

HEART OF COUNTRYSIDE. NEW PUBLIC SPACES OF THE SOUTH-WEST POLAND

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Abstract

Chosen projects of new public spaces show opportunities, which the Polish countryside has in the aspect of the rural planning. The question of spatial changes in villages is international. We have also examples from Western Europe, like France, Austria, and Germany, that such spaces are creating new possibilities for the revival of villages, in which they have been designed since the beginning of 1990s. An important problem is the emigration of inhabitants from rural areas into big cities, which we observe, among the others, in Portugal. The content of deliberations leans on practical solutions in a form of the design work connected with in situ inquiries and the participation of inhabitants in the planning process. The paper presents possibilities of solving the problem by designing new public open-air squares and places as an attraction for people to stay in areas, which will dispose with functional and esthetical public spaces, though of small dimensions. The participation process shall contribute to the positive perception of rural areas and to the improvement of the quality of life thanks to creation of new public spaces, because they integrate local community affecting its sense of attachment to the place.

Streszczenie

Wybrane do niniejszej prezentacji projekty ukazują szanse, jakie otwierają się przed polskimi obszarami wiejskimi w aspekcie planowania ruralistycznego. Pytanie na temat wyzwań przestrzennych w sołectwach okazuje się mieć zasięg międzynarodowy. Jesteśmy świadkami współczesnych procesów przemian w Zachodniej Europie, jak na przykład we Francji, Austrii i Niemczech. W krajach tych, od początku lat 1990. przestrzenie te tworzą nowe możliwości dla odrodzenia się wiosek, w których powstały. Ważnym problemem jest emigracja mieszkańców z terenów wiejskich do dużych miast, co obserwujemy między innymi w Portugalii. Treścią przedstawionych rozważań są praktyczne rozwiązania w postaci prac projektowych, powiązanych z badaniami in situ oraz uczestnictwem mieszkańców w procesie planistycznym. Artykuł ujawnia szanse na rozwiązanie wspomnianych trudności dzięki zaprojektowaniu nowych skwerów i placów, jako atrakcji dla ludzi, które mają ich zachęcić do pozostania w swych rodzinnych stronach, dysponujących funkcjonalnymi i estetycznymi, aczkolwiek nieznacznymi powierzchniowo, przestrzeniami publicznymi. Proces partycypacji ma przyczynić się do pozytywnego odbioru terenów wiejskich oraz do podniesienia jakości życia dzięki tworzeniu przestrzeni publicznych, tym bardziej, że integrują one lokalną społeczność, wpływając na większe poczucie powiązania z miejscem.

Keywords: New public spaces; Countryside; Cultural heritage; Participative process; Social aspects; Rural landscape.

1. INTRODUCTION

New public spaces are being created in countrysides in different regions of Europe.

Also in the world-scale there are certain criteria, that can help in the general and detail planning of squares and streets. These rules are connected with shapes of public space, its size, arrangement, history of the

place, fabric, landscape features (visual landmarks), function, location and links, as well as a research method.

There are two basic types of countrysides which affect the size and the shape of its historical, but also the new public open space: Nature types (German: "Naturtypen") or settlements without distinct plan-

ning (German: "Siedlungen ohne ausgepraegte Plangestaltung") and planned countryside (German: "Normtypen" or "Siedlungen mit Plangestaltung") [1].

In the case of "nature types" we recognize single settlements (German: Einzelsiedlungen), diffused settlements (German: Streusiedlungen), villages (German: Weiler), here: A farm village with or without property (German: Bauernweiler), the street village (German: Strassenweiler), and the round village (German: Rundweiler), as well as the multi-way settlement (German: Haufendorf).

In the case of the planned countryside interesting is also the division into villages planned in the dense (intensive) way (German: Dichte Normtypen) – as a first type, in a form of close groups of farm houses, like the row-countryside (German: Zeilendorf), the lane-countryside (German: Gassendorf), the street-countryside (German: Strassendorf), and the square-countryside (German: Platzdorf). In the last case (square-countryside) the rural square plays the important role. It may be located aside (German: Platzeckdoft), or in-between two main streets (German: Strassenangerdorf), it may have a round (German: Rundplatzdorf) and small form (German: Platzdorfartige Kleinformen). The second type are settlements planned in the loose way (German: lockere Normtypen). We observe here short (small: round-chain settlements – German: Rundreihendorf) and long forms (big: line-chain settlements – German: Kettendorf).

As far as the arrangement of new public spaces is concerned, in many rural cases the "green" electricity may be used for public spaces in a form of photovoltaic elements, which constitute street furniture. Advisable are photovoltaic lamps, benches, water fountains or umbrellas [2]. Considering the history of the place, the interesting work have been done in the Museum of Wool in Covilha, where its Portuguese and neighbouring Spanish traces of the "Route of the wool" had been analyzed [6]. That studies show the long rural tradition of the textile manufacturing and the accompanying open space, which today, in some cases, is serving as a public space with historical roots. Moreover, there is the theme of suburban zones, which posses a certain fabric, where buildings define spaces and plazas connected by streets [3]. In this situation also visual landmarks of a various typology, like cultural or corporate, are of meaning. Its recognition in a public space, which helps in the spatial orientation, depends on who perceives it – here important is the age, the profession, the religion of a per-

son, etc. In some suburban areas strategic guidelines considering the view and the function of a public space had been set, like the reestablishment of the landscape presence and the natural exploitation, the improvement of recreational possibilities, providing with pedestrian links, including the mix of uses with cultural and public functions in order to achieve a vital space as well as building landmarks and the system of orientation. Moreover, concerning the location aspect, the main part of the paper is concentrated on the south-west part of Poland, including much of the German rural history, where the traditional public space in villages is placed mostly centrally and new squares are located in some cases in the middle but also far-away from the countryside centre. The rural-urban fringe is also an interesting location seen as an opportunity area, which may be used for the testing and the experimentation [7]. At present it is described as being disintegrated in its development, though in the future that boarder-experiment may be the new public space. Besides, nowadays in rural areas in Canada we deal with the hybrid space: The heritage-scape, the boutique-scape, and the leisure-scape, which are lements of the task-scape. In this case, the process of the transformation of countrysides is composed of both, creativity and destruction [5]. New squares and paths are also promoting the creative aspect of links in villages. As far as the method is concerned, aerial photographs are necessary to research the vacant land [4]. Furthermore, the in situ analysis and photodocumentation, topographic maps and other land-use maps (for example master plans), and most of all the participation process in the introductory and advanced project phase are steps towards the identification of values and possibilities of the development of chosen places presented in the paper.

2. SOCIAL ASPECT: INTERNATIONAL PARTICIPATIVE PROCESS

In Western Europe the participation process has been well known for years. In Berlin, Germany, with 3,5 millions of people (2013) inhabitants are involved in the design process of districts. In Zurich, Switzerland, with 400 thousand people (2013), this method is applied in the city divided into parts (German: Kantonen), as well. Here the Department of Urban Planning is developing projects of, among the others, streets and squares together with local people. In presented projects, as well as since the very beginning of the Rural Renewal Programme in

the south-west of Poland, inhabitants are taking part in discussions about the future form of pedestrian areas in their villages.

The urban contrast between big European cities and small villages in the Opole Region is meaningful. Nevertheless, the participation of local people in the design work shows that in both cases (the big and small scale) this is the best way of the harmonious planning, listening to what spatial users need.

3. PROJECTS OF PUBLIC SPACES IN THE OPOLE REGION, POLAND

2010-2013 the Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of Applied Sciences in Nysa prepared over 30 projects of new public spaces in 30 countrysides in the Opole Region in the south-west of Poland (*Urban Analysis of 10 countrysides of the Opole Region* [16]). The work was prepared by experts and students of the UAS in Nysa [17,18]. Some of projects of the Edition 2013 will be analyzed in the paper: Kórnicina, Chróścina, Zębówice, Uszyce, and Zalesie Śląskie, since the rest of projects of that year are shown in the other paper of the author: Budzów, Chudoba, Ligota Dolna, Stare Kolnie, and Wojciechów.



Figure 1.
The countrysides in the Opole Region analyzed in 2013 by the University of Applied Sciences in Nysa. The author's analysis on the map from: <http://mapy.opolskie.pl/ogis/> (30/12/2013)

3.1. The countryside Kórnicina, the area of Krapkowice

The countryside Kórnicina is 1450 hectares big with 700 inhabitants (2013). Historical routs of the village go back to 1323. Its shape is based on buildings set along two streets with the kind of the spindle inside: A lanceted form with the long square in-between two streets (cf. Fig. 2). The important monument is the church, the granary from 1795, the cemetery and the cross of 1893 placed by the church. Important object is the school with the kindergarten, the library, the fire department as well as the Cultural-Social Association of the German People in the Opole Silesia. Presently children make 30 percent of the population. The same percentage describes people aged from 18 till 50, which is caused by their emigration to Western Europe in 1990s. Most of the inhabitants (40 percent) are aged over 50.

The chosen area for the project (cf. Fig. 3) has the size of over 2.2 ares and it is a public ground located right in the centre of the rural settlement along and in-between main streets surrounded by houses. The existing land-use as trees, elements of the landscape architecture (the existing playground with some modest equipment: cf. No. 4 in legend in the drawing Fig. 3, decorative flower-pots and the chapel) as well as unofficial spontaneous pedestrian paths shall be kept and used to new ideas. These components placed in the area create the vision of the neglected space, which needs the renovation for the public function.



Figure 2.
The rural analysis of the countryside Kórnicina. Authors: [17, 18]

The main challenge for designers was the mentioned small dimension, long shape of the site surrounded by main streets all over and the need for the adaptation of the existing elements. In the nearest surrounding there is the church, the natural water source, and the

monumental wall. Most important spatial need is here the arrangement of zones of various functions for people of different age and the re-use of the existing small architecture and the natural environment.

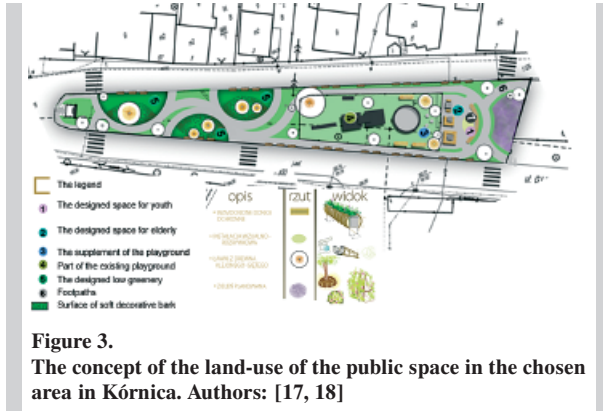


Figure 3.
The concept of the land-use of the public space in the chosen area in Kórnic. Authors: [17, 18]

The purpose of the project is to improve existing little attractive components, to design new footpaths based on existing traces and the division of the site into parts serving for the adults, the young and children. Intended elements of the land-use and kept elements of the landscape are street furniture (small architecture), instruments to play for children in the playground, the sand-pit, sitting places, the meeting area with benches, and the adapted greenery.

Summing up, the below presented square is an example of a small and linear public space in the rural area with some traces of past unofficial uses, which shall not include too many of new elements, in order not to disturb the area with glamour. Important is to get the impression of a bigger space due to avoiding too much of the so called street furniture.

3.2. The countryside Chróścina, the area of Dąbrowa

The countryside Chróścina has the size of 876 hectares and 1600 inhabitants in 2013 [11]. It was created about 1223 [10]. The important architecture is the church, the windmill, the bell tower, the manse, the school, the library, the building of the fire patrol and the sport field. The village is a typical settlement based on a street shape (cf. Fig. 4). In 1784 the village had 127 inhabitants, in 1890 this number increased to 885, in 1933 it was 1097 people, and in 1939 – 1216 inhabitants [9]. It is said, that the population of the countryside is the biggest in the area of Dąbrowa and its development possibilities are very positive also because of its location on the way Opole – Nysa and Opole – Wrocław, in Poland. Therefore the tourism,

also weekend excursions, are some of opportunities for the future evolution.

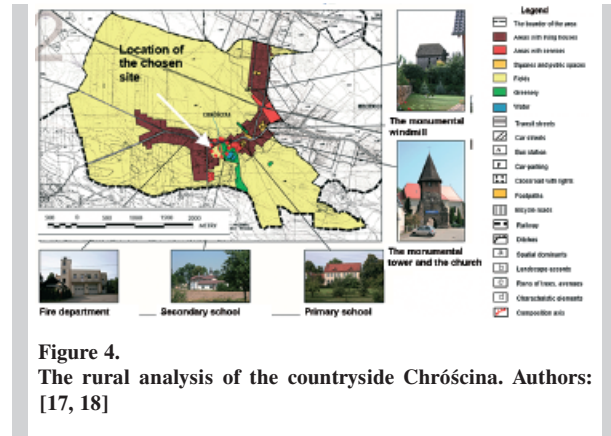


Figure 4.
The rural analysis of the countryside Chróścina. Authors: [17, 18]

Authorities of Chróścina had chosen the given abandoned park site (cf. Fig. 5), which belongs to the high school, because of the need for its revitalization and its prospective use as the place important for the village from the social point of view. It covers 1,69 hectares, is located centrally, and is surrounded by three various kinds of land-use as the forest, the meadow, and buildings on the other side of the street. And what about the most important existing landscape and natural values? They are: old precious trees, which are kept in total in the project, and the water-course on the west side. In the nearest surrounding there is a park and two ponds as well as the high school. The site is a flat ground. The most necessary elements of the land-use, according to the countryside authorities and local people, is the track for the obstacle race 350 meters long, the open-air gym, and the skate park. One of problems during the design were existing electric lines on the area, which are preserved in the project. The spatial solution is the mentioned race track for exercises of firemen, shaped in the form of the pipe-line for the fire extinguishing. It is supported by the pedestrian path in the middle of the area with benches. Half-round spaces created this way by paths are serving for the skate park, the gym, and the playground. Apart from mentioned above landscape elements additionally planned are lamps, benches, the place for the storing exercise devices, two sport fields, one for football and one for volleyball, garden sheds and last but not least the public toilet, which is the strategic equipment of the public space.

Summary: The concept for this site presents the type of a natural and sport public space, where existing

ecological values, like historical trees and the water stream influence the shape and planned functions of the area. Sport is here the main utilitarian idea for future users.

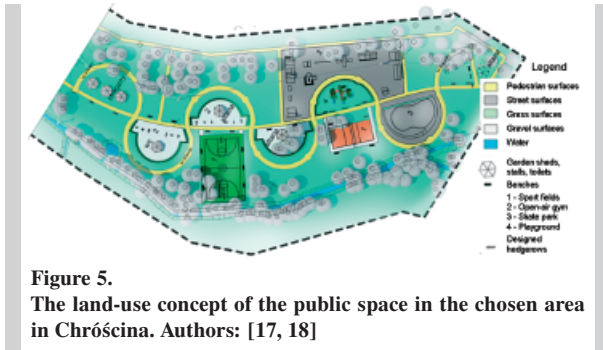


Figure 5.
The land-use concept of the public space in the chosen area in Chróścina. Authors: [17, 18]

3.3. The Countryside Zębowice, the area of Zębowice

The village Zębowice, whose rural pattern is composed of many streets with the centrally located lake and river (cf. Fig. 6), has dimensions of 9581 hectares 95.81 km² with about 1200 inhabitants (2013). The first information about the settlement comes from 1251. Later in 1447 the countryside became parish. In 1834 about 600 people lived here. Like in other examples the village was included into Germany after the World War I and into Poland in 1945 after the World War II. Nowadays, the total area of Zębowice is dwelled by more people of the German than of the Polish nationality. The most meaningful architecture is the baroque church, the palace complex from 18/19 century, the cultural centre, and the house of meetings. Other strategic functions include the health centre, the kindergarten, the secondary school, the library, the post office and the bank. Forests consist of needle trees (conifers) like pines and spruces, but also broadleaf trees as oaks, birches, and alders. Besides in river valleys and on meadows one can find many species of animals. Zębowice is the warmest area of Poland with soft winters. Its vegetation period is the longest and lasts from the early spring, through the long summer, till the late autumn. One of the problems is the lack of the sewage system, the weak infrastructure, too small accommodation sector, the deficiency of offers for spending the free time and last but not least the emigration of youth and adults and too little financial support. Since 2003 the renewal programme for the countryside has been realized. The most urgent tasks is the formation of the recreation infrastructure, the planning of public spaces, and the improvement of the image of the village along with the monumental protection.

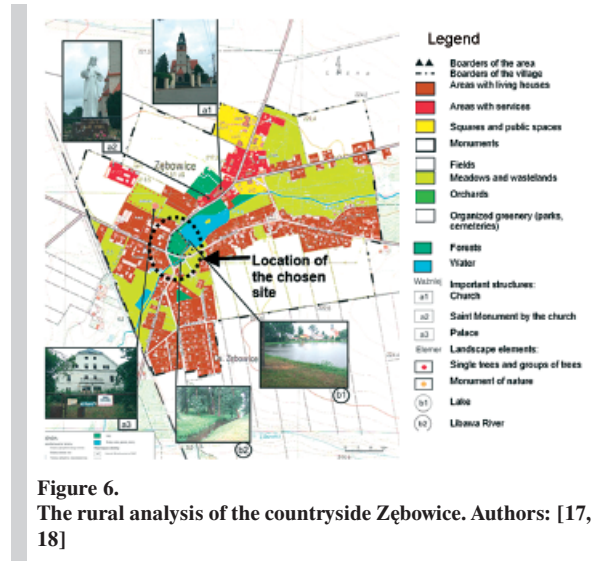


Figure 6.
The rural analysis of the countryside Zębowice. Authors: [17, 18]

There are many buildings for the public use (meeting houses, the internet cafe, conference halls) but open-air public spaces are missing. Necessary is the sport field, the beach volleyball field and the tennis court. One of the main characteristic landscape elements of the countryside is the centrally located Libawa lake, where the chosen project site is placed.

The chosen area covers one hectare and is located centrally in the countryside, right by the Libawa lake, which makes spatial conditions even more attractive, as well as next to living houses and meadows. Moreover, the existing land-use of the wasteland is composed of broadleaf trees. The concept (cf. Fig. 7) is aiming at creating a common place for recreation, rest, meeting and integration of people in different age. It is a calm and quite scene, which is encouraging for the organization of common places for all groups of differently aged inhabitants. The main concept consists of three squares paved with stone slabs. The biggest one with two garden sheds of natural thatched roofs, referring to simple plan of the space, serves for the joint grilling or eating. On the second one, three tennis tables and devices for other open-air games are placed. The third terrace has a small artificial pond located in the middle. All squares are surrounded by hedgerows with entrances in order to divide various types of the use.

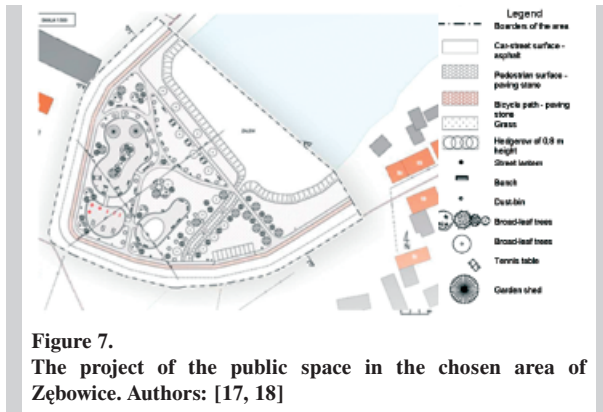


Figure 7.
The project of the public space in the chosen area of Zębówice. Authors: [17, 18]

Besides, new elements of design are wooden benches, street lanterns, litter bins, broadleaf trees and bush. All street furniture and components of the land-use are planned in the natural way in order to refer to the native spontaneous character of the existing landscape.

To sum up, we observe the concept of the public space in a rural area designed as the square by the lake. The surrounding is important in the design process of the given area. The same refers to the location of the site in the middle of the village. This is the type of the public space with the centre-creative potential.

3.4. The countryside Uszyce, the area of Gorzów Śląski

The countryside Uszyce extends at 1100 hectares, with 652 inhabitants. It is composed of a few streets, which could create a centre, though services are spread all over the village and the central public space is missing. The beginning of the rural settlement is at least in 14 century (first information in 1382). The life of generations in that area was rough. It was connected with the World War II and with various political systems. In 1970s. and mostly in 1980s. many people, who had families in Germany emigrated looking for better life conditions. Presently this process is much weaker. Most significant monuments and architecture is the wooden church from 16. century, the manor house dated of 18. century, the protective-education home, the agro-touristic farm, the mill and the bakery. The basic need in the spatial land-use of the village, which is shaped as the longitudinal settlement along the street, is the setting of recreation places for inhabitants, meeting spaces, rest terraces, as well as the building of the access way for the chosen site.

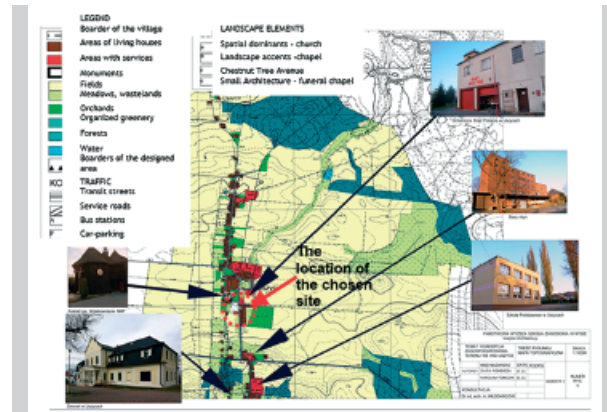


Figure 8.
The rural analysis of the countryside Uszyce. Authors: [17, 18]

The designed area of 0.759 hectare and the public ownership is placed in the center of Uszyce, from east and north surrounded by streets. Besides most of the nearest neighbourhood consist of living houses, services, and green areas. Nowadays, the space has a neglected character with the unofficial football and the beach volleyball field, the garden shed and the playground. The close valuable architecture, dominant and landscape elements are: The mentioned wooden monumental church and the historical mill, as well the basic-use building as the fire department. Pedestrian paths and recreation spaces are missing in the nearby area. The lack of the spatial order, the basic division of functions and the easy traffic are present problems, which inspired the authors to draw the programme of the future square. Namely, the idea is to divide the previously disordered site and to set the sport and the recreation use with separated entrances.

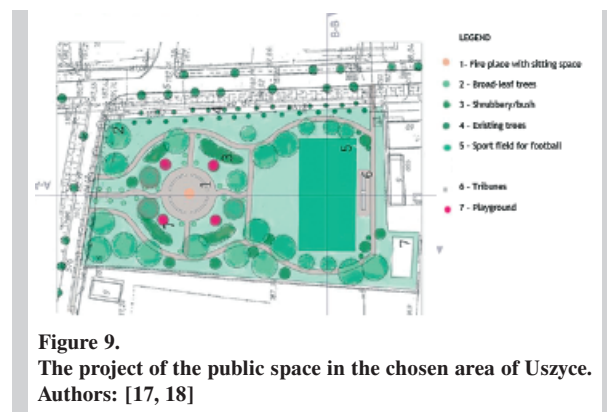


Figure 9.
The project of the public space in the chosen area of Uszyce. Authors: [17, 18]

In the sport zone the small football field is designed and the existing volleyball field was relocated. The recreation zone, in the central part of the site, will serve for the integration of inhabitants by the mobile fireplace with benches. This function maybe changed into the stage for small concerts or for the theatre. This is the heart of the project with playgrounds for children around. The concept keeps existing trees and suggests new broadleaf trees along paths and the shrubbery by playgrounds and around the scene.

Resuming, the presented project may create the open-air centre of the countryside with the green type of the main public space of the sport and recreation use.

3.5. The countryside Zalesie Śląskie, the area of Leśnica

Zalesie Śląskie extends over at 849 hectares [14]. In 1223 it was mentioned for the first time in historical documents. In 1910 the number of inhabitants was about 1600 and in 2011 this number is much less, about 1250. The vegetation period lasts, like in the Opole Region, from March till November. Major meaningful cultural values and architecture include the church from 13th century [12], the fire station, the kindergarten, the primary school, the house of meetings, the rail station (not functioning any more), and the sport field. The worthwhile landscape park with rich variety of conifers and broadleaf trees is located in the neighbourhood. The main purpose of local authorities is to improve the rural land-use and to shape living conditions together with local societies in the participative process. This will increase the aesthetic, the attraction, and the functionality of the spatial structure. The public space is described as the space of “special meaning for the fulfilling of inhabitants needs” [8,13], which contributes to their integration and improves the quality of their life. Significant features of squares, which create these opportunities is their location and the spatial-functional character. Therefore, the priority of the village representative is to revitalize and to shape areas, which realize these criteria. Furthermore, it is of meaning to arrange the site placed by the main entrance into the countryside, which will have the representative function and to design the social meeting space for inhabitants by the sport field. Zalesie Śląskie consists of settlements set along two main streets crossing each other (cf. Fig. 10). The main centre with the church is placed on the north-south axis in-between the main- and the side-street.

The chosen area is located on the east-west axis in the less built up space of the village, which determines the opportunity to make of it the second important place, namely the open-air centre. The local wish to create the suitable visiting card of the countryside and the common space for differently aged people was the inspiration for the project. There are two future public spaces to be composed. The one, next to the existing sport field, has size of 6.5 ares and is now the greenfield with grass growing. Here the use desired by the local community is the recreation, the rest, and the joint space by the fireplace.

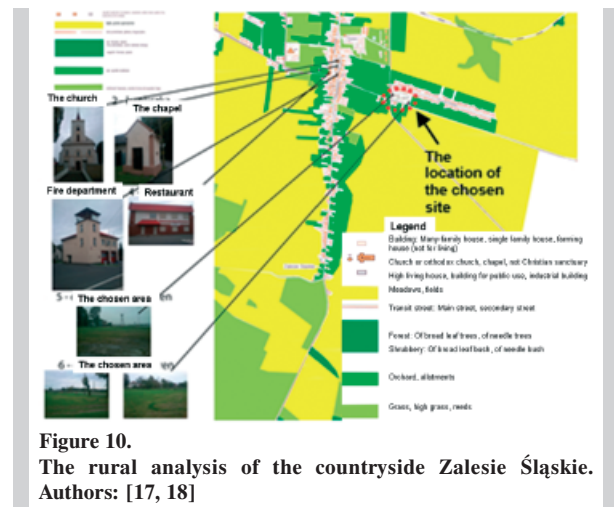


Figure 10.
The rural analysis of the countryside Zalesie Śląskie.
Authors: [17, 18]

Suggested elements of the land-use and landscape elements are: The summer house, benches with tables, single benches, litter bins, decorative greenery, and paved paths (cf. Fig. 11). The second area, by the entrance to the countryside, covers 18 ares, is treated at present also as an empty wasteland. In this case, the representative feature is meaningful, supported by the possibility of resting. The sandstone, blazoned with sign of Zalesie Śląskie and put in the main point of the site, will be the symbol of its underground layers. For this square following street furniture and landscape elements are destined: Pergolas, benches, litter bins, the fountain, the sandstone, decorative trees, shrubbery, and paved paths.



Figure 11.
The first square, the recreation and integration space.
Authors: [17, 18]

Both sites belong to the commune and are of the semi-abandoned character at present. In-between these spaces exists the football field used by the youth. The nearest surrounding are living houses, trees, and two streets from south and west.

Summary: Proposed is the concept of the public space in the rural area in form of the complementation of the existing site with sport fields. Three squares of various functions: representative, sport, and integration areas are creating one public space. It may be the type of the open-air side-centre of Zalesie Śląskie, as the kind of the supplement for the main built up centre.

4. SUMMARY

The described countrysides in the Opole Region need new public spaces, which are planned now on neglected public grounds. Inhabitants want spaces for sport, the recreation, meetings, and integration. This is the crucial mean for development of villages, where people move out to Western Europe. The emigration of young and middle-aged people, in search of better life conditions is a very important problem, not only in Poland but also in Portugal and the eastern part of Germany. The answer may be the qualitative development in the form of the creation of squares and places improving the life quality of inhabitants and affecting the social and economic conditions. Presented projects of the public space are examples of the practical work – it will not stay in the shelf but will be carried into effect. These are live ideas for the implementation, because they are based on the participative design process answering the needs of future users.

The size and shape of new public spaces presented in the paper depends on the location, the surrounding and the original function. We see various forms of public spaces: Longitudinal (lanceted), organic, similar to triangle, rectangular, and point-like. Sizes differ from

small (over 2 ares in Kórnica, 6.5 ares and 18 ares in Zalesie Śląskie), middle-sized (0.759 hectares in Uszyce) to large (1 hectare in Zębowice), (1.69 hectare in Chróścina). The public ground in all cases, apart from Zalesie Śląskie (where the chosen area is placed aside), is located centrally in countrysides.

These fresh examples of concepts of rural squares from 2013 have been the meaningful element of the International Science Symposium on “Traditional and New Public Spaces in Rural Areas” in the University of Applied Sciences in Nysa in that year. It contributed to the discussion on the crucial process of the participation during joining the design work in Opole Region as well as the lack of this process in Portugal. There the inhabitants are informed by local authorities about results of the project in its last phase, presenting projects of masterplans for the public discussion. We are dealing with the same situation in many Polish towns and cities (for example in Katowice, Upper Silesia), where spatial wishes of inhabitants mean nothing in the light of the power of investors and local authorities being conducive to them. Nevertheless, this typical urban and suburban negative attitude against the design of public spaces in the neglected industrial Region of Upper Silesia, showing the lack of the culture of the pedestrian friendly squares and streets creation, is contrastive to local communities in rural areas of the Opole Region. Similarly, in villages of France, Germany, or Austria people freely express their needs for integration and stay in the public open space. The popularization and the internationalization of the participative process of the public space planning in the Opole Region is necessary. The proof is the wide interest of scientist and students, who took part in lectures of the author in May 2013 on this subject at the University Universidade da Beira Interior in Covilha, Portugal and professors who came to the UAS in Nysa (Poland), from Germany, Portugal, and England to refer to the problem during the mentioned Symposium.

5. BRIEF CONCLUSIONS

New public spaces in villages shall be safe, attractive, friendly and useful, as well as well located, which is the main condition for the plan of the lively square or the market. Another rule is to keep the tradition of the place, supporting it with suitable landscape elements. To equip the site with energy-saving elements and the new technology at the same time is the question of the future, in the case of most of countrysides

in the Opole Region. Though, historical elements shall be visible in the new project in order to keep the balance between the past, the present and the future, which is visible in modern public spaces in Western Europe. Thereby, the basic condition for the suitable and useful public space is the participative process, as the sign of the democratization of the space.

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