

Ilona Matysiak

Young University Graduates' Motivations for Living in the Countryside in the Context of Rural Policies in Poland

Abstract: This paper focuses on young adults with a university education (aged 25–34) living in rural areas of Poland. Its aim is to analyse their motivations for doing so, as well as the implications of such decisions. The issue is of crucial importance in terms of the future of rural areas in Poland. Current rural policies, although somewhat vague, emphasize the urgent need of further modernization of agriculture and the creation of more non-agriculture jobs in local labour markets. In order to be successful, rural development should be a community-led process which requires well-skilled and dedicated rural residents. The paper is based on qualitative study conducted in ten selected rural municipalities in different parts of Poland. The analysis show that the young university graduates interviewed were motivated mostly by social relationships and attachment to the local area, but economic reasons were also important. Also, the types of motivation correlate with the young adults' community engagement.

Keywords: young adults, university graduates, rural policies, motivations for living in the countryside, rural development.

1. Introduction

The article focuses on young adults with a tertiary education who decided to live in rural areas in Poland. The aim is to analyse their motivations for doing so and the drivers behind them. Do they see promising future prospects in the countryside or would they prefer to live elsewhere if they could? Addressing these questions is important when thinking about the future of rural areas in Poland.

Ilona Matysiak, PhD, Faculty of Social Sciences, Maria Grzegorzewska University, Szczęśliwicka 40, 02-353 Warsaw, imatysiak@aps.edu.pl.

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The recent OECD assessment of the implementation of rural policies in Poland indicates that Polish rural economy remains under-diversified. Agriculture still needs to transition to a fully modern form and the development of local non-agriculture labour markets should be more dynamic (OECD 2018). The application of these requires the knowledge and commitment of the rural population itself. The presence of young highly educated people is thus of crucial importance, especially in rural areas further from larger urban centres.

Typically, young adults are those most likely to emigrate from rural areas. They are pushed out by the lack of employment or higher education opportunities, limited services and facilities, and cultural factors such as conservatism, as well as the persistence of a negative discourse about rural life. University graduates rarely come back, as rural areas, especially more peripheral ones, do not offer professional employment opportunities suited to their qualifications (Ní Laoire and Stockdale 2016, pp. 80–83). In Poland, unlike in other post-communist countries, about 30% of university graduates of rural origin tend to return to the countryside (Szafraniec and Szymborski 2016). However, systematic research on their motivations to do so seems to be lacking.

The article is based on a qualitative study including 92 in-depth interviews with young adults aged 25–34 with a university degree (63 women and 29 men), conducted in ten selected rural municipalities in different parts of Poland. Firstly, the importance of younger generations for the implementation of rural policies in Poland will be discussed. Secondly, the literature review on motivations for living in the countryside, especially regarding young adults, will be presented. Thirdly, research questions and the methodology of the study and data analysis will be discussed. Subsequently, the research findings will be displayed.

2. The significance of younger generations for rural policies in Poland

Currently, rural policies in Poland are shaped by a number of EU, national and regional policies that create various occasionally contradictory incentives and disincentives for rural development (OECD 2018). For example, the “industrial” model of agriculture, which assumes transformation of small farmers into farmers running large farms, competes with the concepts of multifunctional development of the rural areas and agriculture and sustainable development (Gorlach 2005). The successful implementation of any of these requires the active contribution of rural residents themselves, especially those equipped with suitable knowledge and skills. Namely, in the OECD report (2018) an emphasis is put on rural entrepreneurship that needs systematic institutional support as well as creative and well-skilled entrepreneurs. National strategic documents (e.g. Ministry of Agriculture and Rural

Development 2018) also underlie the role of innovative bottom-up initiatives and community-led development in shaping economic diversification and improving the quality of life in rural areas in Poland.

The younger generations are of key significance under the circumstances of far-reaching systemic changes, because they have a special type of potential, allowing them to support these changes or even shape their direction (Szafraniec 2005). The question is whether and to what extent young people want to be active participants of these processes. As for rural areas, the issue was previously raised within Polish sociology both in the interwar period (Chałasiński 1984) and during the People's Republic of Poland (PRL) (Chałasiński 1969; Siemieńska and Bijak-Żochowski 1975). Before 1989, young rural residents contributed significantly to the modernization of agriculture and rural households. However, very few obtained a university education (Wasielewski 2013) and this usually led to them leaving the countryside and/or detachment from the peasant class.

After 1989, university education became widely accessible, also at numerous private universities and colleges. Rural youth have been taking advantage of these opportunities – currently, young people of rural origin amount to about 30% of all students in Poland (CSO 2017, p. 26). However, they tend to choose higher education institutions located closer to their home villages, with easier admissions procedures, but of a lower quality (Wasielewski 2013; Szafraniec and Szyborski 2016). Undoubtedly, local tertiary educational institutions could play important role by providing rural areas with graduates maybe not of the top academic excellence but skilful enough and motivated to make a difference in their home villages. The question is whether they would be willing to do so.

Analysing the attitudes of Polish 19-year-olds and 30-year-olds, Szafraniec (2011, pp. 44–45) distinguished four types of life orientations: “minimalists”, “dreamers”, “conventionally ambitious”, “extremely ambitious” and “ambitious differently”. These types cover attitudes from being passive and having rather low life expectations to being active, successful, and, last but not least, socially concerned. The analysis shows that attitudes focusing on consumption, individual achievements and family life prevail, especially among the youngest generations. The question is whether young university graduates living in rural areas also fit into these tendencies. It is therefore important to explore what attracts young university graduates to the countryside and whether their motivations for living there could somehow translate into their possible contributions to local development.

3. Young people's motivations for living in the countryside – a literature review

According to the literature on the return migration of young adults to rural areas, job opportunities play important role but not a decisive one (Haartsen and Thissen 2014; Rauhut and Littke 2016; Rérat 2014). Focusing on university graduates, Rérat (2013, p. 73) discusses strategies of avoiding emigration while coping with a limited labour market opportunities in the region. It is argued that trade-offs between professional career and desired place of residence may be involved. Other economic factors include the cost of living and housing opportunities. For example, Stockdale and Catney's (2014) data analysis of internal migration in Northern Ireland showed that the likelihood of moving from urban to rural areas is greater among young adults than other age groups. The authors pointed out the role of building sites that parents give to their children, which resulted in better housing opportunities in the countryside in comparison with the cities.

Equally and often more important is one's embeddedness in local social networks. When analysing motivations of return migrants to rural Ireland, Ní Laoire (2007) indicates the significance of family reasons: the wish to spend more time with parents or take care of them. Others wanted to live among their extended family: siblings, nephews, etc. The author describes such needs as a "quest for anchorage" (Corcoran 2002, in: *ibid.*), i.e. a broader desire to be a part of a society based on community and kinship. Social networks were also a key motivation to return to rural areas among young adults (Haartsen and Thissen 2014; Stockdale 2002), including those with an university degree (Rérat 2013).

Strong community attachment is a powerful predictor of being a rural stayer (e.g. Erickson et al. 2018), a rural return migrant (Rérat 2013), as well as rural youth's future migration intentions (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006; Thissen et al. 2010). As for university graduates, the literature also shows the importance of the location of the university attended and its distance from the home area. For example, Bjarnason and Edvardsson's study (2017) shows that in Iceland only about 30% of graduates who left their home villages for the period of their university studies returned afterwards. Conversely, the great majority of distance students at the regional universities remain in their region of origin after graduation.

Another category of motivations for living in rural areas is based on an idealistic, pastoral image of the countryside, rural lifestyle and the quality of life captured by the notion of rural idyll (Halfacree and Rivera 2012). Such constructs are expressed by young adults moving to rural areas in the Netherlands (Haartsen and Stockdale 2018), as well as return migrants to the countryside studied in Ireland (Ní Laoire 2007). The traces of the rural idyll are also seen in the desire to bring

up children in the rural environment. Such narratives can be described as “country childhood idylls” (Jones 1997). The research on young adults (Rauhut and Littke 2016) and young university graduates (Rérat 2013, 2014) shows that the perception of countryside as a good place for children to grow up was among the main reasons behind their decisions to return.

Typologies of rural return migrants are created according to their motivations to do so. Focusing on young adults in the Netherlands, Haartsen and Thissen (2014, p. 95) distinguished social, family, functional (job-oriented) and partner orientations. Analysing young university graduates coming back to their home rural region (Switzerland), Rérat (2013, pp. 78–79) identified four types of return migrants: “have it all”, “returning partners”, “rooted” and “job opportunists”. In the case of young adults moving to the countryside in the Netherlands, Haartsen and Stockdale (2018, pp. 3–4) divided their interviewees into two categories: “convinced stayers” and “children-led stayers”. The former moved to the countryside mostly for lifestyle reasons, whereas the latter settled in rural areas primarily in order to provide their children with a pleasant childhood.

In Poland, as mentioned above, about one third of students of rural origin settle in the countryside after having graduated from university, as rural areas have been increasingly seen as attractive places to live (Szafraniec and Szymborski 2016). However, it seems that returns are observed mostly among those characterized by weaker cultural capital, who chose courses that are easier to complete, obtained lower grades and have lower expectations about their future professional career (Wasielewski 2013). Graduates of the most prestigious higher education institutions are the least keen to move back to the countryside, due to a pragmatic belief that the knowledge and skills acquired may be put to a more satisfying use in the city (Gorlach 2005).

4. The research problem and methodology

First, the young adults' motivations for living in the countryside will be analysed – are their decisions driven mostly by economic reasons, social ties, attachment to the local area, idyllic images of rural life, as indicated in the literature, or maybe something else? According to the existing research, social and attachment factors are more important than economic ones, however, the importance of the latter should not be underestimated. Secondly, the typology of young university graduates on the basis of their dominant motivations will be constructed and linked to their basic socio-demographic and local contexts' characteristics, as well as their future plans. Thirdly, the implications of the typology will be discussed – how the types of motivations identified fit in the broader life orientations of the university

graduates interviewed, especially in terms of their involvement in the community. In analysing young university graduates' return migration to rural areas, Rérat (2014) suggested adopting the life-course perspective, taking into account socio-familiar migration and professional trajectories as shaping people's decisions about the place of residence.

The empirical data analysed in the text is derived from 92 individual in-depth interviews with young adults with a higher education, i.e. graduates with a BA or BSc or an MA or MSc. The notion of "rural resident" was not limited to people of rural descent – young rural residents of urban origin were not excluded from the study by definition. The research encompassed young adults aged 25–34. At this age, people aim to achieve their aspirations of youth and make decisions which are of significance for their "life strategies" (family, place of residence, job) (Szafraniec 2010, p. 16–17).

The interviews were carried out in ten selected rural municipalities in provinces belonging to four historic macro-regions differing in terms of agriculture, population and the direction of local development (e.g. Rosner and Stanny 2014). The municipalities were selected according to the following criteria: the share of the population with higher education in the district (*powiat*), the type of the local economy and the distance from larger urban centres. Consequently, two municipalities in districts with a relatively high percentage of inhabitants with higher education were selected in each province – an "agricultural" municipality (with more than 60% of the municipality's area being farmland according to the 2010 National Agricultural Census) and a "tourist" municipality (e.g. in the vicinity of nature-related tourist attractions or heritage monuments). In order to avoid large city suburbs, all the municipalities are at least 80 km from a city with a population of over 100,000. Between eight and ten interviews with university graduates were carried out in each municipality (see Table 1).

The first interviewees were indicated by "competent local informants" (local authorities, village representatives (*soltys*), local civil servants, leaders of local social organizations) while others were identified via snowball sampling. The research was carried out between June and September 2016 and in May and June 2017.¹ The interviews were transcribed, coded using MAXQDA 12 software and subjected to a qualitative analysis.

The typology of the interviewees' motivations was created by using fuzzy cluster analysis. Unlike regular segmentation methods, which allow the assignment

¹ At first, the research was to be conducted only in eight rural municipalities located in different parts of Poland. However, in 2017 two more municipalities from the Warmińsko-Mazurskie province were included in order to ensure the diversification of western and northern areas added to the Polish territory after WWII.

Table 1. List of rural municipalities selected for the research

Region	Western and northern Areas		Former Russian partition	Former Prussian partition	Former Galicia (Austrian partition)	
Province	dolnośląskie		mazowieckie	wielkopolskie	małopolskie	
District	głogowski	wałbrzyski	putuski	koniński	gorlicki	nowosądecki
Municipality	Pęcław	Walim	Gzy	Krzymów	Wijewo	Gródek nad Dunajcem
Type of municipality	agricultural	tourist	agricultural	agricultural	tourist	agricultural
Number of interviews	8	10	10	9	10	9

Source: Own study.

of a respondent to only one cluster, fuzzy clustering enables determination of how well a given respondent fits into all clusters distinguished. It means that segments should be perceived as “ideal types”, not disjointed categories. The analysis included variables considering the interviewees’ statements about their reasons for living in the countryside and whether they plan to change their place of residence in the future.

It has to be emphasized that the results of the research are not representative of all rural municipalities in Poland but the selection of municipalities for research makes it possible to make generalizations limited to particular types of local contexts.

4.1. Young adults with a university education – socio-demographic characteristics

The interviewees were 63 women and 29 men. About half of the men and women belonged to each of the categories of over-20-year-olds and over-30-year-olds. The great majority of my interviewees, particularly men, originate from villages where they currently live. In many cases, their parents and grandparents often come from the area, too. The interviewees are therefore usually well “rooted” in their respective local communities. Having such roots correlates positively with returning to rural areas (Rauhut and Littke 2016; Rérat 2014) or planning to stay in the home village (Thissen et al. 2010).

The majority of the interviewees held an MA or MSc: 41 women and 16 men. It is worth pointing out that the men had tended to leave higher education with a BA or BSc degree more often than the women. Some of the most popular areas of study included education/special education/physical education with a teaching specialization (18 women and seven men), public administration (seven women and four men) and management (seven women and three men). Nineteen interviewees (ten women and nine men) graduated in technical studies such as land management and planning, geodesy, transport, ICT and production engineering. Only a handful of the interviewees studied disciplines directly related to agriculture. Traditionally, rural youth have tended to choose fields of study such as education, theology and agriculture (Wasielewski 2013). My interviewees also seemed to focus on education, as well as on other studies perceived as matching the jobs available at local public institutions (e.g. schools, municipal offices).

As little as about one third of the interviewees moved to a city for the whole duration of their studies or a significant part of them. The others usually graduated from local higher education institutions and commuted, or graduated from extramural courses (intensive sessions only at weekends). A popular model

included obtaining a bachelor degree at a local tertiary education institution and then studying for a MA or Msc degree at a larger academic centre. Such tendencies have also been pointed out by other authors (Wasielewski 2013).

The great majority of my interviewees, especially the women, indicated that they were among the first generation of university graduates in their families. Their parents had usually had basic vocational or secondary vocational education and mostly had working-class jobs as craftsmen, minor officials or farmers. According to the literature, a working-class family background increases the probability of returning to rural area or staying in the countryside and evaluating living in the countryside positively (Jamieson 2000; Rérat 2014; Rye 2011).

As for the interviewees' own family life, the majority of women were married with children, a few of the women had informal relationships and ten women were single. As many as 15 of the 29 men were unmarried/without partners. According to the literature, having a dependent at home, namely a parent or a child, increases the probability of staying in the home village (Erickson, Sanders and Cope 2018).

Nearly all interviewees work. Most of them had found employment on the local labour market (usually no more than 20 km from their place of residence), mostly in local public institutions (municipal public offices, cultural centres, social welfare centres, schools). Interviewees running their own businesses or family farms are not too numerous (Table 2).

Table 2. The interviewees' main place of work according to gender

Main place of work	Men N = 29	Women N = 63
Municipal office	4	12
School	2	10
Cultural centre or other local public institution	5	13
Private company	5	6
Self-employed, agritourism services	5	4
Family farm	2	4
Subsidized training in a municipal office	1	3
Other	5	3
Does not work	0	8

Source: Own study.

The businesses run by the interviewees include: language school, agritourism services, veterinary clinic (especially pets), high-pressure hydraulics, transport

services, construction services and accountancy services. Characteristics of the local context differentiate the types of the interviewees' work only to a very small extent. For example, the few working on the family farm or providing agritourism services were found mostly in "agricultural" municipalities in Mazowieckie and Warmińsko-Mazurskie provinces, as well as in "tourist" municipality in Małopolskie province. The interviewees working in private companies or as self-employed were scattered across all selected municipalities.

About one third of the interviewees (more often men than women) mentioned that they had some experience in working abroad. Mostly, that experience included short-term seasonal work or temporary physical jobs. In some cases the interviewees had spent several years abroad and can actually be considered as external return migrants.

4.2. Motivations: attachment to the local area

The attachment to the place of origin was the most popular motivation to live in rural areas mentioned by my interviewees (71 individuals). Some felt not only emotionally attached to their villages, but also wanted to get involved in the community: *Everything I had in life was here. My family and S., who was not my wife yet at that time, was here. (...) Apart from that, a group of young people appeared who wanted to do something for this village, start some activities and they managed to achieve it. In consequence, a return to my village was just mandatory for me. [3.Mł.M_M.29]*² A quite significant group of interviewees pointed out that they were so used to living in the countryside that it was hard for them to imagine moving anywhere else: *I grew up here, I was here all the time and I did not really think about moving. I mean, I have not ever tried anything else, right? I have never had the experience that I left and got to know how it is to live in a larger city. [7.W.K_W.33].*

As mentioned above, only about one third of the interviewees had moved to a city for the whole duration of their studies or a significant part of them. The majority claimed they wanted to avoid higher costs of living, however, many of them paid to study at private universities or on weekends, which one has to pay for even at public universities. Others explicitly stated that they were too attached to their family and home village. Some felt "forced" to study locally due to their family situation, e.g. women who got married and/or became pregnant during their studies.

² Marking of interviews: the first letter means the province (W-M = Warmińsko-Mazurskie, Mz = Mazowieckie, Mp = Małopolskie, W = Wielkopolskie, D = Dolnośląskie), the second letter refers to the first letter in the name of the municipality, letters "W" or "M" refer to the respondent being a woman or a man, the last numbers indicate the age of the interviewee.

A few explicitly admitted that they were afraid of the big city: *Warsaw is a one big noise, a lot of cars, trams and buses, it's difficult to figure it out. I didn't have enough courage to deal with it. [6.Mz.G_W.26]*

In some cases, the interviewees mostly stayed within their local social networks even when they had left their home villages to study. They moved in with their family members living in the city or rented apartment, together with their friends or cousins from the local area. Those who were alone in the urban environment tended to come home as often as possible and rarely spent weekends in the city. Others did not even try to get involved in city life, because they knew from the beginning that they would like to go back to their villages: *I did not find it [city life – IM] particularly interesting. (...) I was trying to go home as often as possible. (...) I always knew that I would return to the countryside, no matter what. [9.W-M.Ś_M.27]* When emigration is planned from the outset as only temporary, young adults' return migrations should be interpreted rather as staying, because they have not “mentally” left their home village (cf. Haartsen and Thissen 2014).

4.3. Motivations: social ties in the local community

The great majority of interviewees (68) indicated the importance of social ties when deciding about living in the countryside. Many of them, especially women, pointed out that they wanted to live close to their family, friends and neighbours: *I am a very family-oriented person. I wanted to stay close to my mom. That's why. Also, the majority of my friends are here. This is the place where I grew up. [10.Mz.G_W.32]* Some female interviewees pointed out that, from their perspective, one of the most important advantages of living with their parents or in-laws or close to them is the childcare support they receive from them. The interviewees, both men and women, also underlined the significance of belonging to the local community: *People in the city don't know their neighbours, while here you always talk to your neighbours. We visit each other. We have our family close. I do have a big family in this area. We always have somebody to visit and talk to. [8.Mz.G_M.25]; Here, I feel that I am among my people. [3.Mł.G_M.34]*

Interestingly, a significant group of women pointed out that they live in the rural areas because of their husbands or partners, whereas only three men stated that they currently live in the home village of their wives or partners. Some of these women had married farmers who did not want to hear about living in the city: *My husband participated in the program for young farmers and we bought more land. He doesn't like noise, traffic jams, rush, he is happy here. What can I do if I married a farmer? [4.Mz.G_W.28]*

The interviewees less often mentioned that they had stayed in their home villages because they needed to take care of their parents (13 people in total). Interestingly, such motivations were expressed by almost the same number of men as women. However, their narratives differ slightly. The women mostly had to take care of their elderly parents or other family members when their health deteriorated. Some of them were not too happy with it: *I don't feel like abandoning my parents who need help. I don't say that I am suffering, but my parents are the main reason why I live here.* [6.W.K_W.25] Male interviewees rather seem to anticipate that their parents might need their help in the future, so they would like to live with them or nearby: *I also took into account that I am the only child, my parents live in a house and in 10 or 15 years they may need some help.* [2.W-M.Ś_M.34] The sense of obligation is expressed more or less explicitly in such narratives, however, some interviewees emphasize that it was their own choice after all and that, over time, they have come to terms with the situation.

4.4 Motivations: economic reasons

Economic reasons (finding a job, having job opportunities, as well as housing opportunities) were the third most frequent type of motivation mentioned by my interviewees (58 individuals). The interviewees often spoke about being lucky enough to find a job nearby so they did not have to leave their home village. Some interviewees, predominantly men, pointed out that they live in the countryside because they wanted to or felt obliged to take over their parent's farm, business or household and continue their "legacy": *I received this house from my parents and I can run a business in the village where I have been living all my life and this is very good.* [4.Mł.G_M.33]

It is worth pointing out that interviewees seem to "fit in" with employment opportunities available on the local labour market rather than create jobs for themselves and, eventually, also for others. Most of them are satisfied with their current employment, usually because their place of work is located close to their village (in some cases even in the same village), the job itself is perceived as relatively stable and providing money that allows them to survive. For many, the dream job that they already have or would like to have in future is one of a municipal clerk or a local school teacher. The women emphasize that regular, fixed working hours enable them to deal with family responsibilities. Some men, on the other hand, pointed out that working in a local public sector is much less stressful in comparison with working in the city: *I have never wanted to take part in a so-called "rat race". It is very typical for big cities and corporations. I would not be able to stand it, this competition and pressure for results.* [1.D.W_M.33] Importantly, for almost half

of the interviewees there is a compatibility between their current job and their formal education. The work of other interviewees usually differs quite significantly from their field of study. However, only a few interviewees work significantly below their formal qualifications.

The importance of good housing opportunities was also quite a frequent reason that the interviewees mentioned for living in the countryside. They were allowed to use part of their parents'/grandparents' house or they were entitled to a piece of land where they could build their own house: *We calculated everything and it turned out that we needed much smaller loan from the bank to build another floor here than to buy an apartment in the city. [6.Mz.M_W.30]* In result, it is significantly cheaper to obtain comfortable housing in the countryside in comparison with the city.

4.5. Motivations: searching for rural idyll

The elements of the notion of rural idyll were visible in a substantial number of narratives, however, less often than the previous motives (23 individuals). Some interviewees, especially women, referred also to "country childhood idylls" (Jones 1997). More interviewees highlighted their aversion to the city, often creating a positive image of the countryside in opposition to the tiring, hectic and anonymous urban environment.

The countryside is described as characterized by peace, quiet, nature and a slower pace of life. The air is cleaner and having your own garden makes it possible to have more control over what you eat. The interviewees often mentioned that they "suffocate" in the city, where there are too many people on the streets and apartments are often tiny. The countryside provides a lot of space – outdoors as well as at home, which gives a sense of freedom: *I feel really free here. (...) I can wake up in the morning and walk my dog in my pyjamas and nobody will say anything. It's so laid back, there is freedom. [5.W.K_W.29]* The interviewees often contrasted the quality of life in a house with living in a flat in the city, where you always need to consider the neighbours: *When we were living in the city, it was enough for the TV to be a bit louder (...) and the neighbour was banging on the wall immediately. [9.W.K_W.29]*

The countryside also means a familiar and safe environment, with much less traffic and crime in comparison with the city. Other interviewees, especially the men, pointed out the differences in rural and urban ways of life, the former being "slower", healthier and focused on relationships with others, while the latter is exhausting, isolating and competitive.

Some interviewees, especially women, described the countryside as a better place for bringing up children than the city. The rural environment is safer for

children than an urban one – there is less traffic and crime, the air is cleaner and a child can spend more time outdoors in the natural world. In addition, people know each other in the community, so someone would always keep an eye on children and teens wandering around. However, other female and male interviewees pointed out also some more practical reasons. Here, children can easily play in the yard, even by themselves when they are older, whereas in the city parents need to watch them constantly.

4.6. Typology of the young university graduates

First hierarchical clustering was conducted in order to create a typology of the interviewees. The number of groups (three) was chosen by examining the dendrogram. The validity of clustering was also tested by crossing it with qualitative material. Then fuzzy clustering was conducted. The intervals between the elements were measured by the squared Euclidean in order to achieve a clearer segmentation. Dunn's partition coefficient is 0.906 (the normalized one is 0.860), which indicates near-crisp clustering. The average silhouette is 0.23, which means that some, though not a very strong structure has been found within the data (cf. Kaufman and Rousseeuw 1990).

Basically, three groups were distinguished on the basis of the analysis of the interviewees' motivations for living in the countryside. Each group is characterized by the dominant motivation: social ties, namely the partner's preference where to live, attachment to the local area and job opportunities. However, as indicated in the table, these leading motivations were often intertwined with others. The types differ most in terms of interviewees' future plans about the place of residence, interviewees' origins, their family situation, experience related to education and living in an urban environment and work (see Table 3). In addition, the "community-oriented" and "job-oriented" types include almost all of the very few interviewees who have at least one parent with a university degree and a middle-class job.

The three types distinguished were not equally distributed across the selected municipalities. Namely, the interviewees in the partner-oriented category are more frequently observed in Mazowieckie province. The "community-oriented" ones are relatively more frequent in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie and, again, Mazowieckie provinces. The "job-oriented" type is observed rather in the municipalities located in the Małopolskie, Dolnośląskie and Wielkopolskie provinces. This may imply that, in these localities, the local labor markets offer relatively more job opportunities for young university graduates in comparison with others.

Table 3. Typology of interviewees according to their motivations for living in rural areas

Group	Gender	Motivations	Future plans	Origin	Family situation	Education	Work
Partner-oriented (28 interviewees)	26 women 2 men	Husband's preference, housing conditions, aversion to the city.	Mostly want to stay in the rural areas.	Rural areas or small towns (new in their husbands' villages).	Mostly married, with small children.	Usually local colleges, some studied in the city.	Mostly public sector, few are on maternity leave or unemployed.
		Embeddedness in the social networks, strong attachment to the local community, appreciating the rural life and aversion to the city.	Mostly want to stay in the rural areas.	Almost all live in their home villages.	Almost half of them are singles without children.	More than a half lived in the city while studying, also in large urban centres.	Mostly public sector, few farmers and self-employed.
Community-oriented (29 interviewees)	18 women 11 men						
Job-oriented (35 interviewees)	19 women 16 men	Having a job in the local area, housing conditions, partner's preferences, taking care of the parents, but also community and family attachment.	About a half of them want to leave rural areas or are not sure about future place of residence.	All live in their home villages.	Almost half of them are singles without children.	About a half lived in the city while studying, also in large urban centres.	Mostly public sector, few work in private companies or are self-employed.

Source: Own study.

4.7. Typology implications

Interesting correlations between types of university graduates' motivations for living in the countryside and their community engagement were identified. Cross-analysing them with the interviewees' future plans about their place of residence made it possible to identify some important tendencies.

As for the community engagement, women from the "partner-oriented" group usually do not get involved at all. Many of them claim to be too busy with their family life and work, whereas others still feel new in their husbands' communities. In case of the "community-oriented" type, almost all interviewees are involved in local organizations on behalf of their villages (fire brigades, sports clubs, non-profit organizations, parents' committees at school, etc.) or informally. Some of them initiated local events or organizations in their villages, others are actively involved in initiatives led by other people. Few interviewees from this group are also involved in the local government. Interviewees from the third group, "job-oriented", are also quite often involved in the local community, however, incidentally and informally rather than as part of local organizations. A few of them are members of the local government, serving as village representatives or municipal councilors.

Interestingly, the great majority of the interviewees in the "partner-oriented" and "community-oriented" types want to stay in the countryside. In case of the former, some women had reservations about living in rural areas and would prefer to move to the city, but their husbands, in some cases farmers, were too attached to their village. However, most of them had got used to it over time and no longer think about moving elsewhere. The "community-oriented" interviewees cherish the rural life and would not like to live in the city. Some of them feel the strong obligation to take over their parents' legacy, i.e. the farm, family business or property. Interestingly, only about a half of the "job-oriented" interviewees want to live in the countryside in the future. The others plan to move to the city or are not certain about their future place of residence.

In sum, the "community-oriented" motivation and long-term plans to live in the countryside often translates into the interviewees' community engagement. The "partner-oriented" interviewees, usually women, also want to stay in rural areas – because they like it or have gradually accepted their rural life. However, most of them seem to be detached from the local community and focused mostly on their narrow family circle as well as on everyday life. The interviewees in the "job-oriented" type are more willing to engage locally, but also to change their place of residence in the future, which would deprive the local community of precious resource.

In terms of broader life orientations (Szafranec 2011), the majority of my interviewees could be described in terms of the "conventionally ambitious"

category. These are focused on average, safe professional careers and have realistic expectations about their social position. However, a significant number of them are concerned about the common good and are willing to get involved in the local community. The “minimalists”, who do not have any particular aspirations, are rather passive and oriented on secure and peaceful life are also present among the interviewees. The “dreamers” or “ambitious differently”, thinking “bigger”, having original ideas for their professional career or community engagement are rather rare. As Szafraniec (2011) suggests, such preferences focused on peaceful life, stable job and good relationships with family and friends may result from a desire to minimize risks in today's conditions, which are perceived as highly insecure.

5. Conclusions

The research presented adds to the literature the so far missing analysis of the motivations for living in the countryside expressed by the young university graduates who have already made such choice. The existing research focuses mostly on rural youth's educational choices, students of rural origin or rural youth's statements about their future life plans. This analysis is also novel in terms of linking those motivations with the interviewees' community involvement.

Regardless the concepts and labels used to describe desired directions of the future development of the Polish countryside and no matter what kind of rural policies would be selected as leading by decision-makers, human capital is crucial. In other words, no significant transformation in the rural areas will be possible without the rural residents' contribution. In order to be active participants in the processes of change, suitable knowledge, skills and competences are needed. Young university graduates living in rural areas are therefore among the most important candidates for such role. They are important in this regard also because many of them have deliberately chosen the countryside as their preferred location and plan to stay there in the future too. Their potential should not be underestimated, even though many of them graduated from local higher education institutions of lower quality than “old” universities in larger urban centres. Mostly, the young university graduates interviewed aspire for a good and peaceful life, without any spectacular expectations in terms of professional career, social activism or even consumption. However, this does not mean that they cannot make a difference in their local communities, when stimulated and supported in the right way.

It seems that several more specific recommendations can be formulated on the basis of the research presented in this paper. First of all, the role of local higher education institutions, i.e. those located in smaller urban centres and often selected by rural youth, should be thought through again. Such institutions could

serve as “incubators” for new generations of rural elites, providing their students with knowledge and skills relevant for development of the countryside, e.g. local participation, entrepreneurship, etc. Apart from that, the potential of young university graduates already living in the rural areas should be recognized and included in strategic documents related to rural development. So far, the focus seems to be limited to rural youth and supporting their educational aspirations (cf. Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development 2018). Subsequently, the following issues should be addressed: 1) how to appreciate those who are “community-oriented” and disseminate their example within broader population; 2) how to stimulate the “partner- and family-oriented” and make them feel more responsible for their local communities; 3) how to keep in the countryside some of the “job-oriented” who are not sure where they would like to live in the future.

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Motywacje do życia na wsi młodych absolwentów wyższych uczelni w kontekście polityk rozwoju obszarów wiejskich w Polsce

Streszczenie: Niniejszy artykuł jest poświęcony młodym dorosłym (w wieku 25–34 lata), którzy ukończyli studia wyższe i mieszkają na obszarach wiejskich w Polsce. Podstawowym celem artykułu jest analiza ich motywacji do życia na wsi oraz konsekwencji takiej decyzji dla wiejskich społeczności lokalnych. Podjęta problematyka ma kluczowe znaczenie dla przyszłości polskiej wsi. Aktualne polityki rozwoju obszarów wiejskich, choć często mgliste, kładą nacisk na pilną potrzebę dalszej modernizacji polskiego sektora rolnego oraz tworzenie większej liczby pozarolniczych miejsc pracy na poziomie lokalnym. Rozwój obszarów wiejskich zakończy się sukcesem tylko wtedy, jeśli będzie procesem kierowanym przez społeczności lokalne, co wymaga zaangażowania samych mieszkańców wsi, posiadających odpowiednią wiedzę i umiejętności. Treść artykułu została oparta na wynikach badania jakościowego, przeprowadzonego w dziesięciu celowo wybranych gminach wiejskich, położonych w różnych regionach kraju. Badanie to pokazuje, że młodzi absolwenci i absolwentki studiów wyższych, z którymi przeprowadzono wywiady, wybierając życie na wsi kierowali się przede wszystkim swoim przywiązaniem do rodzinnej wsi oraz więziami z mieszkającymi tam ludźmi – rodziną, znajomymi, sąsiadami. Czynniki ekonomiczne były również ważne, ale nie stawiano ich na pierwszym miejscu. Przeprowadzone analizy pokazały również, że wyróżnione typy motywacji badanych do życia na wsi są skorelowane z poziomem ich zaangażowania na rzecz społeczności lokalnej.

Słowa kluczowe: młodzi dorośli, absolwenci studiów wyższych, polityki rozwoju obszarów wiejskich, motywacje do życia na wsi, rozwój obszarów wiejskich.