

THE SUBURBANIZATION PROCESS AND QUALITY OF LIFE

Aleksander Ostenda¹

Tetyana Nestorenko²

Iryna Yemchenko³

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Abstract: *The issue of the suburbanization process (urban sprawl) is so important and at the same time still evolving that it forces constant updates and adaptation of research methods to the current situation. That is why it is so important to interest in this issue the greatest number of researchers who could comprehensively conduct research on these phenomena in an open knowledge exchange model. This is an extremely important and urgent problem, especially in the area of effective models and methods of public management that will enable effective management of space, accessibility and mobility so that cities develop intelligently, not only intensively, and to exclude extensive development as much as possible - deprived of control and affecting many areas of public and social life, the natural environment and, above all, the quality of life of residents. The authors of research indicate the impact of suburbanization on the perceptible and real quality of life of suburban residents. It seems necessary to take a systematic approach to the phenomenon of suburbanization and to make an attempt to shape it by the local government thanks to responsible public management in this area, which is particularly important in the broader context, when taking into account the full economic, psychological and social costs that the whole society incurs as a result of the spill Polish cities regardless of their size.*

Keywords: *Suburbanization, Urban Sprawl, Quality of Life.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Suburbanization, from the English word suburb, is a stage of city development characterized by a planned development of the outskirts of the city and the suburban zones. Periphery areas of the city turn into residential space in this stage of development, while the city center undergoes depopulation, leaving room for administrative buildings, public utility facilities, offices, and shops⁴. As opposed to planned suburbanization, uncontrolled building over of suburban areas is referred to as exurbanization or urban sprawl and is a result of the demand for new construction and the practices of developers which are harmful to the natural environment.⁵ It is accompanied by deindustrialization and the degradation of city centers.⁶

The issue of the spread of cities is significant enough and constantly evolving to force us to update and adapt our research methods to the current situation. That is why, it is important to arouse the interest of as many researchers as possible in this topic, so that they would be able to conduct comprehensive studies on these phenomena in a model of open exchange of knowledge. This is a very

¹ Katowice School of Technology, Rolna str.43, Katowice 40-555, Poland

² Berdyansk State Pedagogical University, Shmidta str 4, Berdyadsk 71112, Ukraine

³ Lviv University of Trade and Economics, Tuhan-Baranovsky str.10, Lviv 79000, Ukraine

⁴ Encyklopedia architektury. https://archirama.muratorplus.pl/encyklopedia-architektury/suburbanizacja,62_4357.html

⁵ A. Majer: *Socjologia i przestrzeń miejska.* (Sociology and Urban Space) Warsaw: PWN, 2010, p.209

⁶ H. Izdebski : *Ideologia i zagospodarowanie przestrzeni.*(The Ideology of Space Management) Warsaw: Wolters Kluwert Poland, 2013, p. 78

significant and pressing issue, especially in the area of effective models and methods of public management, which will enable effective management of space, accessibility and mobility so that, cities can develop intelligently and not only intensively and to exclude, whenever the possibility arises, extensive development – bereft of control which influences many areas of public and social life, the natural environment, but most of all the quality of life of the city's inhabitants.

2. QUALITY OF LIFE AND PERCEIVED QUALITY OF LIFE

In the subject literature there are terms such as: quality of life and perceived quality of life. It is inappropriate to use them interchangeably. It is very important to differentiate between them. Quality of life refers to an objective dimension.

The starting point in formulating any kind of conclusions on the subject always boils down to external conditions, the objective reality of a person being a source of stimuli and experiences. On the other hand, perceived quality of life is connected with the subjective attitude to reality. This is an evaluation shaped by emotions and feelings. It concerns the subjective dimension

Objective quality of life is similar in meaning to the term **living conditions** (or **level of life**) which mean all the objective conditions of infrastructural character in which the society (social groups, households and individuals) lives. They are mainly connected with: material condition, existential security and environmental security of the life of an individual. In defining objective quality of life, the data used is generally available in public statistics. Examples of measures used include average lifespan, monthly income and residential area.

Subjective quality of life is an evaluation of fulfilment of needs. Although, in literature of the subject there are numerous different definitions of this category there is a certain similarity between them. It is based on the subjective perception of one's own life within the framework of a specific system of values and under specific social, economic and political conditions. Examples of measures here include satisfaction with one's health, received income and residential situation.⁷

The complete picture of the quality of life is obtained studying both its objective and subjective dimension. In order to study objective quality of life we may use the ready-made sets of indicators provided by subject textbooks (e.g. indicators of sustained development developed for the Ministry of the Environment or indicators used within the framework of Urban Audit).⁸

The multidimensionality of the issue of quality of life is also reflected in another division of this concept. The aforementioned ones belong to the trend which may be called normative. They assume the existence of a certain ideal state – a norm, towards which every person should strive. His quality of life is an expression of the differences between the norm and the actual state. There are also definitions, according to which quality of life is connected with the wealth of experiences and not the fulfilment of needs.

Since the quality of life is a multidimensional concept with a rather loose definition connected with the profession or expertise of the person who is defining it, it is difficult to measure. The

⁷ T. Borys, P. Rogala (ed.), *Jakość życia na poziomie lokalnym – ujęcie wskaźnikowe* (Quality of Life on a Local Level – Indicator Approach), UNDP, Warsaw 2008 pp.13-14.

⁸ P. Rogala, *Zaprojektowanie i przetestowanie systemu mierzenia jakości życia w gminach* (Designing and Testing the System of Evaluation of Quality of Life in Municipalities), University of Economics in Wrocław, Faculty in Jelenia Góra, Jelenia Góra – Poznań 2009, p. 7.

difficulties in providing a precise definition of the term quality of life have led to a situation in which there is a lack of universal tools which would precisely define its level. Most likely, it would be easier to respond to a question why the level of the quality of life is measured than why it should actually be done. Despite the difficulties of this concept, the authors have attempted to answer the question posed in the title.

Currently in Poland we can observe progress in the phenomena of suburbanization around not only main cities but also smaller ones. Suburbanization processes that take place in Poland and the forces that cause them are similar to processes and forces that occur in other countries. For example, among the forces driving suburbanization were marketization of urban land, the shift of industrial land to tertiary use, transportation improvement, the availability of foreign and domestic capital, housing rehabilitation in the city, and new housing construction in the suburbs of China.⁹

Due to the political system which was in place prior to 1989, in Poland these phenomena had not commenced until the turn of the XX and XXI centuries. The main factor determining a decision about place of residence in Poland is the price of real estate. However, living in suburban areas adds other circumstances and aspects unknown to or forgotten by people deciding to live “outside the city”, which significantly influence the quality of their subsequent lives.

Key factors which determine quality of life of the residents of suburban areas are:

1. Employment

Access to employment is severely limited in suburban areas. Suburban quarters are characterized by the fact that they fill the role of bedrooms for “core” cities¹⁰, where the services provided by the core-city are not available. That is why, in deciding to live in the suburbs, a daily long commute to work must be assumed. The results of research conducted previously show that 43% of Poles commutes to work by car every day, devoting on the average 7 hours weekly to this task.¹¹

2. Education and care for children aged 3 and under

Families with small children, who are not of school age, often move to suburban areas. However, even at the stage of pre-school and earlier, these families encounter problems connected with availability of these kinds of facilities for their children. Frequently the towns and villages which experience the phenomena of suburbanization are not able to provide a sufficient offer, to care for their new inhabitants. More often than not this situation leads to the necessity of using private preschools and nurseries. There is especially a lack of nursery facilities, living in the suburbs there is virtually no possibility of utilizing such facilities be they public or even private. That is why, young parents wanting to find care for their small children are often forced to select a facility (usually private) in the „core city”, or to employ a babysitter. The first solution is definitely associated with additional hours spent in the car, since usually the nursery is not found near the place of employment. The second option is connected with employing a stranger and “allowing” this person to enter your home, entrusting them with care over a small child. As far as quality of life is concerned the lack of access to care for children under the age of 3 in our nearest surroundings, decreases said quality at the same time increasing costs of living.

⁹ Yixing Zhou & Laurence J. C. Ma. Economic restructuring and suburbanization in China, 2000, *Urban Geography*, 21:3, 205-236

¹⁰ Core city- a city most often the province or county capital around which a circle of suburban areas is created („bedroom”)

¹¹ Center for Public Opinion Research, 2012

3. Environment

Many decisions about choosing our place of residence are made with the conviction that the natural environment is in a better condition in suburban areas. However, these are only appearances, which do not have much in common with the actual situation. The phenomena of suburbanization is a car-dependent phenomena which means it has a negative impact on the natural environment. Compact cities generate much less carbon dioxide created by transport than suburbs. Approximately 30% of nitric oxide emissions and 30% of carbon monoxide emissions are a result of car traffic. That is why suburbanization contributes to air pollution. In addition, there are permanent changes to spatial landscape due to suburbanization.

4. Health

As far as health is concerned suburbanization contributes to a non-hygienic lifestyle. We become used to cars, without which we are unable to carry out our daily duties such as shopping, doctor visits, taking children to school. Cars result in people not walking and basically treating their automobile as something that is a necessity without which they cannot function. At the same time, they want to drive up “right to the doorstep” to avoid any kind of walking.

Another aspect connected with health is access to health care. In suburban areas access to a doctor is generally more difficult due to greater distances. Primary care physicians generally have their offices in suburban areas. However, when it comes to specialist care our possibilities are greatly diminished, as it is generally located solely in the “core” cities. The same goes for hospitals. Therefore, taking into account access to health care, quality of life worsens significantly as people move to suburban areas.

5. Access to emergency services

The readiness of emergency services is another element, which for example, due to lower population density and the „spread” of areas contributes to the lowering of the life quality of residents. The commute of emergency medical services to suburban areas is longer than in the city. According to the Act on Public Emergency Services the median commute time – on a monthly basis – is no greater than 8 minutes in a city with over 10 thousand inhabitants and 15 minutes outside a city with over 10 thousand inhabitants.¹²

6. Access to public space

As studies have shown new residents do not use such spaces, even if they are available. However, the spaces in which residents do show interest require (similarly to work and school) driving. Access to other areas e.g. those connected with physical activities in suburban areas in Poland has a decisive impact on the decrease of life quality in these areas in comparison with city inhabitants.

7. Feeling of being rooted in the local community, interpersonal relations and participation in the life of a given community

In the process of suburbanization, it is customary to treat residences as places for sleeping or perhaps those used for weekend relaxation. Residents find it hard to become rooted in the local community.

New inhabitants moving into small towns and villages, at the same time contribute to the total annihilation of their old structures. Most of the inhabitants do not know one another, they do not get involved in the life of the local community, their lives are mainly focused on home-work (school) – home commutes and they simply do not have time to establish and develop neighborly relations.

¹² Act from 8 September 2006 on Public Emergency Services

8. Access to public transport and walking access

When we are talking about the intelligent development of cities, about the development of space in the human scale, accessible on foot, one that does not overburden, a key element of such space is public transport. It is due to public transport that space can be recovered to be used by people. However, under Polish conditions living in suburban areas is equivalent with the necessity to use our own cars in order to ensure transport to work, school and to ensure all other kinds of services (even basic ones). Transport in suburban areas is badly organized and unattractive for the user. Agglomerations are slowly trying to implement changes, however in this case such steps are inadequate.¹³

As studies have shown the phenomenon of suburbanization has not only numerous economic consequences but psychological ones as well. Suburbanization causes the loss and permanent change of landscape and brings about significant costs, which are incurred both by the society as well as public administration. People who decide to live in suburban areas rarely make this decision based on in-depth analysis of results of such a move, founded on a multi-dimensional analysis of potential gains and losses, both in the economic dimension as well as the social one. Most of them decide, based on the criterion of price of real estate alone. However, in case of suburban zones making decisions solely taking into account initial costs of purchase is burdened with a significant risk. Living in suburban zones generates significantly higher costs of transport, each household requires two or more cars to function “normally”, without which life seems virtually impossible. A car becomes a necessary attribute of functioning in the suburbs, thanks to which people can get to work, take children to school and take care of their basic needs, such as shopping and visits to the doctor. However, the aspect of costs connected with suburbanization is only a single aspect of this phenomenon.

Suburbanization has a negative influence on the experienced and real level of quality of life, which unfortunately (at least under Polish conditions) is relatively much lower in comparison with the quality of life in well-managed cities. Settlements in villages made up of people who are not employed in agriculture or gardening and who work and fulfill their basic needs in the city, unfortunately do not provide peace and quiet and the possibility to rest close to nature, since these aspects are suppressed by the unfavorable limits in access to fulfilling basic needs, including substandard public infrastructure. Inhabitants of these areas are often forced to live with limitations to basic infrastructure elements such as: lack of sidewalks, lack of hard-surface access roads, low-level technical infrastructure, lack of sewage systems, lack of social infrastructure, lack of decent public space enabling them to spend free time. These limits result in a more difficult access to numerous services and places which are a norm for inhabitants of cities. Despite all that, subsequent generations of Poles make the decision to settle down in the suburbs, driven mainly by dreams of their own house with a garden and the price of purchasing a property. Unfortunately, costs connected with suburbanization are incurred not only by people deciding to live in those areas, such costs are incurred by society as a whole through increased public expenditures, which are rarely balanced out by increased income.

¹³ A. Ostenda, M. Fojud, M. Błaszczak, *Ekonomiczne i psychologiczne aspekty rozlewania się miast*, (The Economic and Psychological Aspects of City Spread) Katowice School of Technology, Katowice 2016, pp. 26 – 36

3. CONCLUSION

The conducted research and source material studies unanimously point out the necessity (especially under Polish conditions) to carry out a system-wide approach to suburbanization and for the local government to influence it through responsible public management in this area, which is particularly important in a wider context when we take into account total economic, psychological and social costs incurred by the society as a whole which are a consequence of the spread of Polish cities regardless of their size.

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