

# THE SUBURBANIZATION PROCESS IN POLAND AND NEW SPATIAL FORM

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## Abstract:

Urbanization is one of the elements that organize space, both in strict spatial dimension as well as in demographic, social and economic dimension. The suburbanization process started to develop on a greater scale in Poland only after social, politic and economic changes of 1990s. The most noticeable effect of urban changes are suburbs. Suburbs in cities of the world, in the course of their formation since 1920s formed various types that depended on their physiognomy, spatial scale and social cross-section of the society. Residential suburban areas in the countries with high urban degree, have many features (such as a distance from the city centre, functions, homogeneity of citizens, connections with the stages of family cycle, migration directions) that allow to classify them to this form of settlement. Suburbs in Poland are different than suburban areas in the Western Europe. The main differences depend on the scale and administrative profiles. However, the contrastive analysis allows to define the current semi-detached development as suburban areas in the conditions of Polish city and society.

**Key words:** suburbs, suburbanization, Krakow, Poland

## 1. Introduction

Suburbanisation is a typical feature of urbanisation in highly developed countries (Grzeszczak 1996). Poland has only entered this stage of urban development relatively recently (Korcelli 1995). This was an effect of the 50 years of “real socialism” when industry was the preferred mode of economy at the cost of tertiary functions; residential housing was dominated by apartment block estates; private car ownership was low and a virtually nonexistent housing market prevented any significant spatial mobility of urban population. Although single-family house suburbs first appeared in Cracow in the 1970s., they only boomed during the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. At the time, the city of Cracow showed a weak overall demographic dynamism, but the suburban zone experienced a demographic growth, while the central districts were in decline. This transformation produced around 30 suburb-like settlements in Cracow. They differ from the older type of single-family house zones and from former villages by their socio-demographics, architecture and the living standards.

## 2. Research objectives, scope, sources and research methods

The author aimed primarily to identify and to characterize the Cracow suburbs. A base hypothesis was formulated: “During 1990s, an extensive development of the suburb type settlements was observed in the Cracow functional urban region”. This hypothesis was verified by the proving of the following auxiliary hypotheses: 1. Suburb-like settlements are one form of new urban development that have emerged in the post-socialist city, 2. They are located differently than the suburbs of Western Europe and North America, 3. The population of the analysed suburbs displays different demographical and social features than those of the rest of the local urban population, 4. The settlements feature a specific pattern and architecture.

The author investigated 20 residential zones with family houses almost entirely located within the administrative boundaries of the City of Cracow (with one exception of Łokietka just outside the city limits in the Zielonki rural municipality). They are situated across nine self-governing districts in the south-western, north-western and north-eastern peripheries of the city (*Figure 1*). The author presents a contemporary status of those settlements after field studies performed in 1999.

The primary method was that of cartographical analysis, as the initial selection of the settlements for the research had been made using maps of Cracow at the 1:10,000 scale. Owing to this procedure, over 30 areas of spatial concentration of individual houses were identified according to the adopted premises, i.e. that no areas of farm-type buildings and those of the dispersed settlements would be included. The author then examined those settlements in the field finally reducing their number to 20. This is where the field research proper was carried out to obtain information concerning the Cracow suburbs.

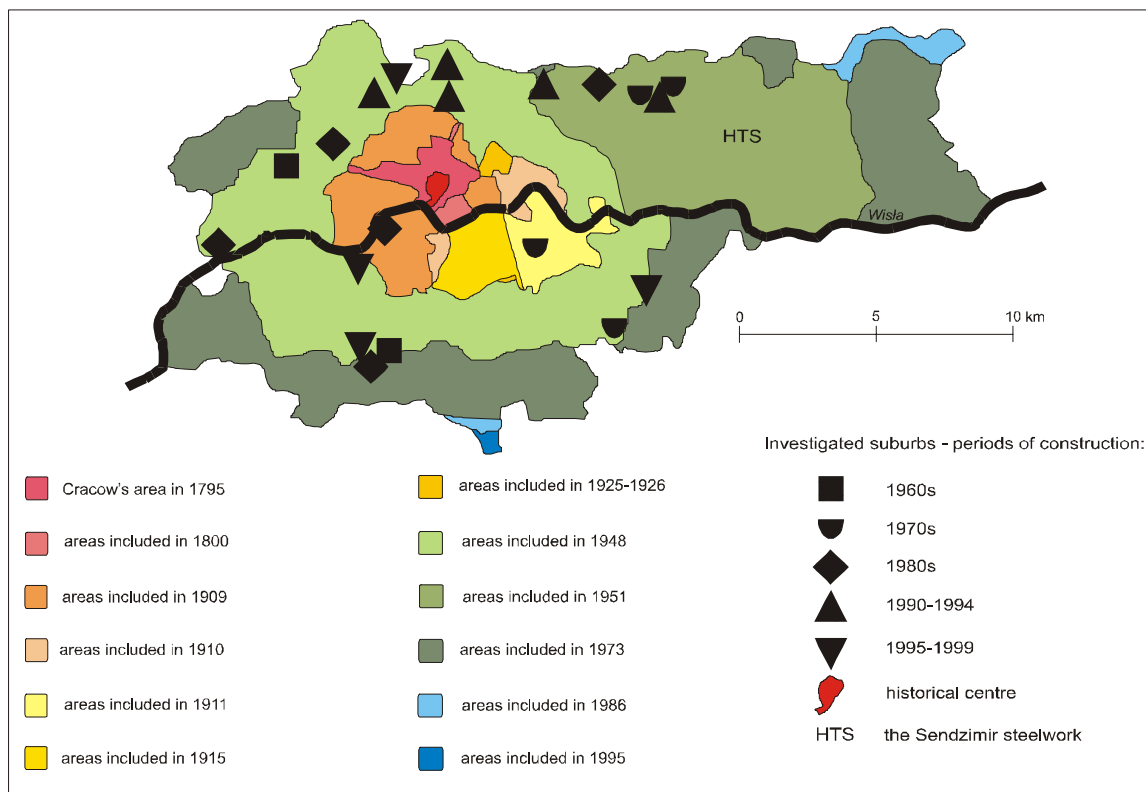


Figure 1. Evolution of administrative boundaries of cracow between the late of 18<sup>th</sup> c. and 1995  
 Source: based on data obtained from Atlas (1988), Encyklopedia (2000)

The basic method of the field research was that of interviewing the settlement inhabitants. In this method, used for descriptive, explanatory and exploratory purposes, individual people constitute the analysed units. This method is also very popular in filling data gaps in studies of populations too large for a direct observation. The author made a four-page questionnaire with 24 questions aiming to collect 2000 interviews.

During a preparatory stage, written announcements were distributed to inform the inhabitants of the interview and its aims. After first six-week field investigation, some additional interviews were carried out, but the final number of responses fell short of the 2000 mark, mostly because of the local population's reluctance towards this form of research. Out of some 1000 filled questionnaires 717 were qualified to the further analyses. The results presented in the article refer to 717 households with 2538 people, of which 717 were the interviewed respondents and 1821 were members of their households. This constitutes ca. 0.5% of the total Cracow population, but in excess of 8% of single-family house dwellers, the total number of which is estimated at ca. 30,000. As regards the analysed 20 suburbs, the share of the interviewed population amounts to 20-60%. The results concerning the demographics of the respondents and their families are presented in a suburb age breakdown. This classification was carried out in two variants: a) on the basis of the median of the year of construction beginning, and b) – using the median of the construction completion. In the case of the oldest suburbs the author also analysed quartiles of the construction start/end date, because of the long construction periods characteristic under the Communism. The analysed settlements were then allocated to four decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> c., with the last decade of particularly extensive development further subdivided into two subperiods, i.e. 1991-94 and 1995-1999. Therefore, the suburbs from the 60s, 70s, 80s and the first and second half of the 90s were distinguished, by the year of their construction beginning and end. This division was selected to achieve the main research objective, i.e. to identify and classify the Cracow suburbs and to propose their typology. As it was stated in the hypothesis, the inhabitants of the suburbs displayed socio-demographic features different to those of the rest of the urban population. The above presented division makes possible an analysis of the relationships between the particular suburbs and their generations.

### 3. Western versus Polish suburbs

The terms *suburb* and *suburbanisation* originated from the United States and Western Europe and have a long history in the literature (Donaldson 1969, Berry 1973, Knox 1994, Larkham 1999). In Poland they are

often neglected or imprecisely defined even if they are often found in publications, usually the theoretical ones (Iwanicka-Lyra 1990). The author does not intend to discuss urbanisation of particular regions or countries of the world, but wants to enumerate basic differences and similarities between large cities of the broadly understood West and those of the former central-command economies. What is important in this context are phenomena organising the spatial and social structures of the cities and the accompanying forms, such as the suburbs. The shape and functions of the suburbs and their population are reference points for the hypothesis (verified in this volume) that there are in Cracow settlement forms that can be referred to as *suburbs*. Therefore, single-family residential housing zones are compared to the suburbs existing in the United States, Canada, Australia, Western Europe and Japan, i.e. countries with the world's highest urbanisation indices.

Studies on urbanisation, commenced in the United States in 1920s, produced various suburb definitions, according to demographical, economic, legal, political and lifestyle aspects (Węgleński 1988, Angotti 1993, Johnston et al., eds. 2001, Lewis 2001). Devised at the dawn of the American suburban development, those definitions are of limited use in the investigations of contemporary Polish cities where suburbanisation has only just began. The old Western-European and American suburbs are subject to a functional transformation, the process of *suburb urbanisation* (Knox 1982, Dear, Flusty 1998).

Considering all the criteria cited in the literature, the author found the following universal features of the suburbs:

- ◆ a considerable distance from the city-centre
- ◆ urban type of the settlement
- ◆ a dominance of the residential function
- ◆ single-family house domination
- ◆ administrative autonomy
- ◆ good access to work places in the city-centre
- ◆ social homogeneity
- ◆ links with family cycle
- ◆ a considerable inflow of population from the inner city

As it was stated above, the author's objective was to identify and characterise the Cracow suburbs. If one accepts the suburb features listed above it is necessary to discuss to what extent the analysed single-family housing areas are similar to the typical Western suburbs, in order to point out whether those areas can be called *Cracow suburbs*.

There seem to exist two basic differences. The first is that of the scale of this settlement form, especially in the context of its distance from the city-centre, being the effect of the magnitude of the compared cities, i.e. their population and area. As Polish urban agglomerations, including Cracow, are clearly much smaller than the American ones, the scale of changes (even if their causes are similar) must be different too. Also the distance between the analysed settlements and the city-centre (the central city) is smaller. While in the most urbanised countries several decades of intensive residential suburbanisation produced vast suburb zones, the Cracow suburbs are but a symptom, the first evidence of this process within the urban space. The return of the market economy and the growing social polarisation are reflected both in the social processes and the urban space. But those changes were initiated only 10 years ago and their spatial scale (in km<sup>2</sup>) is still below that of Western suburbs. The other cause is the historic one. Even if one does not consider the history of various cities or general history (Bagnasco, Gales, eds., 2000, Scott, Soja 1996) one cannot omit an influence on Polish society and the urban space of the central-command economy, which prevailed in Poland for over 40 years. Many authors maintain that this factor considerably distorted the "regular" development of cities in Poland, which may now be referred to as post-socialist cities (Węclawowicz 1997, 1999, Więclaw-Michniewska 2006).

The systemic transformation of Poland during 1990s also featured the ground rent aspect. Traditionally, this was an important factor in the organisation of the urban space since the appearance of the first industrial cities. Ground rent influences the prices according to the site of the given area within the urban region and to the construction activity rate. In Cracow the influence of the ground rent on suburb location can be generally analysed since 1989, when ground rent made its comeback together with the market economy, even if urban neighbourhoods and areas had been considered 'better' or 'worse' before (against principles of the centrally managed economy and in accordance with inhabitants' views) (Prawelska-Skrzypek 1989). This distinction was expressed by housing preferences and the choice of the area for a new house construction, which also had an influence on the price of land. Actually, if the location for a new development is sought, especially a large scale one where the developer offers an opportunity of purchasing houses in a new complex, the

relationship between the land price and the distance from the city-centre is seen as important. In the new Polish reality the biggest change was the replacement of the sole state-owned developer by numerous private ones, where the competitiveness is linked with the ground rent differentiation. On the other hand, the high (barrier-like) price of land in Poland makes the investment costs higher, reduces the rate of construction of single-family housing and influences their location, sometimes against the rules of ground rent, but fit to financial possibilities of potential users.

The second feature, fundamentally differentiating the Cracow suburbs from their Western counterparts is an administrative independence of the latter. This is a result of a the different evolution of the European and American cities, which has led to spatial and social differences. The European cities, often founded according to a plan and limited in their development by numerous historic features, must be different from the American ones – younger and growing in an uncontrolled manner. Their vast areas have more autonomy, due to a more free market mechanism, less centralisation and control. Moreover, the administrative subordination should not be treated too categorically, as urban boundaries change, although those boundaries in Western Europe tend to be stable regardless of the urban spatial expansion. In Cracow the city expanded by incorporating adjacent areas. Therefore, the analysed suburbs are currently within the city limits while in Western cities they would have been administratively independent.

The suburb size and administrative situation are linked to their financial, administrative and spatial organisation. While those issues are not significant in the Cracow suburbs, the tax system and local government are popular topics among researchers in Western countries, especially in the US (Davis, Edner 1993, Hill, Wolman 1997). In Poland differences in taxation have began to stimulate a trend of migration of the construction activity and that of economy toward the suburban zone, where such costs are usually lower. As regards the Cracow suburbs far more important were the requirements of the spatial management plans, land management policies and the demand/supply in the residential market.

Another aspect of difference is the accessibility of the city-centre jobs. It is widely accepted that the dynamic growth of the suburbs was made possible due to the development of the means of transport including railway, trolleybus private cars (Dowling 2000, Filion 2001). The latter factor was crucial at the initial stages of the suburban development, especially in the United States, although it did not play the decisive location role. In Cracow access to transport remains an important factor of the suburban settlements localisation. They are usually located in areas with good transport links, i.e. close to the routes leading to the city centre or out of Cracow. This statement refers also to the newest and the most remote suburbs, which are served by the public or private urban/suburban bus lines. This is one feature that differentiates the Cracow suburbs from the Western European, and especially American suburbs. In the latter not only is access to public transport is not a localisation criterion, but the fast development of suburbs has initially been possible due to the expansion of private car ownership.

Other features, such as the urban type of buildings, the dominance of single-family structures and of the residential function are similar in both compared groups of suburbs, therefore the author does not leave them without a further comment.

The last group of the analysed features is the population. In the Western suburbs it tends to show a considerable homogeneity in being mostly middle class, at the full family stage of the lifecycle and having usually arrived from the city-centre. A considerable social polarisation is typical for most of the cities in the highly urbanised countries, and in the case of the United States the contrast between the city-centre and the suburbs is deepened by the racial segregation within the urban space (Angotti 1993, Rodgers 1997).

In Poland the urban socio-spatial structures began to change in the 1970s, which was accelerated in the 1980s and 1990s (Węclawowicz 1997). Certain socio-professional groups had their share of population increased in some areas at a cost of the other ones. The high percentages of the 'better' groups typically feature in zones with better access to services and better natural conditions. Another dimension of those changes refers to the life cycle of the urban population. The various housing types and residential conditions depended on the defined social groups. The third dimension, referred to as the 'migration factor' shows the concentration of groups of defined demographical/professional features within the urban space. The degree of social polarisation has been growing and the inhabitants of the analysed areas differ from those in Cracow (or even Poland) and are similar to the population of the Western suburbs (Więclaw 2006).

Summing up this comparison of suburbs defined above with the areas of single-family housing in Cracow, the author finds that apart from the scale and the administrative situation, certain features typical for Western suburbs are also observed in the analysed settlements. One can therefore refer to them as the suburbs with certain characteristic peculiar for Polish cities and the Polish society.

#### 4. Suburban communities in Cracow

The aim of this study was to prove the thesis that in the 1990s, in Cracow and its functional urban region there was a rapid growth in single-family development that can be referred to as suburbs. This form of settlement is made up of residential zones characterized by single-family houses with a predominance of terraced houses, and their dwellers stand out from the whole of the urban population with their characteristics.

The spatial development of the discussed settlement form manifests itself in the rising number of such estates during the last few decades. The classification carried out on the basis of the median of the years of construction beginning in each of the 20 analyses developments and of the median of the years of construction completion in these developments has confirmed the rise in the number of suburbs. On examining them with special attention paid to the years of construction beginning it was found that in the 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s the suburbs were built to the numbers of 2, 4, 5 and 9 respectively. However, if the years of construction completion (the dates, on which the inhabitants moved into the new development) are considered, the numbers of suburbs in individual decades are 1, 1, 5 and 14 respectively. The distinct development of the discussed form of housebuilding industry can be confirmed also by the considerable number of projects being currently in progress. 25 such residential zones, of which 23 are situated within the administrative boundaries of Cracow, were built in 2003. These are accompanied by equally rapid growth in the apartment-type development, and it is just the form of building that is typical (apart from the single-family development) of some parts of the suburb-like cities of Europe.

The changes in the form of housing development are largely caused by Poland's socio-economic transformations, especially by the reintroduction of the market economy rules. This has resulted in, among other things, the process of polarization of the Polish people, which becomes more and more clearly visible, and also in the emergence of a new group of people standing out with their wealth and socio-professional position. This group is referred to as the so called 'new Polish middle class'. The other effects of the social and political transformations mentioned above include rapid growth in the real estate market, establishment of numerous property development companies and emergence of new forms of housing development, which, on account of the higher standard, suit the groups of the wealthier, ranked higher in the social hierarchy.

As opposed to the other forms of single-family development, suburbs are inhabited by people standing out (from the residents of Cracow and the overall urban population of Poland) with different demographic and social structures, which are similar in character to those of Western suburbs. Generally, the residents of Cracow suburbs stand out with a large share of people in the working age, and at the same time, with the share of pre-working age population that is considerably larger than the average for Cracow, and with a smaller share of people in the post-working age. Within the working age population, a decided predominance of people in the mobile age was observed. The marital status typical of the majority of residents of the studied suburbs is married, and on average, there are more married people in the suburbs than in the whole Cracow. The characteristic of the studied population is the generally high education level. The proportion of graduates is here more than five times as large as the average for Poland, and twice as large as that for the functional urban region of Cracow. The number of suburb residents with secondary education level is twice as large as the average for the population of Poland.

Another characteristic of the residents of the developments in question is their high socio-professional status (*Figure 2*). A decided predominance of specialists and large enough shares of service employees and private entrepreneurs were observed here, whereas the share of workers was quite minute. At the same time, there is a large share of people employed with services, especially the market ones. In the years 1988-1999 the employment rate rose in market services and fell in the industry, construction industry and in non-market services. There appear differences in the socio-professional position according to sex, to women's disadvantage, especially among private entrepreneurs, the number of whom rose definitely during the economic transformation of Poland.

Among the socio-economic features the family structure of the suburb residents comes to the fore. There is a strong predominance of complete families and a small share of single-parent families in the area in question (*Figure 3*). This involves dominance of households run by three or four people, whereas the share of one-person households is very small. Compared to the whole functional region of Cracow, the residents of the studied suburbs are characterized also by a high degree of affluence. What distinguishes them from the other residents are their pastimes which are often sport activities and tourism. In general, the population in question is characterized by a high rank of the education level and by high enough ranks of affluence and the socio-professional position, which altogether make up the high level of the social status of the Cracow suburb residents.

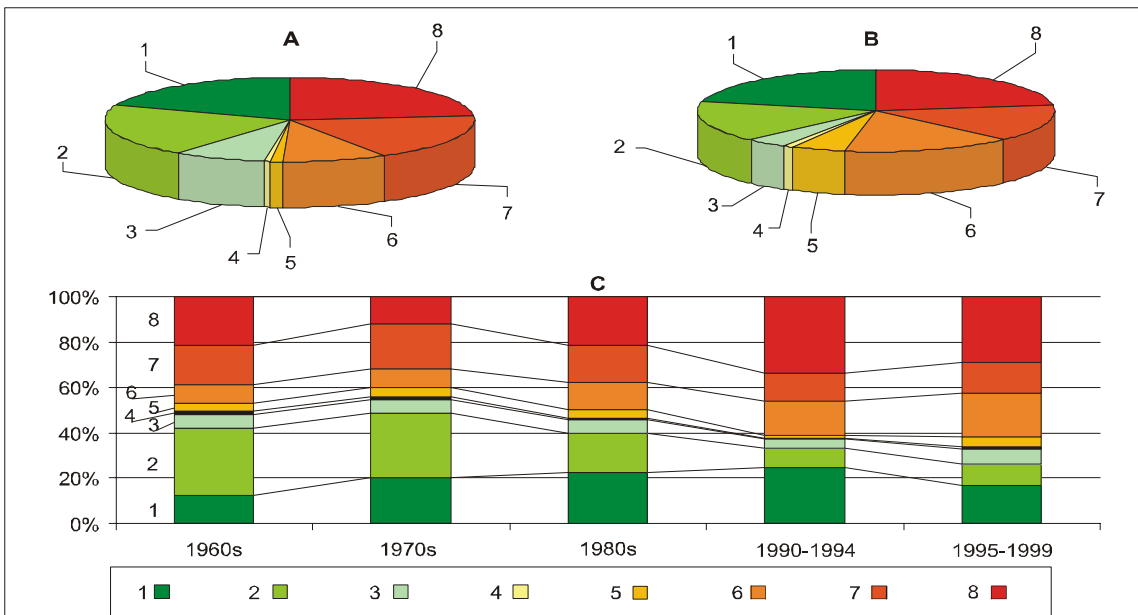


Figure 1. Socio-professionals structure of respondents and their families according to professional classification and by earned and non-earned sources of income: A – women, B – men, C – total (by the decade of the suburbs construction start)

Notes: 1 – pupils and students, 2 – retirees and pensioners, 3 – unemployed persons, 4 – persons employed abroad, 5 – workers, 6 – private entrepreneurs, 7 – clerks and service workers, 8 – professionals

Source: author's elaborations

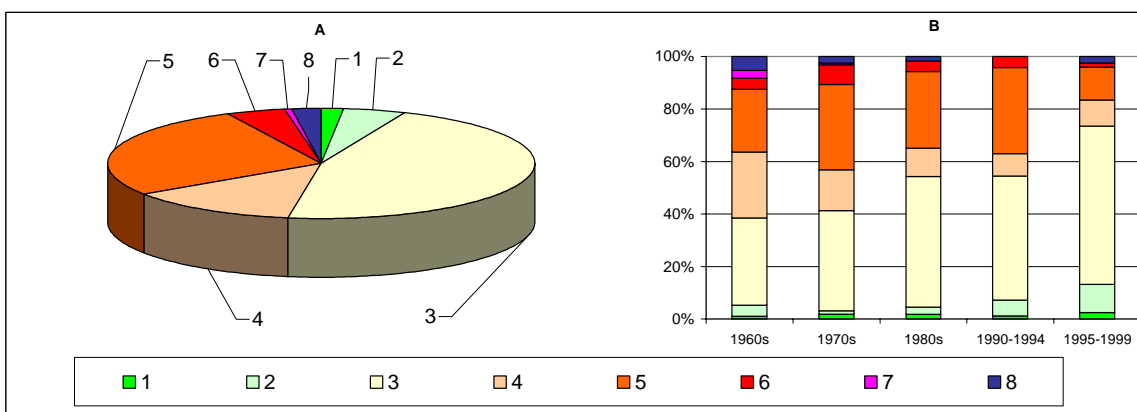


Figure 3. Family types according to family life cycle stages in studied suburbs

Notes: 1 – young single person, 2-6 family: 2 – young couple, 3 – young, 4 – old couple, 5 – old, 6 – single-parent, 7 – related persons, 8 – old single persons

Source: author's elaborations

The research has proved that the discussed social groups stand out with different preferences in the choice of the dwelling place, which largely involves the perceiving of different quarters as attractive areas for settlement as well as the degree of affluence of potential migrants. The present residents of the Cracow suburbs have come mainly from the apartment bloc housing zone, and in the second place, from the outskirts of the Cracow centre. What fundamentally mattered in taking the decision to migrate to the suburbs were housing considerations, especially the desire to improve the dwelling conditions and the higher housing standard offered by single-family development as compared to the residential blocks. The family status structure for the migrants (the predominance of complete families) is to a large extent in conformity with the respective stages of the family life cycle.

## 5. Conclusions

Generally, the listed differences in the social and demographical structures of the suburb population in comparison with other parts of Cracow, or other Polish cities, are the most visible in the youngest suburbs. The trends observed recently in the employment and internal urban migrations and most of all the socio-demographic features in the suburbs built in 1990s are increasingly similar to those in the Western suburbs. This fact, together with growing number and area of such the settlements make the author believe that the development of the suburbs will continue in Cracow, as a symptom of the city's modernisation.

The purpose of conducted researches was to determine the intensification degree of suburbanization and its consequences that can be described by: the increase of the area occupied by semi-detached houses, which is concentrated in the form of suburban development and which leads to significant changes, i.e.: in the way of the city and suburbs land development. It also causes changes in the distribution of people in metropolitan areas, it is responsible for formation of homogenous societies, it affects changes in the lifestyle and the quality of living for citizens who occupy the new urban regions. It also strengthens the regenerated self-governments organization and causes changes in the land infrastructure management, what is connected with the new tasks in the framework of structural planning.

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