



SHERPA
Rural Science-Society-Policy
Interfaces

A VISION FOR RURAL AREAS

MAP Position Paper



LONG-TERM VISION FOR RURAL AREAS: CONTRIBUTION FROM 20 SCIENCE- SOCIETY-POLICY PLATFORMS

MAP POSITION PAPER

MAZOWIECKIE

POLAND

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1. Headline message

The paper presents the position of the Zielone Sąsiedztwo MAP's on the long-term vision for rural areas in Mazowieckie, Poland. Rural areas in Mazowieckie region are very diverse representing different levels of economic development, types of rural communities and structure of the economy and society. Rural areas in Mazowieckie, like in the whole Poland, have been undergoing rapid changes since the Polish EU accession thanks to EU common agricultural policy and cohesion policy.

Vision: MAP members would like to see rural areas in Mazowieckie to be vibrant in 2040. This vision of vibrant rural areas encompasses integrated local communities enjoying both high quality of life and preserved landscapes and biodiversity. This means that further development of rural areas in the region should take into account their natural endowment and preserve it.

Challenges: Demographic shift, climate change as well as poverty and social inequalities are the most important challenges for rural areas in Mazowieckie. The diversity of rural areas is considered as a developmental challenge that must be tackled by area-tailored policies.

Enablers: The prerequisite for vibrant rural areas is consensus and cooperation of all the stakeholders. Other enablers include climate smart policy, capacity building for knowledge transfer and job creation leading to better quality of life in rural areas.

Keywords: *vibrant rural areas, landscape & biodiversity preservation, integrating local community, wellbeing & quality of life.*

2. Key scientific evidence

The process of collecting key scientific evidence followed the procedure agreed by the SHERPA consortium. The scientific evidence is provided in the first section of the Discussion paper (review of desk research), where key developmental trends, challenges and opportunities for the rural areas in Mazowieckie were presented. The identification of key trends, challenges and opportunities was conducted based on the analysis of the developments in several areas, including:

Demographic shift. The forecasts show that the rural population will slightly increase by 2040, while urban population will increase even more but the proportions between the two groups should not change considerably. What is more pronounced is a forecasted continuation of the already visible trend – outflow of people, mostly young, from peripheral rural areas to Warsaw and neighbouring towns and villages. This poses a serious challenge for the viability of peripheral rural communities and a burden on environment and infrastructure in the Warsaw agglomeration.

Climate change and environmental services. Gradual increases in the average temperatures and number of severe climatic events (i.e., droughts, floods, etc.) has already been noticeable in Mazowieckie. So far, the most heavily hit by these changes have been farmers. Therefore, agriculture will have to face this challenge and reinvent itself to become resilient.

Shift in production and diversification of the rural economy and land-use competition. The process of changes in the rural economy have been accelerated by the EU accession. The number large farms cultivating their own and unofficially leased land is growing in peripheral areas, while in areas close to Warsaw land is transferred from agricultural use to residential purposes.

Infrastructure and basic services. Despite significant improvements in this area as a result of the EU funding, especially in peripheral parts of Mazowieckie the infrastructure and basic services are underdeveloped.

3. Summary of the outcomes of the Delphi

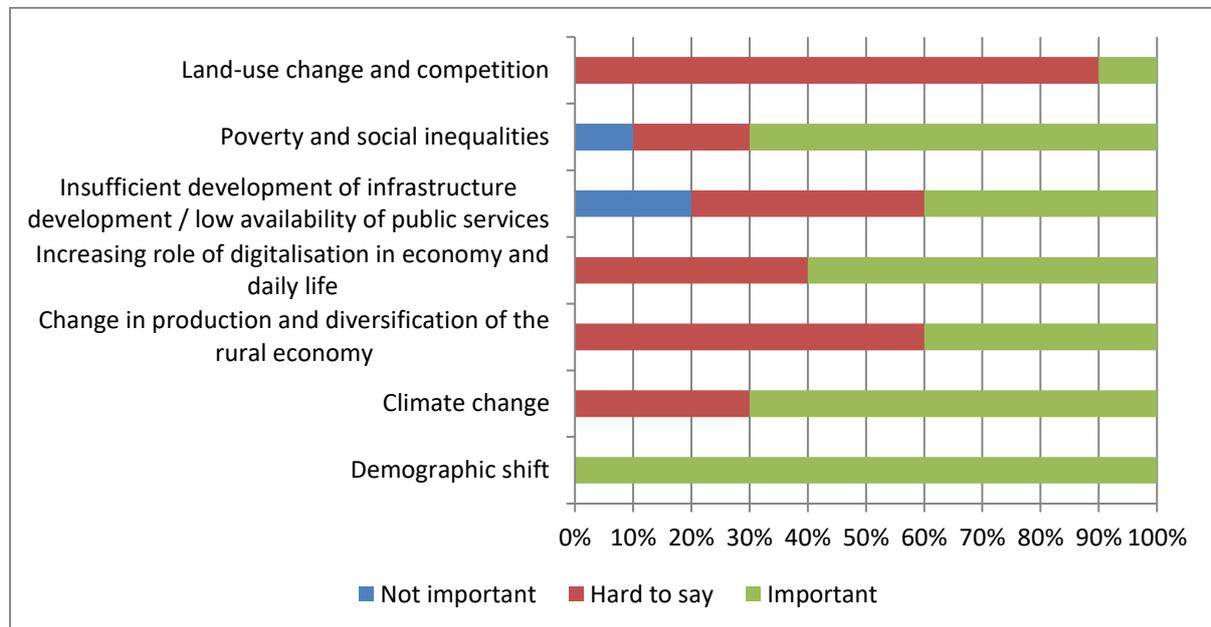
This section provides the outcome of the delphi – combining the results from the interviews, from the survey and from the consensus meeting. The following steps were applied: (1) desk research and context analysis (March-May 2020); interviews – 3 focus groups (June-July 2020); (3) interview analysis, writing MAP Discussion paper and preparation of survey (May-July 2020); (4) MAP survey (July-August 2020); (5) survey analysis (September 2020); (6) validation of results (October 2020). Number of individuals interviewed is 10, while number of survey participants is 20.

3.1. Challenges and opportunities in the next 20 years

As Mazowieckie is the largest Polish region with the area of 35,558 km² and population of 5.4 million, its rural areas covering 93.9% of the surface (Urząd Statystyczny w Warszawie, 2018, p. 8 & 13) are diverse in their historical, geographical, environmental, economic and societal characteristics. Despite a rapid economic growth and significant level of EU funds that enabled investment in infrastructure, their socio-economic situation has been diverging as a result of capacity to attract capital and inhabitants. This capacity is closely related to their location, with the remote areas being less attractive and suffering from underinvestment in infrastructure and basic public services, thus they enter a vicious cycle of depopulation and economic deterioration.

Survey participants named demographic shift as the most important challenge for the development of rural areas in Mazowieckie (tab. 1). Climate changes and poverty and social inequalities are also seen as major challenges for the region's rural areas. The COVID-19 pandemic showed also the importance of development of digital infrastructure to improve the accessibility of digitalised economy and public services, as well as culture and learning.

Figure 1. Main challenges of rural areas in Mazowieckie



In some poviats the share of working age population decreased by as much as 10 pp. in the period 2010-2016 (Urząd Statystyczny w Warszawie, 2018, p. 18) and these are also the parts of the region with the largest drop in the population in this period (Urząd Statystyczny w Warszawie, 2018, p. 16). Unsurprisingly, the same apply to comparison of the newborns in the analysed period (Urząd Statystyczny w Warszawie, 2018, p. 20). In the most peripheral rural areas in the region the ratio of women per 100 men is also the lowest (Urząd Statystyczny w Warszawie, 2018, p. 25).

The problem of climate change has already become visible in rural areas of the region. The worst hit by them have been farmers. Droughts have become the biggest problem for agriculture, but as the underground water reservoirs are small, it is predicted that water shortages will affect daily lives of Poles in the coming decades. The problem with water is exacerbated by a low share of population connected to wastewater treatment plants. In 2016 in no poviats achieved a ratio of 100% of rural inhabitants connected to wastewater treatment plants and in some parts of the region their share was lower than 25% (Urząd Statystyczny w Warszawie, 2018, p. 85).

Poverty and social inequalities have two dimensions. First is the personal dimension of low income of rural families, which is more common in peripheral parts of the region. The other dimension of this phenomenon is the poverty of local public budgets which boosts the problem of insufficient provision of basic public services. A good example of this problem is the level of expenditure of gminas budgets for culture and national heritage in 2016. In some parts of the region this expenditure per 1 inhabitant was only EUR 1, while in the biggest and richest cities it was EUR 125 (Urząd Statystyczny w Warszawie, 2018, p. 54).

To achieve the desirable future for 2040 much needs to be done. Apart from financial resources needed, especially for basic infrastructure (i.e. roads and wastewater treatment plants) and basic public services (i.e. public transport, medical services and take-care services), what is required is increase in public involvement and cooperation among authorities at different administrative levels to coordinate actions taken and pull up funds and know-how.

Moreover, public policy towards rural areas must be cover all the dimensions of socio-economic live of rural communities. The policy must include support for innovations and transformation of the energy system which is still based on fossil fuels. Diversification of energy sources can be a good opportunity for rural areas to develop biomass energy sector.

3.2. Desirable future for 2040

Desirable future of rural areas in Mazowieckie for 2040 can be summed up in a statement "vibrant rural communities". It relates to all aspects of sustainable development. In the case of economic aspects, the job prospects and business opportunities were indicated. Rural areas should offer good prospects for their inhabitants and should be an attractive place for investment for all types of business activity. This should also translate into dissent incomes gained by professionally active population. To achieve this a number of different challenges must successfully be faced by rural development policy and other parts of public policies.

In the case of environmental aspects of the desirable future of rural areas involves protected biodiversity and landscapes. An important part of it is protection of forests and water resources. In line with this the agricultural sector has a substantial role to play as it should become sustainable and a significant part of it should be organic farming. This means that adequate food chains must be in place to cope with the changed agriculture. Therefore, a desired future for food sector are vibrant local food processing enterprises, local markets, direct sales using the digital tools and health aware consumers with sufficient purchasing power.

Rural areas in Mazowieckie should also become an attractive place to live. This means that the rural lifestyle of living close to nature in a small community should be maintained but at the same time the standards of living should become much higher than currently. This involves several different aspects. First of them is the availability of a reliable network of public transport that shortens the time distance of bigger towns with high quality public and private services, such as health and education.

Higher standards of living also require dissent incomes which requires not only good condition of rural businesses but also competitive salaries in the public sector as well as social policy that supports families and individuals in need due to illnesses and other factors lowering their prospects on the job market. Therefore, also development of childcare systems (kindergartens, etc.) and elderly care system should be part of the activities enabling achieving the desirable future.

Broadband internet is also a vital part of the desirable future. This is important for both economic development of the rural areas as well as for the education of rural population at every stage of their lives as this is the easiest and least expensive way to lower the difference between access and quality of education between urban and rural areas.

Social aspects of the desirable future of rural areas in the region are not limited to the quality of life and the level of incomes. The MAP members emphasized the issue of social capital as an important element of the desirable future. Local communities should become more integrated and active. This should not only enable the achievement of the desirable future of 2040 but should also be a foundation for further development and active approach to facing coming challenges and make these areas more socially innovative.

The facilitation of cooperation among rural community members and public authorities at different levels is already an important issue that is necessary to be achieved as soon as possible as possible given the challenges already faced and the coming new EU financial perspective. The EU Green Deal is a very ambitious developmental strategy. The rural areas in Mazowieckie have a far way to go to achieve compliance with the green growth concept. The challenges related to this process are complex and are sure to face resistance from numerous stakeholders as they put into question their business concept (and thus their existence) and way of life. Therefore, there is a need for enabling discussions and presentations of the reasoning behind different perspective and policy stances already today.

3.3. Enablers to achieve the vision

There is a general consensus that rural areas in Mazowieckie have no financial, social, political and human capacity to transform themselves into vibrant rural communities. They can only put into fulfilment of this vision their commitment, hard work and first-hand knowledge of the area and its citizens. Therefore, the key enablers are all the stakeholders at different levels and in various sectors of socio-economic life that can break about the necessary capacity.

This means that the EU, national and regional policies must act in line and empower rural areas to design and implement developmental strategies that are in line with the desirable vision of rural areas. This also means that these policies must offer a significant level of flexibility to cater to diverse developmental needs and priorities. Regulations need to promote communities actively seeking ways to create a common development strategy and implementing them.

An important part of enablers toolbox are financial funds. These need to be provided on time and under clearly defined rules of their spending. Due to different levels of socio-economic development and average per capita incomes of both individuals/enterprises and public authorities, the level of financial support needs to be even more than know related to the financial capacity of the beneficiary. The same applies to types of projects that can be supported. For some municipalities there is no need to offer support for a certain investment type that has already reached a saturation point, but it should be available in other parts of the region where the problem has hardly been tackled.

It still remains an open question whether the EU Green Deal can become an enabler for transforming rural areas in Mazowieckie region so that they are in 2040 as vibrant as MAP members would like them to be.

Generally, the capacity building is an enabler. In some cases, it applies to infrastructure investment projects – roads, waste water management plants, while in other cases to training, advice and know-how. An important part of the capacity building is improving access to digital solutions. Digitization is for the most remote rural communities the only way to improve their economic potential and thus attractiveness as a place to live.

Annex 1. Methodology used in the MAP

Position paper was prepared using a 6-step Delphi method, combining research, utilization of quantitative data with expert interviews and surveys. The following 6 steps were applied for this paper:

Step 1. Desk research and context analysis. Analysis was performed on March-May 2020.

Step 2. Interviews conducted during 3 focus group meetings. Meetings were organized in June and July 2020.

Step 3. Interview analysis, writing MAP Discussion paper and preparation of survey. Works undertaken during May-July 2020.

Step 4. MAP survey conducted in the period July-August 2020.

Step 5. Survey analysis conducted in September 2020.

Step 6. Validation of results in October 2020. Number of individuals interviewed is 10, while number of survey participants is 20.

Annex 2. References

Urząd Statystyczny w Warszawie (2018). Atlas statystyczny województwa mazowieckiego. Statistical atlas of Mazowieckie voivodship. Warszawa: Urząd Statystyczny w Warszawie.

