seems that people need to be anchored in the past. This anchor may be just a minor detail in the modernized space, but its power of influence on the evaluation by the inhabitants is large.

III. CONCLUSIONS

Freehand sketches presenting spatial images of rural settlements are of great importance in the research on human environment. As forms of the world structured in the mind, they fulfil many cognitive and practical functions – broadening the perspective of the research with the issue of space as a social construct. Sketches of rural settlements allow to determine not only the character of images, but it is also possible to describe the contemporary nature of ‘rural areas’ and ‘rurality’ thanks to their contents.

The cognitive function of the presented freehand sketches refers most of all to the interpretation of rural settlements as certain territories where social processes take place. A fundamental difference in shaping the social environment of rural areas in relation to the urban environment depends on the key role of a neighbourhood in the reproduction of interpersonal relationships. In this case, the scale is important, as it refers to the image of the material structure as well as the character of the relation between humans and the environment, which is greatly based on the functional and social relationships between the ‘middle’ (in this case it is mostly the family home) and subsequent spheres of the surrounding of the closer and farther neighbourhood.

The functional aspect includes the usefulness of the environment and the ways of connecting individual spaces (‘places’) being the subject of everyday experiences. Village people, through their sketches, show essential forms of inhabiting rural areas, so that it is possible to make conclusions concerning the coherence or its lack in the perspective of certain rural architecture or landscape. Connectivity is by contrast not only the function of the homestead, farmhouse, allotment border, but mainly it is expressed by the image of common or public space and different types of institutions included in it.

The social aspect covers mostly the sphere of symbolism, which already results from the choice as well as the size and the level of generalization of certain elements. Nodes and institutions included in the sketches should be interpreted mainly as emanation of community life. They inform us about the methods of social communication, and as a consequence we can obtain knowledge not only about the subjective reflection of space, but we also learn a lot about the sketcher and his/her connection with the life space.

The practical aspect of this way of studying contemporary rural settlements has a big connection with spatial planning, especially in the conditions of a fast desagrarization and multifunctional development of rural areas. Sketches make us realize largely the disappearance of productive functions and thereby the marginalization of their role in shaping functional and social relations. Harmony in the rural environment is the result of interactions between human and nature, which have different background (productive and non-productive). In order to retain the specificity of rural settlements it is important to plan open areas, which should serve the contemporary society in the same way as the farmland before in sustaining biological and social needs of their inhabitants. In this case sketches may appear to be very helpful, especially to identify elementary problems of local planning connected with the issue of weakening social relationships, or legibility of elements for the spatial structure of rural areas, which are the sign of their contemporary, dynamic changes. We obtain therefore information on the subject of the quality of everyday life space of individuals and places important both from the perspective of individual experiences and from the experiences of all local communities.

The inhabitants taking part in the conducted research paid attention to the fact that drawing a sketch allowed them to observe more closely the surrounding space and everyday life of their communities. From the research perspective, the obtained images of rural settlements in this way constitute recording and perpetuation of certain visual facts in a specific time-space context, illustrate concepts, categories and regularity of social reality, but are also a heuristic inspiration and a foundation for wider interpretation of social space and cultural scenery of rural areas.

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