REMAINING IN THE VILLAGE:
A CASE STUDY OF THE VILLAGE URBANISATION IN POLAND

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Sustainable development idea is strictly connected with searching for contemporary forms of sustainable living environment. Dynamic world-wide urbanisation is the reason of concentrating on the research and on the practice of the cities' sustainable development. The number of world population living in the cities and the crisis of urban environment, the economic and social problems of big agglomerations, the hardly controlled urban sprawl and urban pollution, the ever growing separation of the city inhabitants from the natural landscapes, the difficulties of governing the cities widely described by many (see e.g. Urban Future 21 – Hall 2000) are good reasons for focusing on redevelopment of the contemporary cities into sustainable place for living. The sustainable city becomes the important subject of our planet survival, when a world has become in many practical aspects a city as Lewis Mumford described it in "The City in History" (Mumford 1961). One of the problems of reaching the city sustainability is its growth, which mainly comes out from the migration to the cities from the dying villages due to the trends of dropping the employment in agricultural production. The industrialised food production forced villagers to search for better life and new jobs in the cities, which not always they find there. The modern industrialised agriculture is not only the serious threat to soil and earth contamination and the reason of the "death" of the village, but also influences the unsustainability of the hardly controlled growing cities. The "death" of the city in the widest sense of all contemporary urban problems is than connected with the "death" of the village in the physical sense of abandoned human settlements. There are questions coming out from that general unsustainable scenario. Is the city really the only living environment, where contemporary man can meet his needs and fulfil his ambitions? Is the migration from the village into the city the "natural" process, we can only react to by better policies for creating sustainable urban environment? Isn't the modern village development policy an important aspect of achieving sustainable cities?

Poland is the country, where such questions are not only theoretical, but come from the reality. 38% of above 38 million of Poles are living in the villages and about 19% of the country working posts are still in the agricultural production (Libner, 2002). According to European Union statistics in this field (comparing for example with 10.1% and 1.7% in Great Britain, 13.9% and 2.9% in Germany, 27.1% and 4.4% in France; Libner, 2002), Polish data are not "up to date" and Polish agriculture is the main problem of political negotiation about Poland joining the EC. The scale of a possible economic problem is spectacularly described by the numbers: if Poland is accepted as a member of the European Union, the amount of food producers in the Union will double. But if Poland adapting to European standards of low employment in the agricultural production will let its villages die, the serious unsustainable scenarios might occur. Polish cities, especially big agglomerations that are the main target of the villagers' migration, are not prepared for a rapid growth in the short period of time. The insufficient technical infrastructure, mainly sewage treatment and weak effective public transport systems of Polish agglomerations are already serious problems of reaching the accepted sustainability of the cities for their inhabitants. The city of Warsaw with 1.6 million inhabitants served by 12.5 km of underground lines and 70% of the city sewage drained into the river without a treatment is an example of those problems (Master Plan of Warsaw 2002). The recently observed spatial development of the cities, if not an urban sprawl, doesn't come from the significant growth of the cities' population, which is a routine of all European cities growth, where people search for better living conditions in a house, in a garden, in a suburb. The mass migration from the Polish villages to the Polish cities is a serious threat for the cities' sustainability, which is already very weak. At the same time abandoned villages is a threat of loosing historically developed heritage of not material as well as material rural culture. Poland might face serious problems of not only hardly controlled urban growth and of loosing an important part of its cultural identity, but even more serious economical and social problems always connected with rapid and mass migration to the cities even when new jobs can be found there.

One of the policies to avoid not sustainable scenarios of the country development might be the political programme of promoting in the nearest future the development within the existing rural settlements. Encouraging people to remain in the village is mainly dependent on political and economical instruments for creating new jobs for ex farmers. There are various possibilities for such a local development. Growing popularity for agritourism is one of the chances for the modern village. The sustainable fashion for healthy food seems to be a perfect match for Polish obsolete traditional small farms. Also new technologies of "diesel" fuel production from the rapeseed might be a new perspective for working posts in the village.

The dynamic growth of e-economy offers various chances of living not in the city and being

active professionally in various fields, fulfilling individual ambitions or even simply meeting everyday life needs. There are many economical and social reasons for the Polish "remaining in the village" policy and there are chances for such a policy implementation. Living in the village by choice or even for a time by no better choices can offer a big part of the country population a possibility of modest life in the sustainable environment, as the sustainability of the village is its immanent identity in contradiction to the city.

Place of working – place of living

Among five patterns of everyday life consumption and their impact on environment described by Brenda and Robert Vale the journey to work is one of the most unsustainable performance (Vale 1991). Urban concentrations of working posts separated from housing districts due to historical development and modernistic zoning demands travelling, results in use of energy and producing pollution, wasting time in traffic jams and also wasting energy for heating or cooling half a day empty flats and offices. There are many sustainable solutions to avoid this scenario, but there are still more developed in urban theories than implemented in practise.
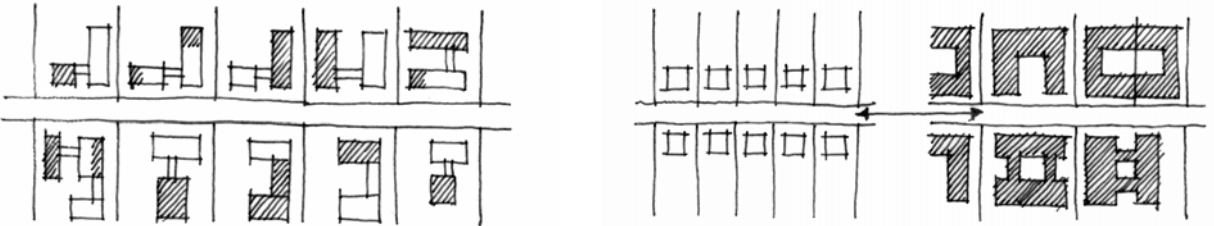

all day long living community   buildings and the city districts remain empty half a day

The unity of the place of living and working is natural for the village. The traditional working place of the villager is close to the house, might be allocated in separate buildings on the living lot, or may be within the family house. The traditional spatial unity of living and working can be continued if new jobs are introduced into the village. So all problems coming out of from the urban separation of working and living districts do not concern the village environment.

The space for the family

The village house is traditionally the family home, frequently for multigenerational big families. This situation enhances the family links with all benefits for the community social life. The village house was designed in such a way, that it could adapt for the changes of family needs by for example converting the attic into the living space, building extensions of the main house or building a new house on a reasonably big lot.
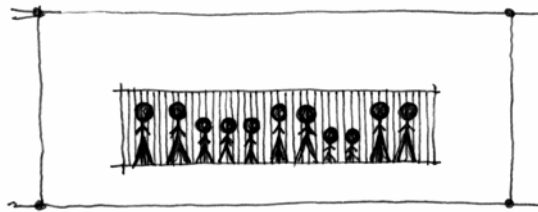
spatial unity of the family ties
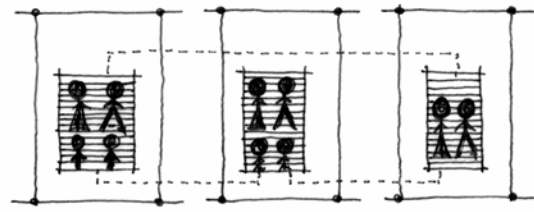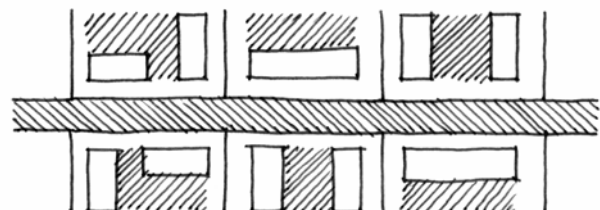

spatial separation of the family ties

Living together is a natural opportunity for the seniors to help in looking after the grand children, for the family to take care for the aged grand parents, for sharing duties of running the house between all members of the family, or to work together in the family business. Many social problems coming out from spatial division of a living place of various generations of the family typical for the city are alien for the village life. The village environment is traditionally friendly for the family life comparing with the urban environment, where family is no longer the basic social structure unit, where the social links connected with working environment, various interests or activities environments compete with, or dominate the family life. Of course if there are less advantages of living together in the family house than disadvantages, the villagers can choose the urban pattern of spatial family separation.

The space for the group

The spatial unity of a living and working place and the village family house influence the character of the village public space. The village street is a livable public space, where all community social connections take place. The village street being the space, where those working and living, older and youngsters are meeting, or at least seeing each other during every day and all day long life gives opportunity or even enforces social integration. The public space of the street is at the same time the social space, where the feeling of security is a natural symptom of the village community life.
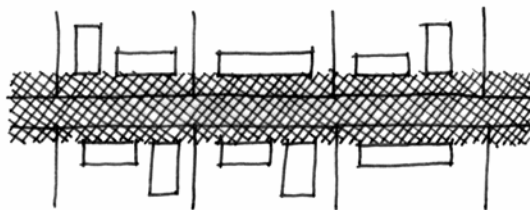
spatial integration of the social ties


spatial separation of the social ties

The public and the social space in the city are usually divided between the street and the back yard. The back yard is mainly used by the age groups locally orientated as the city street is not the space of natural security due not only to the vehicles traffic, but also to

density of the pedestrian traffic connected with urban built up density, and also the presence of passing strangers. The city street is a typical public space, where professionally active members of the community are seeing each other mainly when going out to work or coming back home.

All urban design theories and practises of converting the city streets into the livable social and public open spaces is actually an attempt to achieve the traditional role of the village street, the open space of the community integration.

The space for the family and the space for the group

The character of the village street is influenced by as well as is a result of the relation between the space for the group and the space for the family. The street of the village is the space, where the family life is opening. The front garden, the most prestigious part of every lot, where flower beds and plants are competing with those of neighbours to be most beautiful, but also to be distinguished as the family individual identity are giving the streetscape informal and homely image. The common space image, being a spontaneous composition of individual images of private lots, expresses the social life structure of the community, being a physical symbol of this. The traditional, natural tendency to participate in the community life and to create the common space image is not limited to the front garden. The front porch or an arcade is not only the entrance shelter, but also a place for rest, for outdoor eating and is also an observation point for the village street life. The front porch and an arcade, usually the most decorated part of house architecture, is a very important element of the villagescape and of integration of the family and the community life. This integration is also expressed by the traditional house layout, where the kitchen and dining place were facing the street.
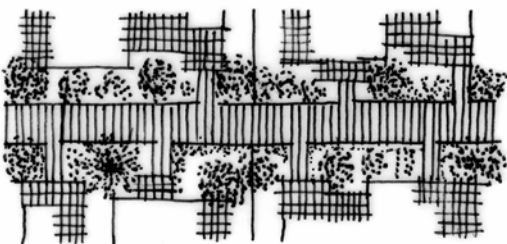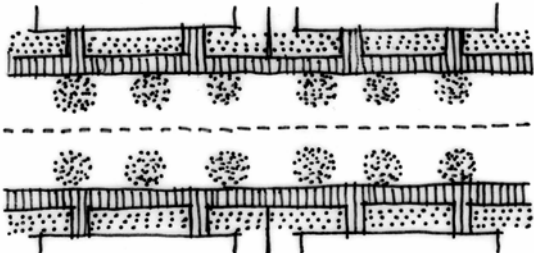
integration of the family and the community life   isolation of the family and the community life

The single urban districts of the family houses adopted some of this village identity, but due to other aspects of urban life, mentioned earlier, the density of this integration is much lower in the city, than in the village. The typical multifamily housing district in the city is organised according to the rule of maximum isolation of the family private space and the public street

space. The traffic lanes, the parking places, the sidewalks and the greenery between the street and a house entrance result in a distance between the houses. The width of the street and its interference are the natural explanation for tendency of isolating the private space of a family flat from the public street space. The back yard is eventually the common space of informal and homely visual image, and the space, where the private and the social life integration may take place. The city streetscape of "formal" regularly planted tree rows, often formed in urban manner, maintained by the communal services enhance the image of a public place in opposition to the image of a privacy.

As the village streetscape reflects the natural integration of the family and the community life, the city streetscape reflects the urban isolation.
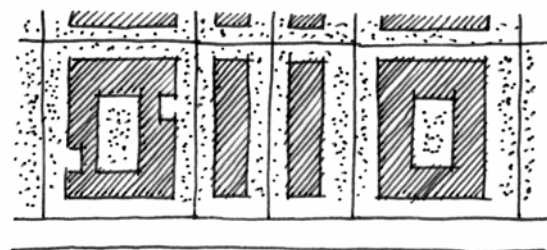

The natural and the man-made environment

The village living environment is integrated with the natural environment. Big building lots, low built up density and the surrounding landscape create conditions for the contact with nature in everyday life, which is the best way of education about the nature, about the benefits from and dependence on it as well about respect of the nature.

City inhabitants living in a densely built-up city are separated from the natural environments. The nature for them is far from the everyday life reality and the knowledge of man's dependence on it and the need of protecting the nature even when it is conscious, is mainly theoretical. In the city the energy and the water supply, the sewage treatment and the food available in the shop are all taken for granted without hesitation about the sources of civilisation benefits and the impact of the comfort of living on the natural environment.
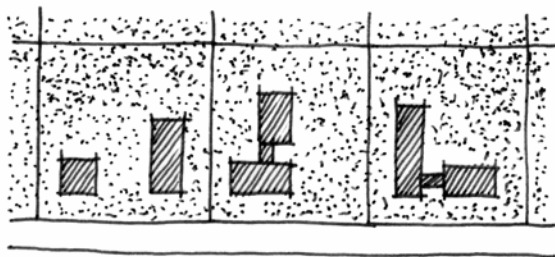
coexistence with the natural environment   separation from the natural environment

Villagers know by practice the food production process even if only by cultivating the vegetable garden which might be a reasonable support to the food supply for a family, and one of the aspects of security of the village life. Composting part of the home waste is traditional for the village as well as the local treatment of sewage. Big village lots and low built-up density are economically appropriate, as well as ecologically safe for modern solutions of sewage treatment for individual houses or small groups of houses. The same

aspects of the village man-made environment allow supporting the energy supply by small windmills located near the houses. Traditional rainwater collection and use for garden watering combined with modern grey sewage separation and reuse in the house are easy ways of conserving water in the village. The high percentage of the biologically active area at every lot creates conditions for natural process of absorbing and evaporating the rain water, so the most unsustainable technical infrastructure of the city, the rain water pipes central system is alien to the village.

In contradiction to the urban environment, the village not only offers living within the nature, but also requires coexistence with the four elements of Earth, which is the best way of education about the sustainable development principles.

The image of the village

The villagescape presents real proportions between the man-made and the natural environment. Dimensions of the buildings and their height below the trees enhance in the local scale the nature domination in the global scale. A single family building in the villagescape enhances the importance of the family, being the basic social structure unit. There is clearly visible unity between the village social structure and its physical structure, the "proper connections between the social form and the physical form" as Robert Geddes says. The relation between the man, the tree, the man's shelter and the surrounding landscape of the village is characteristic for the times, when sustainable development was the natural way of development.

The townscape is a contradiction of this natural harmony. In general the image of the city reflects technology domination over the nature, the man's reliance on technology development to meet his needs in the urban living environment, the lost of the human scale of the city, where the family importance is dominated by the importance of community concentrated on a reasonably small territory. The contemporary big city is the culmination of human abilities to conquer the earth for achieving comfort in a living environment. But the crisis of the urban environment and the threat to the Earth natural environment proof that such an approach is not longer right neither for the man nor for the nature.

traditional relationships: man, nature, buildings

processed relationships: man, nature, buildings

The sustainability of the village image in general comes out not only from the size and the scale of the village dwellings versus the natural landscape. The very important difference between the village and the townscape is in the approach to the cultural heritage. The locality is the essence of the village scene. The local tradition of the village spatial layout, the architectural forms and materials used for construction are results of the geographical variety of landscapes and the local climatic conditions. Locally available resources for building construction influence the constrains and the origins of the local culture. The binds of the regional culture combined with the tradition of community social links influenced the spatial harmony of the villagescape. Every single village house architecturally coexists with the neighbouring houses and besides of being different and individual at the same time demonstrates being the natural part of the community. Like in the ecological landscape all nature features must coexist to survive so in the village the visual "ecology" of man-made environment is similar. In the village the alien, the out of place elements do not occur similarly as in the natural environments. The first visual image of a traditional village all over the world reflects the very special sense of the local identity of the continents, the countries and the regions. The closer look at the typical regional village house shows the richness of the local architecture described by the clear rules within which there is a place for various solutions to express both, individuality and belonging to the group. The solidarity of local groups, the natural way of coexistence in a small homeland is reflected in the solidarity of architecture.
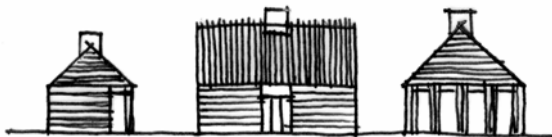
image of solidarity and culture continuity   image of competing and changing fashion

Promoting the continuity of the regional architectural tradition by historical conservation authorities all over Europe wouldn't be successful without the support of the local inhabitants being proud of their cultural heritage and willing to enhance the local diversity. As the bio diversity is crucial for survival of the natural environment so the rural cultural diversity is crucial for survival of man's cultural heritage. The village environment, being for a long time away from the main architectural trends and styles, being fashion-proof or even out of date, become now an example of a sense of locality, a local cultural base for the local social and economical development. The village image is a contradiction of the city image, where the architecture trying to follow ever-shorter lasting new fashions and styles, searching continuously for the most advanced technologies and materials, reflecting the international

competition between stars – architects and the unity of global capital is a threat for cultural diversity.

The sustainable development ideas are often defined by necessity of the social solidarity domination over misunderstood competition of a free market. The villagescape physical features seem to be perfectly matching this idea.

The architecture

The village architecture beyond the boundaries, all over the world was always Earth friendly. Usage of locally available materials for construction was as natural as wasting energy for importing them from the other end of the planet was impossible and abnormal. Reasonable use of the local resources for building was also natural, as the people life related on the local environment stability, so meeting the needs of the shelter was no competing with over exploitation of the earth. The regional architecture reflects respect to the user and builder, often being the same one, in simplicity of the form and its process of construction, reasonable usage of man's power and limited usage of energy for constructing and than for running the house. The house dimensions, the construction elements, the roof siding, the architectural ornaments were all linked with the very modern no left-out materials approach. Village architecture traditional co-operation with climate is the next aspect of green architecture. The attic under the sloppy roof being the perfect thermal insulation, rather small windows and windows shelter being the protection against over cooling or over heating, the tree beside the house giving shelter in the summer heat, and leafless in the winter allowing the sun penetrating inside the house are still the most simple ways of co-operating with the climate.
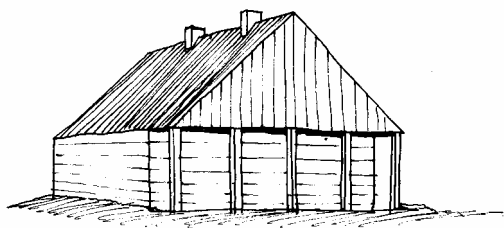
the architecture of humility
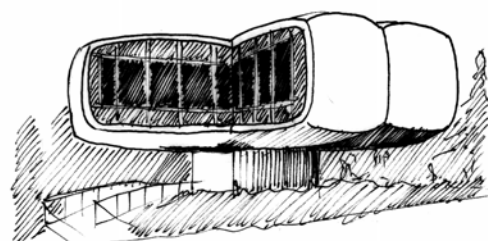
the architecture of arrogance

The centrally positioned chimney in the house was a source of heat, as well as the heat collector, and when the inside heat was unacceptable the shadowed porch or the arcade was a comfortable place for outdoor living. The size of the house was reflecting the needs as well as the abilities of the family, also abilities of keeping good condition indoors, when possibilities of energy use were limited. The layout of the traditional village house was

organising an indoor space for close family contacts, often not leaving enough space for the privacy of all its members. Cultural, technical and economic constrains, but also often poverty, were the reasons of the reasonability of the village architecture, which reflects human humility towards the environment.

Arrogance of the modern architecture, the "everything, which can be done – should be done", approach in creating human shelters, continuous search for spectacular, modern and fashionable forms and construction materials, irrationally oversized for the inhabitants' needs houses reflecting their private wealth resulting in unlimited use of building resources and energy were alien to the rural architecture. Vernacular architecture, including traditional village architecture, deeply analysed in terms of Victor Papanek's "Vernacular Matrix" can be the lesson for main stream modern green architecture (Papanek 1995).

Even if all elements of the village environment identity are presently not ideal and in many places the unsustainable reality influenced the village life, still the rural environment in comparing with the urban environment is very close to the model of the sustainable living environment. There are many good reasons to treat the village as an alternative to the city as a place for living, a place where contemporary human needs of those remaining in the village can be met. In the Polish realities the country and the local authorities policy to encourage and to help the good part of 14 million village inhabitants to remain in the village seems to be the important part of creating sustainable living environment policy of the rural environment as well, as the urban environment of Polish cities.

Analysis of the village environment identity were the base for a case study of development of the village in Kaszuby region of northern Poland (Staniszkis 2001). The general principles of the modern village development were combined with the analysis of cultural identity of the specific region (for example, see Chrzanowski 2000) to be described the building code of the local development as the conservation of the historical heritage is an important aspect of the sustainable development. The project analysis of designing the village house proofs, that the regional architecture interpretation is matching contemporary needs of modest living condition and working places for various family models and various possibilities of occupation for the modern villagers. The urban regulations for the Kaszuby village development together with the architectural design proposals including the catalogue of house projects is a theoretical example of creating sustainable living rural environment. Implementation of such an urban design or rather rural design and architectural ideas depends on remaining in the village policy on the country level as well as on the local regional level. The consciousness of importance of such a policy is growing in Poland and the initiative of the Kaszuby and Kociewie Association, the regional NGO, to organise a competition for "creating the cultural identity of contemporary Kaszuby village development" is an example of that.

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