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Residents of urban and rural areas The same or different?

Mass media are valuable sources of information about similarities and differences between life in urban and rural areas in Poland in recent years. Journalists often emphasize differences between residents of cities and villages. However, the information is ambiguous. A similar situation is observed on the Internet. Bloggers and participants in online discussions present contradictory arguments. They often attribute the inhabitants of cities and villages the same distinguishing features, especially the negative ones, for example, laziness, unhealthy lifestyle, addiction to smoking and drinking. Which of these opinions are true? What are city residents like? What distinguishes them from the village residents?

Attempts to answer these and similar questions have been made for such a long time that a part of theoretical tools on the basis of which such answers were provided are approached in sociology as classical notions. They definitely include typological distinction between two types of social relations proposed by Ferdinand Tönnies: *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* that allow for emphasizing the differences between the social world of urban and rural areas in analyses of discussed issues (Tönnies 1988). Pitirim Sorokin and Carle Zimmerman's model performs a similar function. Among the criteria that distinguish the city from the village, the authors of the model indicated differences in professions, natural environment, size of community, population density, homogeneity and heterogeneity of inhabitants, social diversity and stratification, spatial mobility and social activity and also differences in the nature of social relations (Sorokin, Zimmerman 1929). The concept of folk-urban continuum proposed by Robert Redfield has yet another form, in which village and town are extremities of broad spectrum of communities that combine the features of both places of residence in various proportions (Redfield 1973). The paper by Georg Simmel focussing on the mind-set of large cities inhabitants and published in 1908 was an important

contribution to the discussion concerning specific character of inhabitants resulting from the nature of the place of residence (Simmel 1975). Searching for the answers to similar questions, many years later, Louis Wirth (Wirth 1938) and Stanley Milgram (Milgram 1970) followed Simmel's scientific research.

The paper is not a continuation of considerations of the aforementioned classics. It is rather an attempt to complement some issues in discussion focussed on urban and rural specific character with contemporary empirical content.

It consists of three parts. The first is focussed on the answer to the question: which is a better place to live — the city or the village? The second and the third part of the article are an attempt to look at differences and similarities between city and village residents that are included in nationwide statistical data and results of sociological research.

The city or the village? Preferences concerning the place of residence

The city seems to be an ideal place to live for contemporary people. Easy access to shops, schools and kindergartens, health care institutions, cultural facilities, organized recreation areas, and many other conveniences make life in the city easier than in rural areas.

The aforementioned arguments highlighting the advantages of living in the city, compared with the life in the village, that take into consideration data concerning population change in Poland seem to be less and less convincing. Analyses of migration trends show that urban population is decreasing and the number of people living in villages is increasing.

Described tendencies are typical not only of Poland. They are inscribed in broader depopulation, suburbanisation and desurbanisation processes, characteristic for many European countries (Czarnecki 2011). According to the logic of urbanisation processes outlined by Leo von Klaassen, within which 4 stages of city life can be distinguished, including urbanisation, suburbanisation, desurbanisation and reurbanisation, many agglomerations in Europe and Northern America are currently in the stage of suburbanisation (Nocko, Żelechowski 2011). The symptoms of the next stage, which is desurbanisation that consists in outflow of population both from central city areas and suburban districts to the country, are observed in many regions. These processes are typical mostly of highly developed countries in which we can observe both relatively inconsiderable rate of growth in the number of city inhabitants and insignificant size of rural population influx to them. Both these phenomena clearly diversify highly developed countries from numerous countries of Africa and Asia, in which many cities are just in the first stage of city

urbanisation processes, as distinguished by von Klaassen. Quite significant rate of influx of rural population to the cities that is largely caused by rural overpopulation and lack of possibility to earn a living there is characteristic of this stage.

Processes of desurbanisation have been taking place in Poland since 1990s but their results were clearly observed only after the scale of interior migration from city to village increased, external migration was intensified and population growth decreased.

In 2013 in comparison with the previous year urban population decreased in Poland by 64,857 (*Area and Population in the Territorial Profile in 2014*, 2014: 10). At the same time the population of rural areas increased by about 27,217 people (*ibid.*).

The decline of urban population¹ resulted from the negative migration balance and changes in population growth (*Basic Urban Statistics 2012*, 2014: 24). Administrative factors, including the increase in the number of cities or changes in their borders, were hardly noticeable in their impact on changes in proportion of urban and rural population in Poland.²

The decline of urbanization index is not a new phenomenon in Poland, because it has been continuously observed since 1992. From 1945 urbanisation rate was on the rise until 1991, when urban residents accounted for 62.0% of the total population of Poland (*ibid.*: 25). In 2013 urbanisation rate was 60.5% (*Area and Population...* 2014).

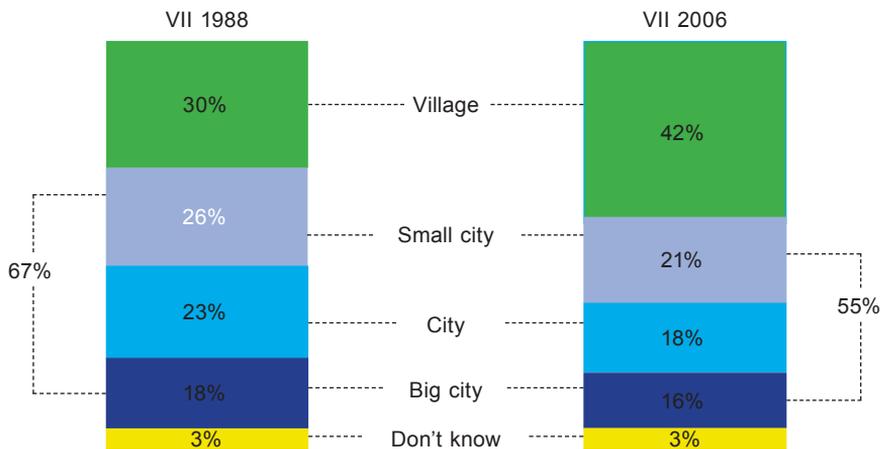


Figure 1. Preferred place of residence

Source: Wciórka (2006a).

¹ Proportion of the urban population often called the urbanisation coefficient or the index of urbanization in many analyses is perceived as one of the key measures of the level of social and economic development of the country.

² Between 2003 and 2013 in Poland 31 new towns came into existence, and thus their total number increased to 913. At the same time, that is at the end of 2013 in Poland there were 52,545 rural localities (*Area and Population...* 2014).

Authors of migration analyses emphasize that people who move out of the city to the countryside are in a relatively good financial situation. They look for a quiet place to live. The primary cause of migration in the opposite direction, which is clearly inconsiderable in terms of size, is the lack of jobs in rural areas. People leave rural areas and go abroad or migrate to cities and towns to find a job (Ćwiek 2014).

Changes in trends of internal migrations of Polish people are accompanied by symptomatic transformations in their ideas about desired place of residence and migrants from the village to the city. In 1998, as many as 2/3 of Poles (67.0%) who were asked about a better place of residence (If you could choose your place of residence, would you choose a village or a town/city?), answered — the city (Wciórka 2006a); however, in 2006 — slightly more than a half (55.0%), and in the sociological research conducted in 2014 most people, chose the village (58.0%) (Hipsz 2014). The change in views of Poles is described in Figures 1 and 2. The city attractiveness as a preferred place of residence has declined in the past 16 years by 27.0% (from 67.0% to 40.0%). The city is an ideal place of residence for majority of people (57.0%) currently living there, and for only 12.0% of rural residents (Figure 2). It is worth stating that the wealthiest and best educated people prefer living in towns or cities. Living in a village is attractive for the rural population and people on lower levels of social ladder, i.e. people in bad material living conditions and poorly educated.

If you could choose your place of residence, would you choose a village or a town/city?

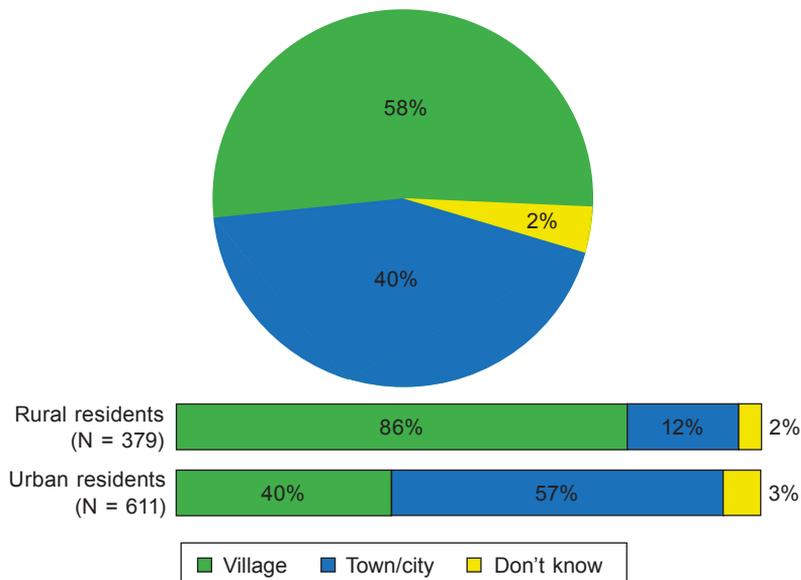


Figure 2. Preferred place of residence in the opinion of rural and urban residents

Source: Hipsz (2014).

Living out of town is now better assessed than 20 years ago. More than 60% of respondents (61.0%) think that people coming from rural areas neither boast about their origin nor hide it, while a quarter of respondents (24.0%) think that they are ashamed of where they come from (Figure 3). In the last 20 years, the proportion of respondents stating that people from the countryside try to hide rural origin has decreased from 32.0% to 24.0%. At the same time the percentage of respondents who think that people who moved from village to town usually boast about their rural origin increased (from 3.0% to 6.0%).

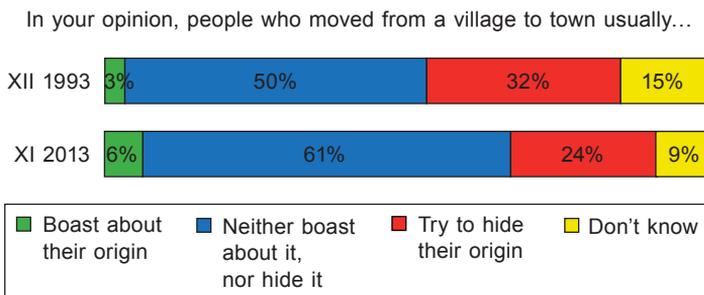


Figure 3. Opinions about people who moved from a village to town

Source: Hipsz (2014).

Differences between urban and rural residents are still significant in some areas. They concern both demographic and social diversity and their opinions, attitudes and lifestyles.

Selected areas of differences

Are people living in urban areas different from people living in rural areas, or are they the same? The Poles who answer this question often indicate significant differences (50.0%) rather than similarities (44.0%) (Wciórka 2006b). Over two-fifths of the respondents (45.0%) agree that these differences are getting smaller, which means that residents of towns and villages are becoming more and more similar to each other. Almost one-fifth of the respondents (19.0%) express a completely different opinion, that is, they believe differences between inhabitants of towns and villages are growing, and a little more than a quarter (26.0%) think that these differences remain unchanged.

Although the fact that respondents declaring that residents of cities and villages are more and more similar to each other is very interesting, the proportion of people who emphasize the differences between the inhabitants of towns and villages is increasing. Surveys from 1993, 1998 and 2006 show a significant

increase in the proportion of people who emphasize the differences between inhabitants of towns and villages (from 34.0% to 50.0%). Residents of major cities and young people (aged 18 to 24) are two categories of respondents who most often pay attention to described differences (*ibid.*).

In public opinion, differences between residents of towns and villages concern three major areas — opinions, approach to people and behaviour. In the case of views, respondents emphasize greater conservatism of rural residents and attachment to traditional values. City residents are, in turn, more modern and they are characterised by greater individualism and more frequent pursuit of career and money. Many people also think that Church plays insignificant role in life of residents of cities (Hipsz 2014).

Differences in the sphere of relationships between people in both groups and their behaviour are perceived in a similarly contrasting way. Relationships between people in rural areas are seen as deeper, and between residents of cities are described as impersonal and anonymous. It is worth indicating that some people judge anonymity of social relations in the countryside negatively, and some others — positively.

In public opinion, contacts between people living in the city are characterized by such features as self-serving, inaccessibility, arrogance and conceit more often than between the rural population. On the other hand, greater tolerance is observed in the city. Honesty, brightness, hospitality, but also envy are qualities attributed to rural residents. According to respondents differences in behaviour are observed in speech, clothes they wear and focus on appearance (*ibid.*).

Statements about perceiving urban and rural population show that social image of the urban population compared with the image of the rural population is significantly worse (Figure 4). Rural residents as more religious, diligent, moral, kind, honest and generous are obviously different from smart, neat, less religious, lazy, depraved, unfriendly, dishonest and mean city dwellers. Both communities are similarly assessed on the scale of cultured — uncultured people (Wciórka 2006b).

Both rural and urban residents agree with presented characteristics of two communities, which is much more beneficial for rural residents. The intensity of this approval is not identical in the two communities, but big enough and leads to the conclusion that the self-portrait of rural inhabitants is favourable, while of urban residents unfavourable (*ibid.*).

Opinions about inhabitants of towns and villages, at least since the early 1990s i.e. since they were regularly tested, have been characterized by stability and have not been subject to significant changes. We can only talk about changes in the distribution of emphasis in images of townspeople and villagers. Comparison of data lets us state that the way members of both opposing communities are perceived are correlated. This consists, among others in the fact

that changes on the scale of diligence that are favourable for city residents, occur together with changes in the perception of village residents, who are assessed as diligent slightly more seldom.

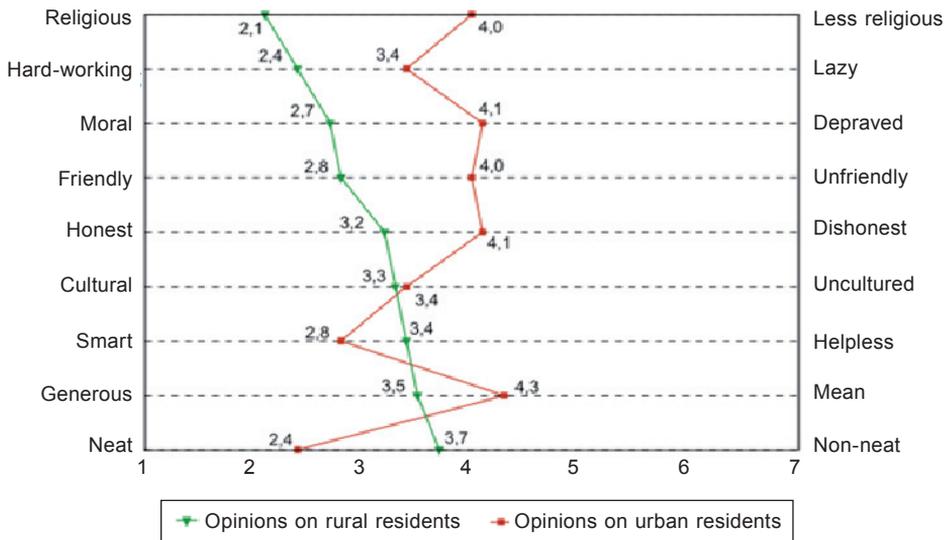


Figure 4. Opinions on rural and urban residents

Source: Wciórka (2006b).

Opposite changes occur, in turn, on the scale of neat — non-neat. While the inhabitants of villages are seen as neat by increasing number of respondents, in the description of townspeople this quality is mentioned less often.

It is interesting that despite the changes of religious behaviour of urban residents and rural areas (Figure 5), consisting in — generally speaking — less frequent performance of religious practices, these transformations do not have a major impact on the perception of both religious communities. Rural residents are still perceived as being far more religious than urban dwellers (Wciórka 2006b; Hipsz 2014).

Apart from differences in views and behaviours that distinguish urban and rural residents, some respondents pay attention to some social features, particularly the level of education and economic situation. In the awareness of surveyed group, urban residents are better educated and have a better economic situation in comparison with those living in the village. These beliefs are constantly confirmed by results of research. For example, Social Diagnosis research conducted in 2013 shows that both the level of education and wealth of the inhabitants of the cities, compared with those living in rural areas are significantly higher. The scale of differences is presented in Tables 1 and 2.

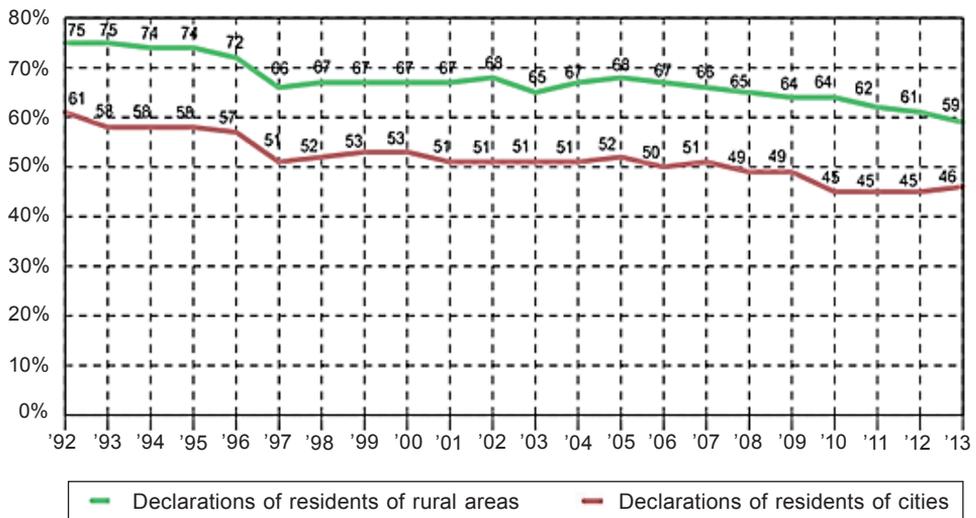


Figure 5. Participation in religious services at least once a week

Source: Hipsz (2013b).

Table 1 presents changes in education structure that appear in towns and villages between 2002 and 2011, in the period between two censuses in Poland. The education structure in Poland during this period significantly changed; more than 70% of people had university degree (increase from 9.9% to 17.0%) and secondary education (increase from 28.3% to 29.0%). At the same time the number of people with primary education decreased (from 29.8% to 18.3%). This means that nowadays almost half of the population in Poland has at least secondary education.

Similar changes in education structure occurred both in towns and villages. This means that occurring processes did not influence significantly the differences between the education structures of analysed populations. In 2011 37.5% city residents had vocational or even lower level of education. In villages 60.2% people had vocational education. Significant differences in education structures between city and village are also observed in sociological research. In their analysis the authors of the project *Social Diagnosis* apply not only the level of education, but they also mention civilization competences such as using the Internet, speaking English and attending courses that increase skills and abilities (Grabowska et al. 2013: 91).

The analysis of human capital of Polish society defined in this way shows that this capital has been constantly growing since 2007. In 2007 the rate was on the level of 41,72 and in 2013 it increased to 45,68 (scale 0—100). The nature and size of the city are very important in defining human capital. The results of the analyses show that the bigger the city, the higher the level of capital the residents have: in villages the rate of the capital is on the level of 40,71, in towns

(population under 20,000 residents) it is 44.51, in bigger cities (population of 20,000—100,000) it is 46.06 and in the largest cities (population > 500,000) it is 55.55 (Grabowska et al. 2013: 95).

Table 1
Population aged 13 and over by level of education and residence place in 2002 and 2011 (in %)

Level of education	Town		Rural areas		Total	
	2002	2011	2002	2011	2002	2011
Higher	13.2	21.4	4.2	9.9	9.9	17.0
Post-secondary	3.9	3.2	1.9	1.6	3.2	2.6
Secondary	33.4	32.1	19.6	23.9	28.3	29.0
Basic vocational	20.4	18.6	28.0	26.5	23.2	21.7
Lower secondary	—	4.3	—	6.0	—	4.9
Primary	23.9	13.7	39.7	25.6	29.8	18.3
Incomplete primary and no education	2.3	0.9	5.9	2.1	3.6	1.4
No data	2.8	5.7	0.7	4.3	2.0	5.2

Source: Wysocka, Szeffler (2013).

People's opinions about more favourable economic situation of urban residents compared with the situation of rural residents find clear confirmation in the empirical data. The comparison of data contained in Table 2 shows that, regardless of the method of presentation of household income, their levels typical of the people living in the city are at least a few hundred PLN higher than the household income of people living in rural areas.

The statement refers to both disposable incomes per household and per person in the household, as well as the equivalent unit.³ The data lead to the conclusion that apart from a few insignificant exceptions, the bigger the city, the higher the level of household income of its residents. The average income per person was 1348,67 PLN in the surveyed households in 2013. This means that the income below the average was characteristic not only for the villagers, but also for the inhabitants of cities the population of which was not higher than 100 thousand (Panek, Czapiński 2013: 44).

³ Explanation of the structure of this measure can be found in: Panek, T., Czapiński, J., 2013, Household living conditions. Social Diagnosis 2013. The Objective and Subjective Quality of Life in Poland [Special issue]. "Contemporary Economics", 7, 40-53 DOI: 10.5709/ce.1897-9254.97, p. 41.

Table 2

Net household income in 2013 by place of residence class

Place of residence class	Net income in PLN		
	per household	per person	per equivalent unit
Towns of more than 500,000	4309,38	2028,89	2401,65
Towns of 200,000—500,000	3633,15	1604,03	1948,92
Towns of 100,000—200,000	3279,73	1386,86	1704,78
Towns of 200,000—100,000	3200,73	1320,92	1630,96
Towns of fewer than 200,000	3301,11	1279,20	1616,25
Rural areas	3094,31	1001,01	1349,11

Source: Panek, Czapiński (2013).

Disparities in financial situation of households in urban and rural areas are reflected in the subjective assessments of own financial situation of members of both communities. Urban residents significantly more often (12.0%) assess it as good or rather good. There are also fewer people in cities whose financial situation is bad or rather bad.

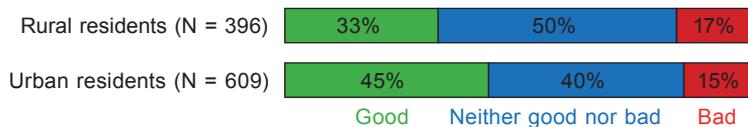


Figure 6. Evaluation of household material living conditions by the rural and urban residents

Source: Hipsz (2013a).

There are many differences between political opinions and behaviours of urban and rural residents. It appears from data presented in Table 3 that first of all interest in politics in Poland is low — almost half of the respondents (48.0%) assess their interest in it as practically none or little. Considering this, it can be noted that the level of interest in politics of urban residents is higher. The differences are expressed first of all in twice as high rate of city residents who declare a strong interest in politics (14.0%) compared with the percentage of rural residents really interested in politics (7.0%). Rate of respondents declaring average and small interest in politics are very similar to each other. Presented data also allow for the statement, that the level of interest in politics is correlated with the size of the place of residence. The larger the city, the greater the interest in politics.

Table 3

People interested in politics in urban and rural areas (in %)

What is your interest in politics?	Interest in politics by size of place of residence						Total
	rural areas	Towns				total in towns	
		of fewer than 20,000	of 20,000—100,000	of 100,000—500,000	of more than 500,000		
Strongly	7	9	15	13	21	14	12
Moderately	41	39	38	43	40	40	40
Not very	30	31	27	25	25	27	28
Not at all	22	21	20	19	14	19	20

Source: Cybulska (2014).

Greater interest of urban residents in politics is confirmed by frequent participation in parliamentary and presidential elections. In the last few years the turnout in all elections in the city has been higher than in the countryside by several percent (Table 4). The same regularity is also typical of the elections to the European Parliament.

Table 4

Turnout in the parliamentary and presidential election (in %)

Type of election	Turnout		Total
	towns	rural areas	
Presidential Election 2000	64.19	56.35	61.12
Parliamentary Election 2001	47.99	42.93	46.29
Presidential Election 2005	52.40	45.06	49.74
Parliamentary Election 2005	43.06	36.18	40.57
Parliamentary Election 2007	58.75	45.27	53.88
Presidential Election 2010	57.57	51.25	55.31
Parliamentary Election 2011	54.52	42.42	48.92

Source: Data of National Electoral Commission [www.pkw.gov.pl].

On the other hand village residents participate in local elections more often. Smaller turnout of urban residents in local elections compared with the villagers probably means that interest in politics of urban residents is different from interest in it among rural population. Political interest of townspeople seems to be more focused on national and international events and less on matters concerning their environment (town, district). Perhaps this can also explain more frequent declarations of interest in politics of urban residents, compared with

the rural residents. Interest in politics of townspeople probably means monitoring activities of political parties and political leaders as well as prominent members in parliament and in media. Urban residents probably know personally the candidates to council district less often than rural residents (Boguszeński 2010). The larger the city, the higher the percentage of voters who know the candidates for municipal councillors only from posters, flyers and election programs. In the largest cities their rate reaches 39.0%. However, it is also important that 12.0% residents of the largest cities in Poland do not know the people they vote for at all. In their decisions, these voters are guided by the name of the electoral committee. In smaller towns, this phenomenon is really rare. Residents of cities are also less willing to give their electoral support to current local authorities. The larger the city, the less frequently their residents vote for candidates nominated by the election committee associated with the current authorities.

Selected areas of similarities

Apart from many differences, a lot of similarities between people from villages and cities can be found in results of research. One of the most interesting areas pertain the political changes after 1989. Majority of both groups agree that changing the political system after 1989 was a good decision despite the fact that it is often claimed that political transformation and its results are assessed in significantly different way by city and village residents (Badora 2014). Majority of both village and city residents also think that these reforms were not successful (Sulek 2013). Table 5 clearly shows that only one in nine Poles thinks about the reforms in the positive way (11.6%). More positive opinions about these changes are obtained from residents of cities. These results also show that the bigger the city, the more positive opinions about the reforms, and so the bigger the city, the more people claim that reforms were successful. In largest cities there are twice as many people claiming this compared with towns with the population up to 100 thousand people and almost three times as many as in the village.

However it is difficult to interpret the data as evidence of significantly different assessment of the reforms by the inhabitants of towns and villages. This is because in the case of all categories of respondents presented in Table 5, those who argue that reforms have failed and those who cannot explicitly assess them are two most numerous communities.

Table 5

Percentage distribution of answers to “In your opinion, were the reforms in Poland after 1989 more successful than not?” by place of residence class for the 18+

Place of residence class	In your opinion, were the reforms in Poland after 1989 more successful than not?			
	successful	unsuccessful	hard to say	N
Towns of more than 500,000	21.8	39.6	38.6	3160
Towns of 200,000—500,000	17.0	42.4	40.9	2483
Towns of 100,000—200,000	12.6	41.6	45.8	2015
Towns of 200,000—100,000	10.6	44.5	44.9	5098
Towns of fewer than 200,000	10.7	48.4	42.9	3119
Rural areas	7.7	45.2	47.1	10292
Total	11.6	43.9	44.4	26170

Source: Sulek (2013).

Quite numerous features indicated by the respondents as those that clearly distinguish residents of cities from village dwellers (Hipsz 2014) may suggest that systems of values of residents of cities and villages are completely different. This impression is false — both systems are quite similar to each other (Figure 7).

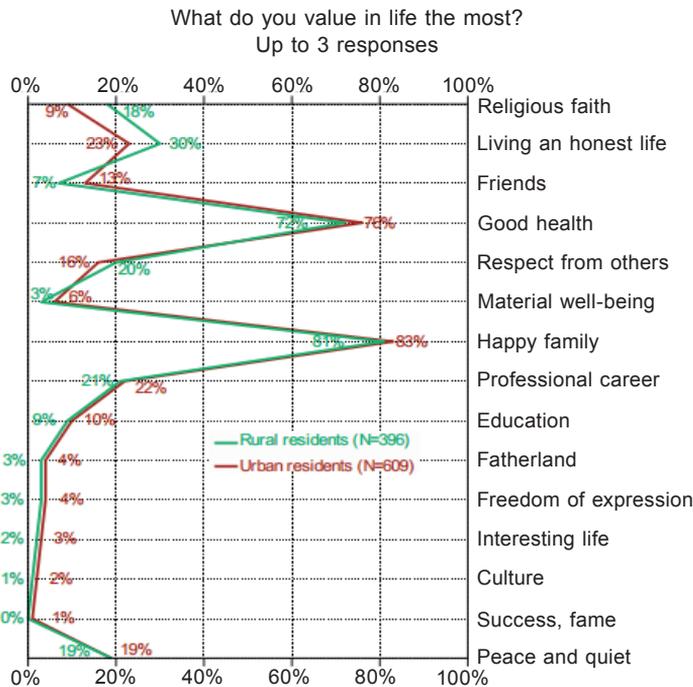


Figure 7. The most important values in life

Source: Hipsz (2013a).

In both cases, family happiness and good health are the most important values. They are indicated by more than 80.0% and 70.0% of inhabitants of towns and villages (Hipsz 2013). Other values are declared significantly less frequently because by no more than 30.0% respondents. Fair life, professional career, peace and quiet, respect from others, religious faith and friends were listed on top positions. Although the rates of respondents from cities and villages declaring these values in many cases are similar, their hierarchy shows several significant differences. City dwellers significantly rarely appreciate religion (9.0%) and fair life (7.0%) in comparison with village inhabitants. Also, a group of friends as one of the most important values in life is indicated by a higher rate of city residents (6.0%).

Less significance attributed by city residents to such values as honest life or religion finds its expression in the greater tolerance for breaking moral standards in comparison with people living in the village. The differences are relatively small, but symptomatic.

A similar conclusion can be formulated on the basis of a comparison of the assessment of various aspects of life of inhabitants of towns and villages. The level of satisfaction with majority of aspects presented in Table 6 declared by representatives of both communities is the same or very similar. More evident, a few percent differences in indications in favour of the urban population are reported in such areas as education, occupational status, way of spending free time and financial situation.

Table 6
Satisfaction from different aspects of life (persons very much satisfied or satisfied) (in %)

Aspects of life	Towns	Rural areas	Total
Employment status	63.0	57.0	60.0
Education	57.0	49.0	54.0
Family situation	75.0	74.0	75.0
Relationships with others	85.0	85.0	85.0
Financial situation	36.0	31.0	34.0
Financial living conditions	55.0	53.0	54.0
Amount of free time	61.0	62.0	62.0
Way of spending free time	62.0	57.0	60.0
Health	58.0	58.0	58.0
Life satisfaction	74.0	74.0	74.0

Source: Bieñkuńska et al. (2013).

More stressful life and most frequent self-destructive behaviours are probably the cost of higher professional status and better financial situation of urban

residents. The rate of smokers and the rate of people who abuse alcohol are higher in the city than in rural areas (Czapiński 2013). The residents of rural areas use drugs also two to five times less often than the residents of urban areas (ibid.).

In view of research into the systems of value, in the most important spheres of life, such as health or family situation, the level of satisfaction of city and village residents is the same or almost the same (Hipsz 2013a). Most importantly, the general level of satisfaction of urban and rural residents with life is also the same. Nearly three-quarters of Poles (74.0%) are very satisfied or satisfied with their life (Bieńkuńska et al. 2013).

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Mieszkańcy obszarów miejskich i wiejskich
Tacy sami czy różni?

Streszczenie

Dokonujące się w Polsce przemiany ludnościowe, w tym odwrócenie się trendów migracyjnych, których efektem jest zmniejszanie się populacji miejskiej, czemu towarzyszy zwiększanie się liczby osób zamieszkujących wieś, wpływają na stopniowe zmiany cech społecznych obu zbiorowości. Artykuł jest próbą spojrzenia na te odmienności i podobieństwa mieszkańców miasta i wsi, które zawarte są w danych statystycznych oraz wynikach ogólnopolskich badań socjologicznych.

W jaki sposób postrzegani są mieszkańcy miasta i mieszkańcy wsi, czy w wyobrażeniach społecznych są między nimi różnice, czy nie ma, jakie są obszary podobieństw i ewentualnych różnic, co łączy, a co dzieli mieszczan i mieszkańców obszarów wiejskich — to niektóre pytania, na które starano się udzielić odpowiedzi.

Słowa kluczowe: mieszkańcy miasta, mieszkańcy wsi, podobieństwa i różnice