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Rural Gentrification in Central and Eastern Europe

Abstract: This paper develops a conceptual framework for interpreting the process of rural gentrification in Central and Eastern Europe. It highlights the commonalities and differences of the phenomenon as they relate to its dynamics, trends and spatial patterns. The analysis shows two trajectories of rural gentrification: seasonal interest in rural areas and related to suburbanization, in which endogenous and exogenous factors of rural gentrification can be distinguished. The author sees the reasons for the uniqueness of the process in the socio-historical specifics of the region: its agrarian character at the beginning of the 20th century, the specific ethnic composition of the middle class in the interwar period, under-urbanization in the period of real socialism and the process of post-communist transformation creating a “capitalist class without capital.”

Keywords: gentrification, rural gentrification, middle class, Central and Eastern Europe, post-socialist countries

Introduction

Rural gentrification, following Keith Hoggart (1997), is defined as the process of saturating the social structure of the countryside with people occupying higher positions in social stratification—and this definition of the discussed process was adopted in this analysis. It is a narrower understanding of the process focusing on its social consequences: changes in the social structure. It emphasizes the class character of the process (higher positions), but does not define the territorial (city dwellers) origin of gentrifiers. Many researchers have used a broader definition of the process (see Guimond, Simard 2010; Nelson, Pistre et al. 2008), limiting it to urban migrants but recognizing that the consequences are an integral part of the process characterization. The description of rural gentrification understood in this way usually consists of the characteristics of population, socio-economic, spatial, psychosocial and cultural changes, which in practical terms mean: a change in the social composition of the population, emphasis on local heritage and resources, aestheticisation of localities (and districts), new institutions, diversification of available services and increase in property value (Phillips 1993; Smith, Phillips 2001; Solana-Solana 2010; Stockdale 2010).

In both (narrower and broader) cases, it is assumed that the term denotes the process of the formation of the broadly understood middle class in the countryside at the expense of extreme groups in the social structure, which leads to the similarity of styles and ways of life. This phenomenon is also described by the term *moyennisation* (Mendras 1994), which denotes a set of processes in the formation of a middle-class society. In

the literature, the process of rural gentrification is analyzed on the basis of two different theoretical concepts. The first one focuses on the changes in the structures of the economy, followed by changes in the social class structure. In developed market societies the sharp class divisions referred to as class death disappear through various forms of property dissemination. These changes are taking place gradually, but more and more people are becoming owners or co-owners of something that is paramount to defining their own place in society. This trend of explanations also comprises changes in the rural economy, including a significant participation of services (Halamska, Zwęglińska-Gałecka 2019). Here a question frequently arises whether middle-class gentrifiers do not come into conflict with the existing users of space, appropriating their place. In the case of rural gentrification, the question arises whether gentrifiers are not appropriating the existing space of farmers. The second concept attempting to explain the phenomenon focuses on its cultural aspects. The emerging gentrifiers bring a lifestyle different from the autochthonous system of values and needs. And that—by spreading in a given place—cause its changes. Rural gentrification occurs as a result of the emergence of people who, based on their cultural resources, occupy higher social positions, have greater material resources and have a different lifestyle to the members of the host communities. It manifests itself in the simultaneous diversification and homogenization (Maloutas 2011). Gentrifiers enrich human, social and cultural capital in rural areas, which to some extent bridges the gaps caused by urban migration and the drainage of educated young people from the countryside. It causes a recomposition of the rural social fabric.

Rural gentrification is a process richly described in Anglo-American literature. Many researchers treat them as—almost—models of the course of this process and methodological patterns of its research. It turned out that the concept of rural gentrification is more complex than originally assumed, and with the development of studies on this subject, new, often critical, threads and interpretations appeared. Peter Marcuse (1986) rightly claims that the evaluation of gentrification depends largely on how it is defined. In Central and Eastern Europe and Asia, the analysis of this process still faces numerous challenges resulting from such factors as regional determinants of population processes, economic and spatial processes, as well as the state of national statistics necessary to describe the process. Manifestations of this process have been occurring in the region for many years, but the use of the concept of rural gentrification has imposed a certain framework for the definition and analysis of the changes taking place, which can be described as rural “improvement” as a result of the influx of middle-class migrants—composed of many social categories, legitimized by good education, occupying higher positions in the social stratification and having a specific lifestyle (Halamska 2016). This process is associated with the renewed/returning interest of the population in rural areas (Phillips 2002), which causes demographic, socio-economic, housing and spatial changes in the host community.

The aim of the article is to critically analyze the descriptions of the process of rural gentrification in Central and Eastern Europe. I rely on a critical analysis of the literature on this process. Texts describing rural gentrification were selected through the following procedure. The basis was the Google Scholar database, which is a scientific search engine, the method of indexing, searching and displaying results most similar to traditional internet search engines. The keywords used for the search are: rural gentrification, counter-

urbanization, bourgeoisie in rural areas, rural in-migration, second homes in rural areas, middle class in the countryside, rural areas / village in Central Europe / Eastern Europe / Central and Eastern Europe. The collection of analyzed texts was limited to full texts available on the Internet. The searches were completed using the “snowball” method, which made it possible to reach publications included in bibliographies and cited peer-reviewed scientific journals. The collected texts (twenty one) was thoroughly analyzed. The adopted method of searching for articles on rural gentrification in Central and Eastern Europe resulted mainly in English-language texts, which limits the conclusions. The studies selected for the analysis describe changes in rural areas defined by the authors as the process of rural gentrification in the last twenty years, i.e. at a time when the concept of gentrification began to appear and then gained popularity in the discourse of social sciences (see Rogatka 2019).¹ Ultimately, the analyzed material consisted of articles prepared by researchers from Central and Eastern Europe (more precisely from the Czech Republic, Poland, Croatia, Slovakia, Latvia, and Hungary). They constituted the main axis of the analysis and served to achieve the main goal of the article—namely to identify and interpret the characteristics of the process of rural gentrification process in Central and Eastern Europe. The analyzed process, as already mentioned, is very well described in American, British and Canadian literature.² For this reason, the findings of researchers from these countries (quoted above) probably served as a point of reference, setting the framework for the analysis of the rural gentrification process for researchers from other countries (including the authors from Central and Eastern Europe referred to in this article).

The research showed that there is relatively little work on gentrification, and even fewer analyzes showing the specificity of the process against the background of social, economic and spatial changes taking place in European countries. In this respect, the area of Central and Eastern Europe (or the “post-socialist” countries) lies on the margins of theoretical deliberations on gentrification (cf. Kaleta 2017). Due to the fact that it is such a specific economic and social region, differing in many features from Western Europe, there are justified grounds for treating this group of states as a separate part of the European continent (Eberhardt 1991). Certainly, the presented considerations do not exhaust this vast and complex issue, but they will allow to outline the trajectory of the process, show its specificity as well as multiple social, cultural and historical conditions that may determine this specificity.

Main Features of Rural Gentrification in Central and Eastern Europe

In the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, gentrification began to be described later than in the Anglo-Saxon countries or in Western Europe, in the last decade of the 20th

¹ Certain manifestations of this process (including mainly seasonal influx of city dwellers to rural areas) can be found in Polish research from the last hundred years (see, for example, Rembalski 2016; Olkuśnik 2001). However, it should be noted that neither the term gentrification itself (whether in the context of cities or rural areas) was used, nor the manifestations of the process were described in typical terms for this process.

² The British, American and Canadian literature cited above, serves to define what the process of rural gentrification is.

century.³ Initial analyzes only signaled the existence of this process. Previously, this was a problem that was almost non-existent in public and academic discourse. In the countries of Central and Eastern Europe—as mentioned—gentrification appeared later, and the initial analyses only signalled the existence of the indicated process or only described its impact on the rural social structure (Phillips 2005; Halamska 2016). On the basis of the review of publications from the period 1999–2020, it can be concluded that rural gentrification in this part of Europe was defined in a broader way and according to the definition focusing on the inflow of urban population and including its multiple effects. It was described according to two main schemes, indicating the genesis of the process.

The first scheme of the process, described by publications on the phenomenon in the Czech Republic (Horáková 2010, 2013; Vágner, Muller, Fialova 2011), Poland (Adamiak 2018; Czarnecki, Frenkel 2015; Heffner, Czarnecki 2015) and Croatia (Miletic, Perackovic, Golubic 2016) shows that the rural gentrification process and the accompanying changes are initiated by the development of seasonal housing. This is directly correlated with the spread of a lifestyle in which leisure is spent in the countryside—in Dutch villages (Dutch *vesničky*) in the Czech Republic, as well as in Croatian and Polish second homes. It is related to the phenomenon of permanent tourism and residential tourism. For new rural residents—“seasonal gentrifiers”—it is decisive to pursue a lifestyle organised around the consumption of the values of “nature” or ruralness (Adamiak 2018). The focus on factors related to the quality of the natural environment has led to the emergence of a separate term in the West—greentrification—green gentrification (Smith, Phillips 2001; Darling 2005), which emphasizes the aspirations and the vision of a certain type of ruralness, with an emphasis on environmental and consumption issues. This concept emphasises the consumption of nature, which is an important value for people moving to the countryside—also due to the fact that its availability in the city is limited. Popularization of seasonal housing results in an influx of socio-professional groups to rural areas not previously associated with the countryside—the greatest number of second homes belong to families of specialists and entrepreneurs, with higher education and high income, people situated at higher levels of the socio-economic hierarchy (Kowalczyk 2003; Adamiak 2018). Their appearance changes the rural landscape, affects the local economy, and the differences in lifestyles and value systems of the existing and new (also temporary) inhabitants generate social and cultural changes (Darling 2005). According to the concept of consumption, gentrification in these cases is not associated with displacement, but with a gradual influx of people with different socioeconomic characteristics, confirming the intuitive perceptions of gentrifiers as better educated and wealthier people (Drozda 2017). A significant part of

³ Gentrification is a process that appeared in highly developed countries in the second half of the 20th century. The phenomenon, recognised in the urban organism of London, was defined in 1964 by the sociologist Ruth Glass to describe the changes taking place in the social structure and housing market of central London (Hamnett 2003). Research on rural gentrification has a slightly shorter history. The first analyses of the rural gentrification process were made by Anglo-American researchers. Contemporary changes in the population of rural areas began to be of interest to researchers in the 1960s and 1970s (Phillips 2005). They focused on rural re-settlement, rural renaissance and rural development (Phillips 2005, 2009). However, it was not until the 1980s before studies that drew attention to the class dimension of changes in the rural population began to appear (Uysal, Sakarya 2018). David Parsons (1980) first proposed the concept of rural gentrification in a study on the class composition of rural residents in Great Britain.

the owners of second homes and houses used seasonally located in the countryside are people in a good financial situation, and therefore (potentially) characterized by a high social status and a fairly high material status. On the one hand, Czech researchers see some manifestations of the gentrification process in the emergence of “urbanized guests” from the Netherlands in the countryside (Horáková 2013). On the other hand, in Croatia, the increase in the number of rural house owners is associated with the interest of the local elite (upper class) in the natural resources of villages used for recreational and tourist purposes, and not only for agricultural purposes. Private houses located in the countryside used for recreational purposes come from the elite tradition. Having a country house used seasonally has become an expression of prestige and social status.

Researchers indicate that the development of seasonal housing—considered in terms of gentrification—causes economic and spatial changes. Buying a property is a one-time act, but second home owners have a constant influence on the market for local, often informal, services or products such as groceries. Their appearance is associated with the introduction of restrictions on the access to arable land or forests, and therefore has a major impact on the local economy. However, the emergence of new residents, both temporary and permanent, was associated with the inflow of capital, which could and still can be redirected both to improving the condition of housing and increasing the availability and quality of services and commercial facilities focused on serving the local population, as well as guests and tourists (Webber, Burrows 2017). In popular rural areas, seasonal housing has become an integral part of a diverse rural economy—primarily by ‘using’ the countryside and the environment as an essential basis and resource. The rural space has been commercialized and commodified. In other words, “nature has turned into a product that attracts nature-oriented people” (Horáková 2010).

Despite the relatively novelty of the process, some of its manifestations can be found by analysing the studies from the last century,⁴ which address the problem of the ongoing revalorisation of rural space and the recreational and tourist functions developing in rural areas. As a result, structure of land use became altered. In Central and Eastern Europe, the development of recreational and residential functions took place with a simultaneous gradual decline in the importance of agricultural functions. This was accompanied by the appearance of holiday settlements in forest areas and former farmland, (...) which changed the appearance of the contemporary rural landscape (see Ilbery, Bowler 1998). In this context, the term “tourist colonisation” has appeared in the literature, meaning the settlement of suburban areas by foreigners for tourist and recreational purposes and undertaking tourist and recreational investments based on external capital, flowing in with the colonisers. It turns out that second home owners are becoming an increasingly important stakeholder group due to the dynamics and increasing diversity of local retail and service markets. The scope and strength of economic inte-

⁴ This phenomenon could be derived from a trip to a garden plot (in Polish “wyjazd na letnisko”) or “dacha.” However, it had a very limited social range—it did not change the social structure on rural areas, because summer vacationers never belonged to it. This phenomenon also had little economic effects and—due to the distance separating the vacationers from the rural population—almost no cultural effects. Therefore, the term gentrification reserves the term for a phenomenon that appeared at the end of the industrial era in societies—at least theoretically—egalitarian.

gration between seasonal and local residents is of great importance. Strong economic ties may result in an increase in farm and farm income, preventing further impoverishment, improving welfare and contributing to functional diversification (Heffner, Czarnecki 2015; Miletic, Perackovic, and Golubic 2016). Secondly, rural gentrification in Central and Eastern Europe is described as a process correlated with counter-urbanisation or suburbanisation, which has been described in Polish (Kajdanek 2011, 2012; Śpiewak 2016; Zwęglińska-Gałeczka 2019), Slovak (Ira, Huba 1999), Latvian (Kruzmetra 2011) and Hungarian (Timar, Varadi 2001; Vasarus, Bajmocy 2017) studies, as well as in the Czech Republic (Simon 2011). Rural gentrification, like suburbanisation and counter-urbanisation, is based on the process of the influx of people to rural areas, but its key element are the actors of gentrification: people with specific demographic and socio-professional characteristics, the emergence of which causes changes in the composition of the social structure, and above all in increasing or strengthening the participation of the middle class (Halamska 2016). The progress of the suburbanisation process does not condition the emergence of the phenomenon of rural gentrification, however, without the influx of people (with certain specific features) it probably could not have occurred. The process of suburbanisation is a result of the city development process, while rural gentrification results from the development of rural areas and its changing roles—mainly the abandonment of agricultural functions. It seems that rural gentrification was researched due to the fact that the concepts of rural urbanisation, suburbanisation and counter-urbanisation are no longer sufficient to describe settlement changes in rural communities resulting from the influx of people with a clearly defined class or socio-occupational profile. The consumerist lifestyle, which was increasing in popularity, was also important, as it clearly strengthened the tendency to move out of the city. In some cases—including in Poland and the Czech Republic—the phenomenon was analysed on its own, and scholars distanced themselves from the notion of gentrification. The term counter-urbanisation is closest to the concept of rural gentrification, although they are interdependent—gentrification is a broader concept, while counter-urbanisation is a concept subordinated to gentrification (Śpiewak 2016). Rural areas undergoing the process of gentrification increase in population, its age structure changes, the level and structure of the population's education changes due to a significant increase in the share of the community with higher education. It is precisely the social changes and the accompanying transformation in local economies and spaces that researchers from Central and Eastern Europe focus on, following the British and American analyses. Some indicate that the changes taking place as a result of the gentrification process are reflected in the social consciousness of both the indigenous and the gentrifiers, as well as in the perception of themselves, in the construction of social identity, and change the relationships between the newcomers and the former members of local communities (Simon 2011). The consequences of the gentrification process are also discussed: positive—as in Latvia, where it is emphasised that the influx of new inhabitants causes the creation of new economic entities and new jobs and an increase in the income of local budgets (Kruzmetra 2011), and negative—regarding the exclusion of certain groups of the existing inhabitants from rural social life (the original old population, the permanently unemployed and the Roma population in Slovakia (Ira, Huba 1999)) or those causing the loss of the traditional character of rural areas and blurring the boundaries between the village and the city (Kruzmetra 2011).

Loretta Lees, Hyun Shin and Ernesto López-Morales (2015) put forward a hypothesis that the most favourable conditions for the rural gentrification process in the non-Western

world—regardless of the trajectory of the process—occur mainly in suburban areas of rapidly developing metropolitan regions, in historical villages with a rich cultural and historical heritage, and in large urbanised villages that are local “business centres.” Analyses of Eastern and Central European researchers allow to confirm this hypothesis to some extent. On the basis of existing studies, it was possible to identify two main trajectories of the process in this part of Europe. The first one sees the source of the process in the development of seasonal housing (also called wild gentrification). It is quite well described in international literature (including that on the phenomenon of second homes (Czarnecki, Frenkel 2015)). The second one is related to the processes of suburbanisation and counter-urbanisation, and the research is based primarily on case studies, the findings of which almost never go beyond the national literature. As in Western studies, it is emphasised here that rural areas, having free space and housing reserves, can meet the housing requirements of both indigenous inhabitants and gentrifiers, therefore the discussed process in rural areas does not have to mean replacing the “indigenous” class with “middle-class-gentrifiers.” This process in Central and Eastern Europe—according to Zoltan Kovacs—cannot be characterized without placing it in the transformational context (Kovacs 1997, 1998), which influences its features, i.a. the post-socialist way of restitution and privatisation of housing, the limited amount of capital both in the hand of potential gentrifiers and domestic real estate developers. Gentrification in post-socialist countries,⁵ undergoing socio-economic transformation, is soft, which distinguishes it from the classic, American or Western European, aggressive form. Here, there is also a partial, specific “gentrification backwardness,” which can be associated with the initial lack of potential gentrifiers, especially those with greater resources of economic capital (Kovacs, Wiessner, Zischner 2013; Drozda 2017; Parafianowicz 2019). It is a derivative of broader socio-political changes. The beginnings of the gentrification processes should be traced back to the times following the fall of real socialism and so much later than in the case of highly developed capitalist states (Drozda 2017).⁶

Rural Gentrification in Central and Eastern Europe: Universalism or Specificity?

Comparing the considerations of Eastern and Central European researchers with the results of analyses from Western Europe, it can be concluded that the process of rural gentrification in Central and Eastern Europe, due to its course, does not betray a specific character. Perhaps this is due to the transmission of Western patterns. Researchers are also discovering

⁵ The term post-socialism is used here to emphasize the specific experiences of Central and Eastern European countries against the background of the Western context (democracy, ownership, civil society, class, etc.) (Verdery 1996, see Muller 2019).

⁶ In Central and Eastern Europe, the perception of the countryside through the prism of production changes to the perception of the countryside through the prism of consumption, the so-called “post-productive transformation” (Śpiewak 2016). This resulted in the construction of a kind of modern ruralism characterized by an alternative—from the point of view of agricultural production—use of rural space and new forms of organization and social relations (Horáková 2013). It is also related to the changes in the rural economy, in which the importance of agriculture is decreasing and the third sector, i.e. services, is growing—similarly to the entire post-industrial economy.

that the consequences of this process are similar. Overall, “socialist gentrification” appears to be producing strikingly similar effects to those produced by its capitalist variant (Drozda 2017). Regardless of geographic space, rural gentrification takes place as a result of the (re)interest of the population in rural areas. New residents are looking for a “good life” in the countryside. They often see rural culture and life as a kind of rustic idyll. At the same time, it fits in the hedonistic discourse of social perceptions, in which the countryside is treated as a space for rest and recreation, and the ideal countryside is equated with beautiful nature (Frouws 2002), as well as the post-productivist vision of rural development consisting in consuming the idyll (Halfacree 2006).

Many questions arise here. Perhaps, then, the identified lack of significant differences between rural gentrification in Western and Central and Eastern Europe results from the still initial and not too rapid phase of the gentrification process in this part of Europe? Or perhaps because this gentrification is modelled on the Western one? Or maybe because its researchers use the same analysis patterns? I would like to focus on the last mentioned question. Certainly, similar findings of Central and Eastern European researchers result from the fact that when dealing with the rural gentrification, they use the achievements to date in Western Europe, the United States and Canada, where the described process is not a marginal phenomenon, but a clearly defined and analyzed process for many years. Using the concepts of rural gentrification existing in the literature, they characterize it as a phenomenon that includes changes in the socio-professional structure caused by the influx of the middle class to the countryside from the city (Parsons 1980). The findings of Western European and American researchers set a certain canon for the characteristics of the process of rural gentrification. Demonstrating the social changes taking place as a result of the migration of the middle class to rural areas and the accompanying economic and spatial changes constituted the description of the discussed process. Those analyzing it looked for patterns similar to those identified by the first researchers of gentrification. As a result, the research on rural gentrification became repetitive and secondary to the original findings, and new threads were added relatively rarely. However, even a cursory analysis of the existing literature on the subject also shows that there is no single universal and comprehensive definition of rural gentrification, and the underlying processes of changes taking place in rural areas show similarities and differences.

Certain differences are indicated that are worth considering here. The main differences indicated above by Lees, Shin and López-Morales (2015) include the place where it occurs: the neighborhood of urban agglomerations, also called metropolitan areas. This phenomenon is difficult to observe in case studies, it can be statistically grasped by spatial analysis using the gentrification indicators available in mass statistics. Despite the fact that it is difficult to construct a universal, hard and reliable measure of rural gentrification (by its complexity and spatial diversity), there are attempts to develop a more general analytical model (eg Nelson, Pistre et al. 2008). For this purpose, available statistical data, describing rural gentrification indirectly through its effects, are used. While mass statistics do not record cultural and psychosocial effects, other changes (population, social and economic) have their spatial reflection (see Jałowicki, Szczepański 2006) and can be illustrated using publicly available data. This means that the spatial analysis of these indicators may

point out the spatial range of the process.⁷ To this end, some researchers dealing with the issues of rural gentrification and the accompanying transformations are trying to develop an integrated approach to the discussed process (see Nelson, Pistre et al. 2008; Hamnett 1991), which would use demographic and social, housing/spatial and economic indicators. Such analyzes are in line with the Peter Marcuse (1986) appeal on the need to consider gentrification in a broader social and spatial context.

Such an attempt was made in Poland in 2019 (Zwęglińska-Gałecka 2019, 2020, see also Halamska, Stanny, Hoffmann 2017). Using the extended case method (Burawoy 1998), a group of accompanying gentrification processes constituting the index of the rural gentrification process was determined. These correlates of rural gentrification processes include: a) a significant increase in the number of inhabitants in the analyzed period, b) mainly due to the positive migration balance; c) city-dwellers account for a significant proportion of the migrants, but d) there are also many rural migrants who link their careers to the city but choose to settle in the peri-urban area; e) they are mainly young and well-educated people: the “new middle class”; f) changes in spatial development take place: the share of agricultural land decreases, the share of urbanized areas increases; g) it causes an increase in land prices, including agricultural land; h) the structure of the local economy changes radically, which is reflected in the increase in the share of non-agricultural entities, mainly in the third sector (services); i) the structure of the population’s income changes significantly (see Zwęglińska-Gałecka 2019). They made up the index of rural gentrification. Its spatial distribution indicated that gentrification in rural areas is not a universal process. Following the values of the index in the period 2002–2016, it was found that the rural gentrification of varying intensity occurs in 98 units (i.e. 31.2% of poviats). It occurs mainly in poviats located near large cities, especially those located in central, northern, western and south-western Poland—in areas which could be described as city’s countryside (Bryant et al. 1982), urban village (Wu, Wang 2017) or metropolitan village (Wójcik 2009). It also turned out that a relatively low value of the indicator in a given year (in the case of most indicators it was 2016) may mean a very high dynamics of the process. In turn, the low dynamics of rural gentrification in 2002–2016 is often the result of a very high value of the indicator in the initial year. In addition, it was also indicated that the gentrification process studied over a longer period of time has a different range than that studied at one specific point in time. These ranges partially overlap—precisely in metropolitan areas—in poviats near Gdańsk, Warsaw, Łódź, Poznań, Kraków and Wrocław. Cities are the drivers of population growth and the influx of gentrifiers. It also indicates that the ranges of the processes of suburbanization, counter-urbanization and gentrification of villages partially overlap. It was also observed that the higher the level and pace of the development of the agglomeration core, the more dynamic changes taking place in the surrounding areas—they are visible in a greater level of their urbanization, which is manifested by e.g. functions appearing there (Parysek 2008). There is a weakening or disappearance of agricultural functions with the simultaneous development of urban functions—“quasi-city” and “quasi-village” units are created, so that are not

⁷ Problems with measuring the range of the process result from its complexity, heterogeneity, limitations in obtaining data and the already mentioned lack of a common theoretical concept.

yet fully developed urban space, but no longer have archetypal/typical features of rural space.

When analyzing this process of the “metropolitan area” of rural gentrification, one should ask how it is related to the specific course of late urbanization in this region. In the second half of the 20th Central and Eastern European countries were “underurbanized” (Konrad, Szelenyi 1974). Underurbanization was a consequence of the character of industrialization, which in the 20th century, in the countries of this region, was extensive: the process of industrialization was faster than the process of “urbanization” (Pobłocki 2014). For this reason, Polish and other Eastern European cities are “underdeveloped,” and the social image of the city is burdened with its negative stereotype (Rewers 2010). Late entry of cities into the phase of intensive growth, delays subsequent stages of development, the so-called urban life cycle. In consequence, it also results in the fact that the traditional countryside lasted longer in Central and Eastern Europe (which was often tantamount to its backwardness) and employment in agriculture began to shrink rapidly only in the second half of the 1990s. Underurbanization has an impact on the very course of the process of gentrification in Poland, which suggests that other countries in the region are not free from its influence.

The second important difference, only for post-communist and not “non-Western” countries, is the combination of rural gentrification with post-communist transformation (Kovacs 1997, 1998). The relationships between these two processes—post-communist transformation and rural gentrification—are multiple and complex. Focusing solely on the actors of gentrification: the gentrifiers recruited from the middle class.⁸ This segment of the social structure in the societies of Central and Eastern Europe began to be noticed only in the 1990s, also because consumption began to play a distinctive role only then. In most Central and Eastern European countries, the gentrification process intensified in the last decade of the 20th century.

A common feature distinguishing Central and Eastern Europe was the deficit of the middle class, which ensured economic, social and political balance in Western Europe. The emergence of this deficit was caused by the specific history of the 20th century in this part of the continent. A substitute for the middle class was the intelligentsia, derived from the impoverished nobility (Chałasiński 1946), who played a significant role in the organization and consolidation of nation states that emerged in this region after World War I. It did not claim to the middle class as it was associated with the bourgeoisie. As Paweł Kubicki

⁸ The concept of “middle class” requires clarification. Intuitively, this class is defined as the one occupying the middle space in a hierarchical society. Such a definition remains empty as long as it is not accompanied by an indication of the principles of social hierarchy, “and there may be—and indeed is—as many as the theory of stratification, and even, with additional assumptions, social differentiation theories” (Mokrzycki 1994: 39). At the same time, it is pointed out that the middle class is a community composed of categories so different that it discredits it as a “social class,” “the hard-working shopkeepers have little to do with successful surgeons or university professors, not to mention the owners of law firms and the management staff of large corporations” (Domański 2012: 13). The greatest peculiarity of the middle class is that it is called a class, even though it includes people of different levels of education, unequal material standards, unequal income, consumption preferences, and esteem. It is worth mentioning that the middle class is one of the most important structural segments of market societies. Currently, the middle class (in general) includes two types of community: the so-called “old middle class” formed by small entrepreneurs and merchants, and the “new middle class” “(...) composed of people whose profession is the production and distribution of symbolic knowledge” (Berger 1995: 127).

Table 1

**Increase in the share of occupational categories included in the “middle class”
in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in 1980–2010 (in %)**

Country	1980s ^a	2000s ^b	The year 2010 ^c
Poland	35.1	29.6*	43.4
The Czech Republic	13.7	37.6*	43.5
Slovakia	14.2	38.0**	45.7
Slovenia	no data	40.4*	39.3
Croatia	no data	no data	no data
Hungary	11.3	25.0*	34.9
Lithuania	no data	24.6*	28.1
Latvia	no data	33.0**	no data

* Data from 2002,

** Data from 2006.

^a The middle class comprises here of the following (cited in Domański 1996): intelligentsia, the highest-ranking staff of pre-emptive and state administration; medium-sized industrial workers and office workers.

^b The middle class comprises: senior specialists and managers; mid-level white-collar workers and office workers (Domański 2009).

^c Middle class: “representatives of public authorities, senior officials and managers,” “specialists,” “technicians and other mid-level professionals” and “white-collar workers.”

Source: own study based on Domański 1991, 2002; Halamska 2015.

states, in this part of Europe the middle class developed later and in a different way than in the West. It is difficult to speak of a generational reproduction of bourgeois financial and social capital (Kubicki 2011). In 1920s there were “very few types of modern entrepreneur-businessman in Eastern Europe, ‘bourgeois’ in the sense of the middle class. (...) This type was mainly represented by Jews in Poland. So far, the peasant class had not played an active role in shaping economic policy. The social structure was a mixture of three types: a nobleman, a civil servant from intelligentsia and a liberal profession intellectual. Neither of them is the host-entrepreneur type in the modern sense of the word” (Heydel 1932). At the beginning of the 1930s, the bourgeoisie in Poland was estimated at around 260 000, in Hungary it was around 600 000–700 000 in total, and in the Czech Republic—up to around 2 million (Żarnowski 1973). Bernard Michel (1997), analysing the social situation in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, indicates the historical reasons for this fact. In his opinion, it was influenced by the strong Counter-Reformation and later, in the 19th century, the reluctant attitude towards capitalism in the divided Poland and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In these countries, the nobility played an important role until the Second World War, and entire societies were permeated with aristocratism. The reluctant attitude towards trade and banks had a significant impact on the negative perception of the middle class. In the 19th century, European societies based their nationalism on the aristocracy and petty nobility on the one hand, and on the peasantry (dependent on the manor until 1848) on the other.

In the interwar period, the middle class in Central and Eastern Europe consisted largely of Germans and Jews. In Poland, Jews constituted 43%, and Germans 3–4%. In Hungary, the bourgeoisie was mainly made up of magyarised Germans, while the representatives of liberal professions were mainly Jews—constituting 49% of lawyers, 33% of doctors, and

almost 25% of actors (Michel 1997; Kaleta 2017). Further decomposition of former social structures took place due to the population losses suffered during the Second World War and mass migrations caused by territorial changes. The war and the German occupation knocked all classes and social strata out of their established way of life, changed behaviour patterns and value systems (Szczepański 1973). During the war, the intelligentsia was destroyed and almost ceased to exist as a separate social class. As a result of the Holocaust, the Jewish population practically disappeared. In Eastern Europe, it was primarily the working population—if one applies the modern nomenclature—in the third sector, i.e. in services and trade.

After the war, in the years 1946–1960, in some countries of Central and Eastern Europe every third young person moved from the countryside to the city (Nesterowicz 2016). Some of them joined the masses of unskilled blue-collar workers, but for many, the move was associated with a rapid social advancement: they became public administration employees, and joined the teaching and military staff. The cities were opened and they were rapidly occupied by all those who made the effort to “move.” When the bourgeoisie formed and grew in power in the West, becoming the basis for the emergence of modern nations, in Central and Eastern Europe a specific category of “working intelligentsia” emerged with a dual genealogy: from social declassification or social advancement (Kubicki 2011). In the 1980s, in the so-called Eastern bloc changes took place, and party technocrats, intelligentsia and the democratic opposition began to play a significant role. The aspect that, despite all differences, connects the analysed countries is the experience of the communist system, that is, a single-party political system and nationalised economy. This experience was more common than the much more diverse subsequent transformative experience (Podemski 2017). The very fact of belonging to this system had two key consequences for the social structures of Central and Eastern European countries. The first was the almost complete liquidation of the bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry (with the exception of Poland in the latter case), the second was the rise of the bureaucratic class. To a large extent, it shaped the transformation, reforming—through conversion—political capital into economic capital, necessary to acquire “environmental capital.”⁹ This significantly influenced the specificity of the process in post-communist countries. Liviu Chelcea (2006) puts forward a hypothesis that the specificity of gentrification in the post-socialist countries is related to the process of creating a capitalist class without capital. Privatisation becomes a method of capital formation here, and gentrification is seen as a process of primary capital accumulation (Eyal, Szélényi, Townsley 1998; Chelcea 2006). Since gentrification consists—above all—in contributing cultural capital, one has to ask what kind of cultural capital is contributed by the Central European middle class, which has such a specific genealogy?

⁹ In rural areas appear people better than the existing inhabitants equipped with various capitals: economic, social, cultural, who are looking for a suitable environment. The latter can be broadly defined as “a social and political construction, created in the process of interaction between the biophysical reality and its imaginations, and at the same time—projections concerning it. The environment is therefore a combination of natural reality and personal or collective perception or projection” (Richard, Tommasi, Saumon 2017: 90). It can also be treated as environmental capital, consisting of many values related to the environment, in relation to which individuals and social groups take different positions. It is often acquired through the conversion of economic and cultural capital.

The process of rural gentrification, as shown by the research conducted in the Polish countryside (Halamska 2016; Śpiewak 2016; Zwęglińska-Gałecka 2019, 2020), has a clear specificity, which is not described in the analyzed studies. It is shown only by those studies that focus on the basic trait of gentrifiers: their belonging to the middle class, regardless of their previous place of residence/origin. With this assumption, the saturation of rural areas with representatives of the middle class has two sources: endogenous and exogenous. The first of the indicated sources of the process is related to the “educational boom” that took place in Poland after 1989. “The growing number of people willing to study were absorbed by the dynamically developing (under the reforms of the 1990s) non-public universities, (...) public schools also significantly expanded their offer” (Moron 2016: 109). The increase in the number of people taking up studies was also the result of demographic changes: one of the main reasons was the fact that people from the age of the baby boom at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s entered the study age. Education or supplementing education became important from the perspective of opportunities on the labor market. The model of education, promoted by politicians, became popular: general secondary school—higher education. In 1988–2011, the number of people with secondary education in rural areas doubled, while the number of people with higher education increased more than six times.

The second indicated—exogenous sources—are related to the reversal of migration trends. At the beginning of the 2000s, for the first time in the post-war history of Poland, a positive migration balance in rural areas was recorded for the entire country. In 2015, the balance of migration to the countryside amounted to 24.0 thousand, and in 1990 it amounted to –112.7 thousand (Halamska 2016). Rural areas have become a popular place of residence for former city dwellers, but among those who choose the village as their place of residence there are also many educated ex-rural residents, professionally oriented towards the metropolis. They are also people of rural origin, temporarily living in a large city after their studies, who move outside the city when they start their family. Mostly young, well-educated people with a good and stable social and professional position move to the countryside (Guimond, Simard 2010; Zwęglińska-Gałecka 2019). Rural gentrifiers recruit—as shown in table 2—from the “new middle class.”

Table 2

Change in the shares of the segments of the social structure of rural Poland

Segments	1992	2003	2015	Dynamics 1992 = 100
Farmers*	46	38	26	57
Labourers**	41	36	45	121
Middle Class***	13	26	28	215
Including: the “new”	7	20	22	314
the “old”	6	6	6	100

Legend:

* group no. 6 less self-employed persons;

** groups nos. 5 and 6–9 less self-employed persons;

*** groups nos. 1–4 less self-employed persons, plus the self-employed in all groups.

Source: Halamska 2021, p. 43.

In Poland, the process of rural gentrification is the result of an increase in the level of education of the rural population and the migration influx of people from cities to rural areas. An important spatial aspect of intra-rural migration processes should also be noted here: the inhabitants of rural areas, mostly young and well-educated, leave peripheral areas and concentrate on areas attractive for migration, around metropolitan areas (Stanny 2013). Thus, the gentrification of some rural areas is also associated with the 'washing out' of peripheral areas from the middle class. The course of rural gentrification, with its numerical growth of the middle class, changes over time. This process was the most dynamic in the 1900s, later its dynamics slightly weakened. Nevertheless, in the areas attractive for migration, it caused profound and quick transformations, so it almost brought about a revolution (in the sociological sense of the word) (Arato 1994). In twenty years, the new middle class is the segment with the greatest quantitative change, with a relatively stable share of the old middle class and a declining proportion of the working class, especially farmers. At the beginning of the 1990s, for one person recruiting from the old middle class, there were one and a half representatives of the new middle class, after twenty years these proportions clearly change—for one representative of the old middle class there are more than three of the new middle class population. The process of rural gentrification takes place primarily through the increase in the share of the new middle class community. Due to its high dynamics with a stable participation of the middle class, its importance in rural society is decreasing—both numerically and symbolically. Nevertheless, despite the growing share of the middle class, workers are the dominant community in the social structure in rural areas. And not only Polish but also Central European villages are far from the social composition of the British countryside, defined as belonging to the "white middle class" (Wyly, Hammel 1999).

Conclusions

The aim of the considerations undertaken here was to answer the question of how rural gentrification in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Already during the analysis, new questions arose: about the universality of the process or—considering the different, not only in time development trajectories—its particularity.¹⁰ As for the sources of gentrification, there were two patterns of rural gentrification in the observed area: the one taking place as a result of seasonal interest in rural areas and the one related to the phenomenon of suburbanization and counter-urbanization. This points to points of contact with the course of processes in Western countries, and often similar consequences. From the social point of view, this means an increase in the share of the broadly understood

¹⁰ Here it should be remembered that the Western canon was the key to recognizing the process of rural gentrification. After that came the second stage—asking questions about the universality of the process in various social, economic and political situations, i.e. searching for the particularity of the process in Central and Eastern Europe. Perhaps this approach to the process in Central and Eastern Europe was influenced by the theses of the hastily formulated "transitology" (not about transformation, but about transition). Many Western authors formulated theses about "transition," that is, a quick transition—after political change—to the Western (treated as universal) functioning of societies. At that time, on the basis of research, theses about convergence were formulated (see Domański 1996).

middle class in the social structure at the expense of other socio-professional groups—mainly farmers. This is the understanding of the process of social gentrification, i.e. saturation of the social structure of the countryside with people occupying higher positions in social stratification, proposed by the British researcher, Keith Hoggart (1997), and this understanding of the process of rural gentrification prevails among Eastern and Central European researchers. The discussed two trajectories of the gentrification process have a similar background—they occur as a result of the presence of the middle class in rural areas, which shows a tendency to idealize rural life. One of the reasons for rural gentrification is the fashion of owning a country house as part of a certain lifestyle, popular among the middle class, which in turn contributes to changes in the local real estate market and the structure of inhabitants. Rural Europe—both in Central and Eastern and Western Europe—continues to attract people with high (or even highest) incomes. Directors, specialists and managers replaced the pre-war nobility and intelligentsia. This post-communist middle class differs from the West because of its different formation conditions. The question then arises, are the social effects of gentrification in Central and Eastern European countries only apparently similar?

Rural gentrification occurs with the transition of the rural economy from the industrial phase, in which the village is treated primarily as a place of agricultural production to the post-industrial phase, in which the functions of rural areas are differentiated. In Poland, the intensification of this process occurred in the last decade of the 20th century as a result of—firstly—endogenous processes, the manifestation of which is an increase in the level of education of rural residents, and secondly, as a result of the settlement (exogenous in relation to the countryside) of the urban middle class settling in rural areas (Halamska, Zwęglińska-Gałecka 2019). The process takes place through three paths: through a sharp increase in the level of emergence, through migrations from peripheral villages to attractive villages and through migrations from town to countryside. Are the motives of the gentrifiers the same in all these cases? The emergence of gentrification in rural areas is related to the revalorization of rural areas—due to the clear interest in consumption of rural values associated with clean air, nature, and a good, healthy living environment (Phillips 2005). As a result of the change in perception, the countryside has become a consumption space with well-developed residential and recreational functions. Secondly, the revalorization may mean a return to traditional values. New inhabitants are looking for a “good life” in the countryside (Hahn 2006), its better quality, which includes the acceptance of rural and agricultural symbols. They often see rural culture and life as a kind of rustic idyll. This fits in with the hedonistic discourse of social perceptions proposed by Jaap Frouws (2002), in which the countryside is treated as a space for relaxation and recreation, and the ideal village is identified with beautiful nature. This revalorisation of ruralism may only concern some gentrifiers. Others stay in the countryside and do not emigrate to the city because the “civilization conditions” have improved. Still others—migrate to suburban villages because underdeveloped post-communist cities cannot accept them.

This revalorization is certainly conditioned by the improvement of the “civilization” living conditions in the countryside—the development of the road network, water supply and sewage systems, universal availability of telephones and the Internet, but also an increase in wealth, resulting in equipping households with cars, which ensures mobility.

The resulting rural revalorization and gentrification is influenced by the change in the existing cultural structure of the village, which results in the separation of the production village from the cultural function (see Murdoch 2003). There is a deconstruction of the “old” configuration with the central figure of the peasant-farmer and the new construction, with elements such as sustainable, ecological, market-related agriculture, environmental protection, and the emergence of new cultivation techniques. This new configuration also affects the perception of the countryside, its image in the collective consciousness. This results in breaking the relationship between the rural area and agriculture, which results in the arrangement of rural areas for non-agricultural functions.

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