

"Just leave everything and go to live in Bieszczady mountains"? A life-course approach to new residential mobility to non-metropolitan areas in (post)pandemic Poland.

News on residential mobility made it to the front pages in between recent lockdowns and Covid restrictions in Poland. Article lead based on data from county offices suggested that, despite the economic crisis and pandemic-related uncertainty, 2020 saw the highest number of family home building permits issued in a decade. Another commentary stated that the share of houses and land for single-family residential development in property purchases increased from 21% in 2016 to 34% in 2020, and three Covid quarters of 2020 were record. As majority of building permits are issued for non-urban areas, articles asked whether "Poles abandon cities", and move far out, to proverbial "Bieszczady".

The phenomenon of moving out from large cities is not new in Poland. In socialism, people of relatively high economic capital built dachas and, later, second homes. Leaving big cities was also an expression of withdrawal from socio-political reality by those of higher cultural capital, deprived of the possibility to go abroad after the declaration of martial law. Since 2000, suburbanization has been a dominant trajectory of urban development in Poland. But current deconcentration trends are becoming more significant and take place in changed conditions. Exorbitant prices of flats in cities raise interest in detached houses or recreational plots in more affordable yet more distant locations there are shifts from public transport towards car-based mobility, and emerging lifestyles combine teleworking with unrestricted access to green spaces for leisure. All this fuels residential mobility beyond immediate suburban zone, to non-metropolitan, peripheral areas, and gives way to changed core-city – region relations resulting from counterurbanization.

To unveil the nature of counterurbanizing residential mobility, this study uses life-course approach in a socio-cultural perspective. It examines individual life histories to understand how earlier events, individual characteristics and supra-individual conditions (social, economic) influence housing decisions over time. In residential mobility studies it allows to capture the complexity of residential choice as a result of individual aspirations as much as of individual and systemic constraints, social and life-style profiles of households, and biographical trajectories where individual lives are linked and contextualized by structural conditions.

The main research question is: How is residential mobility to non-metropolitan areas embedded in the individual life-course and what consequences it brings to housing trajectories of households, in (post)pandemic Poland? This project in residential mobility in life-course perspective follows a qualitative methodology design of narrative research in order to collect, record, analyse and re-tell life-stories of residential migrants. Narrative stories will be analysed according to a more general guideline to analyse the participants' stories using the process of reorganizing the stories into some general type of framework called restorying. Restorying will be conducted using varied data analysis strategies: analysis will be made about what was said (thematical), the nature of the telling of the story (structural), with a particular attention to turning points, tensions and interruptions. In this study, we will seek out for personal housing experience stories (an individual's personal experience found in single or multiple episodes, private situations and structural conditions).

The novelty of the proposed research is in (1) the ambition to fill the gap in empirical studies on counterurbanization in an understudied context of central eastern Europe using the Polish case; (2) employing latest theoretical advancement of life-course approach re-conceptualized as relational practices that link individual lives through time and space while connecting people to structural conditions; it is fresh to see mobility as an active practice (*doing* mobility), and not depersonalized act (*mobility is done*); (3) taking advantage of collecting and analysing dynamic housing trajectories that encompass the past and presence, but also the future of housing behaviour by households who decided to move into non-metropolitan areas.

The rationale behind the project is threefold: (1) it aims to provide a fuller picture of urbanization processes in Poland, by demonstrating a concurring and synchronous character of population shifts, with a focus on an empirically understudied phenomenon of counterurbanisation; (2) it proposes analysing the "doing" of counterurbanization by people in changed conditions, and as an effect of complex macrostructural setting; (3) it points to the need of collecting local knowledges and contextualized housing trajectories to discuss stability and change of new residential mobilities and population shifts in Poland.