

# POLISH RURAL SOCIOLOGY IN THE PERIOD OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** The aim of the present study is to attempt to evaluate the Polish rural sociology of development during the period referred to as a political and social transformation (1989–2019). The time of this transformation had brought up new and difficult challenges for the rural sociology, urging it to examine the social effects of the transition process in the rural society, moving from a totalitarian system to a democratic one, from centrally managed economy to market economy. Theoretical and methodological orientations, which prevailed throughout the entire period of changes, have been analyzed here by taking into consideration the most important publications, which appeared in Poland after 1989 under the banner of social research on countryside and agriculture. Moreover, attention was given to problem areas particularly intensely penetrated through empirical research such as: transformations in the agriculture as well as within the social and professional group of farmers, standard of living of rural residents, changes of the local rural communities. In the final part of the article, our attention was focused on the outlook and possibilities to confront the challenges of the future with regard to rural areas in the situation of constant weakening of the institutional base of the Polish rural sociology.

**Key words:** Polish rural sociology, political and social transformation, theoretical and methodological conceptions of development of rural areas, future of rural areas

**Podsumowanie:** Celem tego opracowania jest próba oszacowania stanu polskiej socjologii wsi po 25 latach jej rozwoju, w okresie nazywanym transformacją ustrojową (1989–2019). Postawił on przed socjologią wsi nowe i trudne wyzwania, związane z analizowaniem społecznych skutków procesu przechodzenia społeczeństwa

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wiejskiego od systemu totalitarnego do demokratycznego, od gospodarki centralnie sterowanej do gospodarki rynkowej. Na podstawie lektury najważniejszych publikacji, jakie w latach 1989–2014 ukazały się w Polsce pod szyldem społecznych badań wsi i rolnictwa, podano analizie teoretyczne i metodologiczne orientacje dominujące w całym okresie zmian. Ponadto szczególnie intensywnie empirycznie penetrowane obszary problemowe: przeobrażenia w rolnictwie i przekształcenia w obrębie grupy społeczno-zawodowej rolników; warunki życia mieszkańców wsi oraz przemiany wiejskich społeczności lokalnych. W końcowej części artykułu skoncentrowano uwagę na możliwościach sprostania wyzwaniom przyszłości obszarów wiejskich, w sytuacji systematycznego osłabiania zaplecza instytucjonalnego polskiej socjologii wsi.

**Słowa kluczowe:** polska socjologia wsi, transformacja ustrojowa, teoretyczne i metodologiczne koncepcje rozwoju obszarów wiejskich, przyszłość obszarów wiejskich

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## 1. Introduction

The 1980s brought up new and difficult challenges for the Polish rural sociology, connected with analysis of social consequences of the historic events: revolution of Solidarność (1980/81) and appointment of the non-communist cabinet of Tadeusz Mazowiecki (1989). The latter event was in its essence tantamount to the beginning of a process which is still going on today and is known as transformation of social and political system – it means evolutionary social change consisting of a transition from totalitarian regime to democratic social order in its political dimension, from centralistic economy to market economy in its economic dimension and from society enslaved by the ideology of governing party (Polish United Workers' Party) to pluralistic and civic society.

Unfortunately, as Winclawski (2012) wrote in the last part of his paper dedicated to the history of Polish rural sociology in the period between the two world wars (1818–1939) and in the Polish People's Republic (1945–1989), the theoretical and conceptual framework, elaborated in the whole post-war development of the discipline, turned out to be unprepared when confronted with growing problems of agriculture and rural population, arising in the wake of political and social transformation. While generally sharing this opinion of the outstanding Polish sociologist, it should be noted that the above said helplessness appeared on various levels. Surely, it was and still is a failure of sociological theory, of the theoretical base of Polish rural sociology, which does not allow (by the way, the same goes for general sociology) to explain the rules of social changes or let alone to predict their social effects. In other terms, Polish rural sociology was unable to fulfill its scientific obligations or was fulfilling this responsibility in such limited way. Instead, Polish rural sociology performed much better with regard to ideological functions – both in the apologetical as well as in the unmasking variation – trying to influence and to shape in this manner societal practice.

## 2. Dispute over imponderabilia – technocratic and humanistic visions of development of countryside, agriculture and rural areas

Through the political, social and economic reforms which were initiated in the late 1980s, the Polish countryside and agriculture entered a phase of changes that are often described as adaptive processes of countryside and agriculture to development conditions in a capitalistic society. According to the assumptions of the so-called Balcerowicz Plan<sup>3</sup> (a strategy of economic policy implemented in societal practice at that time) only the market model of economy would have been able to ensure the required direction of social changes within the countryside and agriculture (similarly to the entire society and its economy) because

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<sup>3</sup> The Balcerowicz Plan is the colloquial name of the reforms aiming at achieving macro-economic stability of the Polish state which were prepared in the end of 1989 and implemented in the beginning of 1990 under the leadership of Leszek Balcerowicz, Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister in the cabinet of Tadeusz Mazowiecki.

exclusively, this type of regulation would have guaranteed fast development, minimizing the costs of protectionism (See inter alia: Balcerowicz and Banaszekiewicz, 2000, or Balcerowicz, 1997). Proponents of that extremely liberal socio-economic doctrine criticized the protectionism because of its excessive support for the agricultural sector in the time of real socialism (1945–1989). They argued that by maximally restraining the policy of state intervention, farmers would have been made to enter the sphere of goods turnover, which would have stimulated their own entrepreneurship and contributed at the same time to modernization of the Polish countryside.

Sociology, including the rural sociology, particularly in the first stage of changes, mostly showed understanding not only for such doctrinal options but for their practical consequences as well. An exception, rather proving the rule, was the way in which the liquidation of the state agricultural sector (State Agriculture Farms and Agricultural Cooperatives) was carried out, leading to a chronic and often hereditary marginalisation of over 1.5 million agricultural workers and members of their families<sup>4</sup>. By making reference – directly or indirectly – to different versions of positivism<sup>5</sup>, known in the form of various theories such as: modernization theory (industrialization of agriculture and urbanisation of countryside), endogenous growth theory (rural areas as city outskirts), regulative theories (management of development of the countryside and agriculture)<sup>6</sup>, allegedly validated by societal practice in Western societies, the opinion was sometimes formulated that Poland would be entering the complex and difficult stage of social and political changes with a structural heritage that was unsuitable for capitalist transformations and whose most important problem (albeit not the only one) constituted the population of rural areas, including first of all peasants, with their strong sense of group solidarity and collective claims against the state as distinctive characteristics left by the state socialism<sup>7</sup>. It was argued that improving the quality of life of almost 40% of the population living in underdeveloped rural areas, including owners of over 2 million of relatively small agricultural farms, would require radical changes such as: western-style industrialization of agriculture (sometimes referred to as „farmization”), urbanisation of countryside (it means implementation of urban rationality to the patterns of life of rural population), and de-agrarization, which means a significant reduction in the number of agricultural farms and peasant families. Upon this way of thought – reconstructed here certainly not without some simplifications – focused numerous studies and analyses devoted to pro-capitalist changes in the Polish agriculture, featuring the traditional peasant becoming agriculturist or farmer with a mentality of a capitalist business owner<sup>8</sup>. The authors underscored the exogenous (i.e., mainly external such as technocratic, urban, European, global) character of development incentives, which made both farmerization of Polish agriculture as well as adoption of the operating patterns from the modernized rural areas in the West necessary by means of a search for a possibility of successful improvement of the low level of various types of resources: material, human, cultural or social, needed in order to build a citizen society (Duczkowska-Małysz, 1998, Gorlach and Pyrc (2000) or Krzymieniewska, 2000, Szafraniec, 2006).

This first type of theoretical and empirical orientation of the Polish rural sociology during the period of social and political transformation had to face at first timid, but then increasing,

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<sup>4</sup> Socio-economic, but above all social, consequences of the liquidation of the State Agricultural Farms, were one of the most important and empirically most extensively explored research areas of the Polish rural sociology in the entire analyzed period, reflected also in many publications. See inter alia: Korab (1997), Fedyszak-Radziejowska (1998), Zabłocki et al 1999, Publishing House of the Nicolaus Copernicus University, Tarkowska and Korzeniewska (2002), Sikora (2006), Karwacki, (2002).

<sup>5</sup> We attribute to positivism, probably not quite right, the view that changes are of natural origin, thus reflecting objective laws which are generally independent of humans. Following this way of reasoning, the countryside is governed by the same laws as all other forms of social life, included the city in the first place, ranking however at least one step up the ladder of social progress.

<sup>6</sup> The same theoretical conceptions had been referred to in the Polish People's Republic, but then they took a different wording: *socialist industrialization* and *modernization*.

<sup>7</sup> This opinion was formulated by Adamski (1995), author of the conception of Polish peasantry as a specific formation shaped by real socialism. See also: Mokrzycki (1991) or Rychard, and Federowicz (1993).

<sup>8</sup> This important trend in the Polish rural sociology during the period of political and social transformation is represented primarily by numerous studies and books of Krzysztof Gorlach (1995, 2001, 2009).

criticism, voiced already in the 1990s by sociologists with less technocratic orientation, who were supported by a growing number of agricultural economists, social geographers, cultural anthropologists, ecologists, spatial planning engineers and other representatives of the widely understood social sciences, which, at least within the Polish tradition, have always sympathised with the rural sociology. Halamska (2011) demonstrates a multi-coloured picture of the present associations between the Polish rural sociology and many other social science disciplines. Bukraba-Rylska (2012) outlines their position perhaps in the most radical manner when she points out that proponents of modernizational conceptions not only are leading the rural sociology astray, but they are repeating the fundamental mistakes and deviations of the period of real socialism, when „... *the social science was seeking to serve the dominating ideology and additionally was too eager to imitate foreign patterns which had been shaped on the basis of different social and cultural realities...*” Wilkin (1995). In his opinion, the ideology of socialist industrialization of agriculture and of urbanisation of countryside has been replaced in the 1990s by equally ideological doctrine of the invisible hand of the free market, whereas the alien patterns of Soviet-style collectivization gave way to the patterns of Western-style farmers, pursuing in their economic activities the rationality principles of business policy.

The criticism, even if devastating, against the Balcerowicz model of the social transition in countryside and agriculture, was not and still is not devoid of rational arguments. Practical experiences, even during the first stage of the transformation process (1990–1995), induced to formulate the assertion that agriculture is a specific kind of productive activity, in many segments essentially different from industrial activity, whereas the countryside represents a particular type of social environment. Both – agriculture as well as countryside – require not only increased attention, but also a kind of protection (ergo something like protectionism, which was condemned by liberals). Agriculture deserves it because of the special nature of manufactured goods (food), countryside in turn deserves it as the depositary of natural and cultural properties. In both cases, resources of utmost importance for the survival of human civilization are involved.

By applying this more humanistic perspective in the examination of the liberal strategy of transition in the Polish agriculture, which has been implemented since the beginning of 1990s, the well-known rural economist, Wilkin, drew attention to the superficial character of observed mechanisms aiming at adjustment to market economy, consisting mainly of the replacement of capital factors by labour and in the incapability of peasant husbandry to finance its own development. Wilkin divided the first period of pro-capitalist changes into 3 phases: general anarchization of economic life, macroeconomic stabilisation and the stage of immature capitalism. He pointed out that each one of these phases made us to witness a drama of agricultural economy: the system transformations led to radical deterioration of livelihood situation of farming families and bring about no desirable structural, large-scale changes so as to ensure success in confrontation with the West European agriculture. Some sociologists reported in turn that modernization, in the case of Poland sometimes defined as “modernization of peripheral capitalism” (Bohle, 2002), gives rise to a growing number of contradictions in the countryside and agriculture. The result is that both, countryside and agriculture, are becoming problem areas – by the way, even so in the countries considered as models worthy to imitate. The studies reported enormous and sometimes entirely irrational expenditures on industrial agriculture on the one hand and the process of its marginalization as a source of income for farming families on the other hand. In the same context, the authors stressed the growing problem of structural unemployment in rural areas, generated by workers losing their jobs in the wake of the concentration of land property or as a result of agricultural mechanization matched with the shrinkage of employment opportunities in industry and cities. Moreover, modernization of countryside and agriculture was made accountable for unfavourable demographic changes (above all depopulation), for enlarging the scale of pathological phenomena, for blurring the specific character of local and regional cultures as well as for the emergence of numerous hazards for natural environment<sup>9</sup>. Many empirical studies, in

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<sup>9</sup> A vast overview of these issues offers the comprehensive study published in the aftermath of the international conference organized in 1996 in Toruń by the Institute of Development of Countryside and Agriculture of the Polish

particular during the second decade of the transition period, provided evidence that the announced changes in the mentality, way of life and style of work of owners of agricultural farms as well as the expected transformation of traditional countryside into a modern one, do not necessarily fit the model established by modernization theories. Instead, the changes go on in accord with other axioms which are very seldom a simple reflection of the patterns transposed from the Western societies (Bukraba-Rylska, 2012, Giordano, 2012).

In the 1990s, to the rescue of the ever-increasing – not only in Poland – reservations against the obligatory doctrine came and the societal practice in the form of growing consumer awareness as consumers were becoming gradually more sensitive to issues of health risks associated with the use of artificial fertilizers, crop protection chemicals, and growth promoting additives in animal food production or genetic manipulations. Citizen movements and non-governmental organizations were popping up like mushrooms, voicing their opinions in favour of more sustained strategies of development of the countryside and agriculture. Owing to those endeavours, it came to modifications of the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union that were perceived by a notable part of the so-called opinion-forming groups as an admission of failure on the part of political elites to realize the modernization model of development and transformation preached by them, at least in rural areas.

The result of the above described phenomena has been quite a visible, theoretical and empirical re-orientation, which took place in the Polish rural sociology, prompting the search for new solutions in economic and social life, sometimes by referring to technological rationality (ecological agriculture) as well as organizational solutions (family farming, local community) of the pre-industrial society, which are regarded – let us remember – in the conceptual framework of modernization theories as a symptom of underdevelopment. In the so-called new rural sociology, also known under the name of sociology of rural areas (Gorlach, 2004), the question emerges of how the changes would have to continue. In this connection, a clearly outlined perspective of an anti-modernization alternative<sup>10</sup> arises as an attempt to return to relatively normal agriculture and to approach the countryside as a whole of timeless and immeasurable values of ecological and cultural character.

### 3. Theoretical and methodological foundations of research

In the introductory section of our reflections, we have drawn attention to the statement that the Polish rural sociology of the transformation period has been rather unsuccessful in its scientific functions, as it has established no cohesive theoretical framework, which would make the explanation possible and prediction of ongoing social changes. Instead, it remained restricted to descriptions of the social process by means of many diverse theoretical conceptions. As it seems, we have to do in this case with the same pluralism of ordering and explaining conceptions as that ascribed by Gorlach (2018) to contemporary studies of the countryside in the Western societies of global post-modernism. This formulation denotes frequently enough the reference in Poland – in many possible ways, often only in form of declarations – to a certain set of assertions and judgements associated with theories of both kinds – belonging to sociological canon of classics as well as suggested by the present sociological fashion.

To the first group (sociological canon) belong most certainly: **modernization theories** (development process of rural areas considered with regard to their industrialization, which means under the aspect of urbanisation and industrialisation); **dependency theories**, in their more pessimistic version (fixation of the imbalance between the core and the periphery, i.e., also between the city and the countryside) and in their less pessimistic version alike (emancipation of the periphery due to positive influence and support from metropolitan areas,

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Academy of Sciences in Warsaw and by the Institute of Sociology of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, which are regarded as leading scientific centres in Poland, devoted to rural sociology. Wierzbicki and Kaleta (1998).

<sup>10</sup> In the Polish rural sociology, this alternative appeared as soon as in the beginning of the 1990s under the name of *renewal* or *revitalisation* of the countryside (Wieruszewska, 1992, Kaleta, 1996).

i.e., development of rural areas in consequence of contacts with urban areas); **theories of integrated development** (social change as bottom-up process with integral and harmonized character). The last-mentioned theories are reflected in the rural sociology in the most significant way in the conceptual forms of local community activization and development, nowadays generally identified with the issues of increasing the *social capital* and building up the *citizen society* or looking for a *new localism* or a new meaning of *location*.

The second – the more up-to-date or simply the more fashionable one – of the above named types of theoretical references which are present in the Polish rural sociology of the transformation period seems to be represented by a **group of regulative theories** (the countryside – together with the agriculture naturally incorporated in its structures – is a generally self-regulating system, but like all other social systems, it requires from time to time certain institutional interventions) and by **theories of sustainable development**.

The latter are the opposite of technocratic conceptions originating from thinking in terms of modernization. Within the realm of rural sociology, they are expressed by already mentioned **paradigms of renovation or revitalisation of rural areas**. In recent years, attempts have been made to analyse the phenomena taking place in rural areas with the aid of **theories of information society and network society**<sup>11</sup>.

Characteristic not only of the Polish rural sociology is the lack of any coherent theory of development of rural areas in the post-modern society. Therefore, the rural sociology is doomed to engage in armchair reasoning or speculations. On the one hand, there is a tendency ..... *that is visible in the entire sociological theory, reflecting the process of „knocking down the walls”, of sacrificing theory on the altar of multi- or even transdisciplinarity* (Gorlach, Klekotko and Nowak, 2012). On the other hand, even if some theoretical assumptions are formulated in the research, they quite often are not applied in order to explain or at least to sort out actual facts reflecting societal practice. .... *A lot [...] seems to boil down only to a simple description of the distribution of the respondents' answers related to selected components of the social space of the countryside; no attempts of theoretical generalizations are made, which can be either the result of lack of an appropriate conceptualization of research or the consequence of insufficient analytical tools of the authors*<sup>12</sup>. In my opinion, this is also and first of all a symptom of the weakness of theoretical framework of our discipline. This theoretical framework is an expression of .....*the nature per se of ethnocentric prejudices, emphasising and conclusively perpetuating belief in the superiority of the social order in the Western Europe and North America in relation to all other forms of social organization. It includes the danger of creating false stereotypes, having a powerful and negative impact upon social planning* (Giordano, 2012).

The methodological foundations of the Polish rural sociology were based already in the first period of its development (untill 1939) on the conviction, stemming from the humanistic sociology of Florian Znaniecki and the interpretative sociology of Max Weber, saying that sociology should explain the phenomena and processes which take place in the society. To explain means here first of all to understand the sense of social relationships between people. This understanding is possible only by combining two ways of cognition: rational, making use of the logical and mathematical apparatus, and the more emotional, using our human ability to experience occurring events (Vonderlach, 1990).

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<sup>11</sup> In the studies of this kind, the assumption is made that also in rural areas processes take place which are objectified in the network architecture: such as for instance relativization of time and space, looking for a certain type of knowledge and for access to information as a pledge of success in business and in life, transforming social structure by way of formation of new social classes and above all by cyber-connectedness of the majority of social phenomena. These factors are accountable for existing social and cultural differences of European villages on the one hand and for processes of uniformization of the cultural standard in Europe's rural areas on the other hand. A relatively rare example of this type of considerations in the Polish rural sociology (but for the time-being only theoretically) has been published by Gorlach and Klekotko (2013).

<sup>12</sup> K.Gorlach, M.Klekotko and P.Nowak have formulated this view based on two examined collective studies: Halamska, (2008) and Podedworna (2010). It can be argued however that authors of several hundreds of other studies of this type which were published in the years 1990-2014 committed the same „sin”.

The latter way of thinking has found its eminent reflection most notably in the social studies about countryside, carried out by means of biographic and monographic methods, due to which these studies have turned out easily to be the most identifiable in the scientific world till this present day. Although this type of research quite certainly has not prevailed for various reasons<sup>13</sup> in the period examined here, it has nevertheless played an important role in the Polish rural sociology of the past three decades, serving not infrequently to the purpose of falsification of diagnoses and predictions formulated on the base of the so-called obligatory theory and of quantitative research studies<sup>14</sup>.

As a rather symbolical form of continuation of the monographic trend after 1989, it should be considered the third attempt of description of the village Żmiąca<sup>15</sup>, delivered by Michał Łuczewski, a sociologist of the youngest generation, who in 2007 in his dissertation *Doświadczenie narodowe w życiu codziennym. Problemowa monografia wsi Żmiąca: 1370–2007* [National experience in everyday life. Problem-related monograph of the village Żmiąca: 1370–2007]<sup>16</sup> came back to the most famous picture of the Polish countryside.

An even more substantial token of commitment to this less rationalized model of sociological practice is the living presence of the so-called anthropological perspective in the Polish studies devoted to forms and directions of the countryside development, including for instance, its widely understood culture. The methodological approach is characterized here by a certain persistence of cognitive perspectives: firstly, skepticism towards too frequent sociological generalizations; secondly, consistent application of the principles of inductive cognition and mistrusting the rules of deductive cognition; thirdly, specific set of research tools with distinguished qualitative character and domination of narrative knowledge as well as preferences for reconstruction of social processes in both the diachronic and synchronic perspective. Such a way of conducting research seems to allow gaining insights into regularities and mechanisms of social life by interpreting the relationships between cultural foundations of individual personalities and changes taking place in economic, political and moral dimensions of their existence, which is very desirable in a situation of obliterating disparities in the ways, standards and styles of rural and urban life at the same time as the respective differences are expanding in the sphere of meanings and values<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Kwaśniewicz (1999) voices the opinion that the main cause of this state of affairs is the low level of methodological awareness especially among the younger generation of sociologists

<sup>14</sup> An interesting example of this situation provide the studies on the self-organization of rural communities, carried out by Maria Wieruszewska in the year 2002 in the Institute of Development of Countryside and Agriculture of the Polish Academy of Sciences, from which it followed that ..... *dynamic and open countryside in the region of Wielkopolska, which was „leading in terms of success” in the 1980s, is performing much worse under the new conditions (both in economy and with regard to citizens’ involvement of inhabitants) if compared with the „underdeveloped” countryside of the Podlasie region* (cited according to Bukraba-Rylska, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> Franciszek Bujak is commonly regarded as the initiator of the monographic trend in the Polish rural sociology. He published his study in 1903 on the village Żmiąca in Galicia, Eastern Europe (Bujak, 1903). The book is considered to be the first genuine monograph on a single village. The work initiated by Bujak has found many outstanding continuators like e.g. among others Kazimiera Zawistowicz-Adamska, Kazimierz Dobrowolski, Dyżma Gałąj, Wincent Styś, Maria Wieruszewska as well as Zbigniew Tadeusz Wierzbicki (1963), who published in 1961 a new monographic study on the village Żmiąca (see also Bukraba-Rylska, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> In 2012, the mentioned dissertation appeared in print as an edition of the prestigious series „Monographs of the Foundation for Polish Science” (Łuczewski, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> Undoubtedly, the most outstanding reflection of anthropological perspective in the Polish studies on the countryside of the transformation period can be found in the works of Izabella Bukraba-Rylska and Maria Wieruszewska, representing the community of rural sociologists at the Institute of Development of Countryside and Agriculture of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. See inter alia: Bukraba-Rylska (2000, 2005), Wieruszewska, (1997, 2011). To this trend should also be counted some of the publications of Józef Styk (Lublin, 1999) and Paweł Starosta (Łódź, 1995).

Among many hundreds of minor and major empirical studies which are characteristic for the trend of more rationalized research, it means the research taking resort to and quoting first and foremost reality descriptions based on indicators, diagnostic surveys (as a method of solving research problems) as well as techniques of interview and questionnaire (as prevailing procedure for establishing facts), the so called panel studies arouse particular interest. Such studies are in the Polish rural sociology of the transformation period associated most notably with the names of Krzysztof Gorlach, representing the sociology of Cracow (Jagellonian University), and of Krystyna Szafraniec<sup>18</sup>, representing the scientific community of sociologists in Toruń (Nicolaus Copernicus University). The result of the extraordinarily high activity of both named scholars have been empirical studies extending over many years, designed with perfection methodically as well as organizationally, conducted on representative population samples, initiated very early during the period of the so called real socialism (1985/87 – Gorlach; 1981/1982 – Szafraniec) and evaluated in the form of synthetic overviews in the second half of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The studies enabled to follow social processes taking place in rural areas in dynamic settings, it means from the perspective of different phases in the life of individuals and of different stages in the development of the Polish society. Owing to the applied procedure of repeatable tests, we have been able to follow the changes going on in the Polish countryside and within important groups of rural residents such as peasants, agriculturists, agricultural producers (Gorlach), school youngsters and young adults (Szafraniec), in the whole time of one of the most important periods in modern rural history, marked by three events ranking as really radical changes: last years of the so called real socialism and its decline; formation process of the new political system and transition from central economic planning to market economy ; entry of Poland into the structures of the European Union. We do not stretch the truth by stating that the mentioned research projects have constituted *sui generis* „value added” of the entire rural sociology in the examined period. It seems that more important than their significance for the state of theory or even the state of methodology of the subdiscipline has been their practical context because the results of those studies have had a decisive impact on identification of the principal trends of development and on interpretation of successes and failures of the Polish countryside and agriculture over the entire transformation period.

The stability of methodological foundations of the Polish rural sociology, in general promoting a good methodological level of empirical studies, means no absence of challenges in this field of our discipline.

#### **4. Challenges of the future**

The interest for the social class of peasants and for family farms, later on the issues concerning the nature of differences between the countryside and the city, which have determined the subject of the Polish rural sociology during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, seem to be slowly, but systematically, fading away to the margins of the discipline.

Even if we still accept the dogma of structural connectedness of rural areas with agriculture as true, we cannot disregard the by now obvious facts that this type of economic activity in the countryside is subjected to marginalisation. In Poland, like in all developed countries, the cultivation of plants and breeding of animals for some years already have not been sufficient to provide incomes, meeting the growing needs of farming family households, which makes to be common practice the diffusion of combined ways of satisfying the respective material needs.

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<sup>18</sup> K.Szafraniec focuses her interest on the role of education in shaping personalities of the young generation (particularly in the countryside) and on their adaptation problems, first (in the 1980s) with the social system of real socialism, which had not fulfilled their aspirations, and then (the years 1990s and the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century) with the new democratic society, generating barriers of other kind and making it difficult for young people to achievement their life goals. In the last two decades, Krystyna Szafraniec has directed the works of two research teams trying to solve important problems of the contemporary Polish society: Emergence of axio-normative order in the intergenerational perspective. Logitudinal studies (1977-1999), Psychological, educational and social potential of the Polish countryside (2000-2003) and The abandoned generation – educational paths and entering the adult life (2006-2009). The book “Young generation versus new social order” (Szafraniec, 2010) is regarded as a synthetic summary of her scientific achievements in this field.



The daily work on a farm, not so long ago regarded as the base of the first peasant, then rural, style of life, is losing the previously dominant influence on behavioral patterns not only in the economic, but also in the cultural aspect.

To make matters worse, the rejection of the assumption about agriculture being the dominant type of economic activity of rural residents is usually followed by rising doubts as to stability of the second pillar of our discipline – the view about rural social communities being the alter egos of urban social communities. According to empirical studies and to everyday observations based on the so-called common sense, one by one the reasons are eliminated to justify the attribution to the countryside of a separate type of social organization (by the way, referring as a rule to Weber's formula of ideal type) which would purportedly come closer to the sociological notion of community rather than association. Also, other, less sociological, criteria of model rurality have ceased to be supported by empirical evidence. The historic thesis about agriculture as a dominant field of economic activity of rural population<sup>19</sup>, going bankrupt before our very eyes, is joined in its plight now by the practice of associating rural population with the specific character of rural forms of settlement and geographic mobility or a special relationship with natural environment. Since several decades already, the terms connectedness / disconnectedness of the workplace in relation to the household, spatial diffusion / concentration, more / less intense spatial mobility, stronger / weaker dependence on natural forces etc. are becoming likewise misleading in describing social processes taking place in villages, small towns and large urban agglomerations.

As particular properties of rural areas dwindle away and the assimilation of conditions and ways of life in the countryside in relation to other social settings is constantly in progress, the opinion becomes increasingly established that some problem areas of rural sociology have been subjected to dematerialization while its other focuses of attention are in the process of universalization. There is no cognitive sense any longer in analyzing these points of interest as specific for the rural type of settlement and resulting social contacts, relations and institutions. In consequence, the very existence of the rural sociology is challenged, brought into question. As pointed out, the research domain of rural sociology is taken over by special sociologies, which are based on the principles that suit the needs of adequate contemporary analysis better<sup>20</sup>. The rural sociology, long ago separated from the general sociology as a formula of a certain set of social groups, institutions and processes, determined by specific conditions of life, seems to become obsolete in the post-modern society with comparably homogenous social processes taking place in every type of human collectivity. Rural sociologists – if they want to maintain their status as scholars and their institutional base – have to face the difficult challenge of re-defining the subject matter of the discipline, it means identifying the new areas of research interest.

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<sup>19</sup> In the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, 1.67 million of small and medium-sized business companies (SMEs) were run all across Poland, by far and wide most of them in rural areas, dealing mainly with providing services of all kinds. See Halamska (2013).

<sup>20</sup> Some of such special sociologies – sociology of economics, nutrition sociology, environment sociology, sociology of development – successfully taking over from the rural sociology research problems alone in the field of agriculture have been indicated by Vonderach (2006) in his publication introducing the 9<sup>th</sup> volume of the editorial series under the name „Sociology and sociologists” in Toruń. Even more eager to take part in the process of seizing possession of the traditional sociological problem areas are the special sociologies such as sociology of rural communes, of landscape, of social mobility, of leisure time, of animals and many others.

From relatively few studies as well as from the conclusions of several scientific discussions among rural sociologists which were devoted to these issues<sup>21</sup>, it follows that we have to do here with problems that have been only rudimentally identified in Poland. This statement applies to both tendencies in the currently ongoing discussion about necessary changes in the foundations of our subdiscipline. The discussions of the same kind have been present already for many years in the English and German mutations of rural sociology.

The first tendency – holding to the classical assumption about the division of human existence into two forms: rural and urban, but rejecting at the same time the majority (if not all) of traditional indicators of rurality – takes more than usual imagination and intellectual courage. Despite many so called obvious things, it is necessary either to demonstrate evidence for the assertion that the countryside and city still function in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as two different forms of social organization or to indicate at least the areas of sociological search for criteria of post-modern rurality. Discussions initiated in the German-speaking area – the main trends of which it was attempted to submit to the Polish rural sociologists systematically during the entire period of political and social transformation<sup>22</sup> – show that these areas of sociological research can be associated above all with the research on life style, understood however substantially wider than only penetrating the given ways of life for the purposes of social stratification. For instance, Rudolph Richter postulated in his research on contemporary life styles of inhabitants of Austria to include Simmel's category of *space of orientation*, which means a place where the meanings ascribed to surrounding objects are interpreted through the context of values and ideas shared by the group and reflected in the forms of everyday life of individuals. In the proposed perspective, a complete and allegedly evidence-based obliteration of differences between the city and the countryside turns out not to be so evident anymore. Contrary to obligatory clichés, the differences in this respect persist in the conscience of members of even most urbanized societies because people simply know if they live in the city or in the countryside (Richter, 1994). Other possible areas of empirical search for dimensions of post-modern rurality are associated with the conception of a rural sociology which denies essential aspects of the globalization theory as well as with the increase of economic and cultural significance of rural areas, referred to by the category of *space of future* in opposition to space of the past as a synonym of the contemporary city (Sterblich, 2006, Steibach, 2006, Hahn, 2006).

Definitely more echo found, in Poland, the thinking of another kind according to which modelling of a new subject matter of rural sociology requires the rejection of the antinomy between „rural” and „urban” as well as the inclusion of new social phenomena, which take place in post-industrial societies and which cannot be reasonably explained (Vonderach, 2012) without consideration of their respective ... *involvement into the history of rural and agricultural forms of existence, of regional properties, landscape traits and of tradition or cultural change*. This type of belief gains a remarkable support and is enhanced by the nostalgia, spreading wide among people, for

<sup>21</sup> As major meetings of Polish rural sociologists in the period of social and political transformation, devoted mainly to the issues of the future of this discipline, should be enumerated in the chronological order: editorial board discussion (on October 23<sup>rd</sup> 2006, organized by the editorial team of *Roczniki Socjologii Wsi* [Yearbooks of Rural Sociology], moderated by Kazimierz Korab, dedicated to the subject Status and future of rural sociology, conference (May 5-6, 2006, at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń), moderated by Krzysztof Gorlach, Andrzej Kaleta, Lutz Laschewski, dedicated to the subject New rural sociology in Poland and in Germany (Laszewski, Gorlach and Kaleta, 2008), conference (February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2011, at the Warsaw University of Life Sciences) under the guidance of Hanna Podedworna, dedicated to the subject Directions of research of the contemporary rural sociology in Poland (Podedworna, 2011), conference (November 29-30, 2012, at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń), organized by Andrzej Kaleta, dedicated to the subject Countryside and its sociology in the perspective of historical experiences and contemporary challenges in Central Europe (Kaleta, 2012).

<sup>22</sup> Five out of ten volumes published so far by the Scientific Publishing House of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in the editorial series *Socjologia i socjologowie* [Sociology and sociologists] have been dedicated to the problems which are dominant in the discussions of rural sociologists in German-speaking countries: Rural sociology in the Federal Republic of Germany (Kaleta, 1992), Rural sociology in Austria (Kaleta, 1994), Rural sociology in Switzerland (Kaleta, 1998), New rural sociology in Germany (Kaleta and Vonderach, 2006), German rural sociology of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Piszczyk and Vonderach, 2013). Care was also taken to bring closer to Polish readers the ways of thinking about post-modern rurality in a number of other countries: Rural sociology in France (Rambaud and Wierzbicki, 1994), Rural sociology in North America (Gorlach, 1998), Rural sociology in Ireland (Knieć, 2002).

something in the kind of a paradise lost, it means selected values of rural life – such as naturally produced food, special relations with fauna and flora, particular social ties and many other things – evoked contemporarily based upon an idealized and in many elements falsified, embellished reality picture of agrarian society. As a growing number of people wish, regardless of their place of residence and at least according to their own declarations, to enjoy such values in their lives, many social implications resulting from it cannot escape attention of rural sociologists as problem fields legitimating further functioning of the discipline.

The lack of wider references to these fundamental issues in theoretical conceptions and especially in empirical studies of the contemporary Polish rural sociology<sup>23</sup> seems to be the result of a combination of various circumstances. First and foremost however, it should be regarded as the consequence of theoretical and methodological restrictions, which we have signalled in both previous sections of this article. We should keep in mind that both the first and the second type of reflection require careful interdisciplinary consideration, meaning a perspective for examination based on various academic fields – those historically interacting with rural sociology (rural and agricultural geography, history of peasantry and of economic relations, agricultural law, ethnography, agricultural economics, rural demography) as well as those having hitherto no points of contact with rural sociology and becoming absolutely indispensable nowadays for explanation of the post-modern dimension of the phenomenon of rurality (human ecology, ecosophy, psychology). The reservation is necessary that the above named approaches are not exhaustive.

The search for new empirical indicators of rurality would not bode well without references to hermeneutics, a more understanding method of cognition through the exploration of senses, intentions and intended meanings, meanings ascribed to behaviour and to diverse objects as well as taking into account the subjectivity of conversation partners and their linguistic intersubjectivity. Within the dimension of empirical studies, this means the preference for narrative knowledge, discovering regularities and mechanisms of social life by listening to what people have to say about the surrounding reality. In the situation of increasingly blurred differences as to conditions and ways of rural and urban life and the simultaneous intensification of such disparities in the sphere of meanings and values, standard techniques of sociological research have ceased to suffice for the rural sociology.

The signalled deficits do not acquit however from the obligation to take more energetic measures in order to determine more precisely the contemporary subject matter of rural sociology. That is the basic challenge also for the Polish version of the discipline at present. Ignoring or neglecting it would bring about catastrophic consequences for the institutional evolution of rural sociology regardless of under which names it will be practiced – the old traditional or more contemporary names such as: *sociology of rural areas*, *sociology of rustic areas*, *new rural sociology* or *social studies of the countryside*.

Beside the signalled challenges of theoretical nature, the contemporary Polish rural sociology faces more practical challenges too.

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<sup>23</sup> In the last two decades, numerous empirical studies were conducted in Poland, proposing new, sometimes innovatory, approaches to problems of contemporary rural communities, first of all in the so called anthropological perspective, reflected most fully in the works of Izabella Bukraba-Rylska and Maria Wieruszewska. To the same trend are to be counted the latest works of the younger generation of sociologists and anthropologists of culture, among others: Szerłaż, Dziubacka (2012), Angutek (2013).

However, the intention of the authors of the above publications was not the search for a new subject matter of rural sociology, although the necessity to rephrase the perspective of empirical view of the countryside and its problems was dominating. About this necessity also report in their latest articles Wieruszewska (2014) and Gorlach et al. (2014).

In the sphere of methodology and research methods, the new practical challenges are the result of the growing need for so-called evaluation studies, which include systematic scientific analysis of the consequences of the realization of development measures that have been implemented in rural areas for ten years by now and have been financed chiefly with the means from the Common Agrarian Policy and subsidies granted by the Structural Fund of the European Union<sup>24</sup>. Evaluation procedures presently used raise many doubts. Their superficial façade character and only apparent truthfulness are criticized in the first place because the procedures excessively focus upon formal and purely statistical effects, displaying at the same time lack of interest for what has been attained in the social dimension. We know only little if and how hundreds of programs and projects that are implemented in Poland actually work, if and how problematic situations are solved, development deficits are eliminated, local communities are integrated, owned resources of these communities are made visible and the social capital is strengthened, if and how these achievements have led so long to higher standards and higher quality of life for rural residents, which should constitute the basic premise for spending every single sum of public funds. The public administration can be blamed only in part for this state of affairs insofar as it bears the responsibility for construing evaluation sheets which don't require on the part of the staff conducting the research any focus on social effects, any use of innovatory, chiefly quantitative research methods, any long-term monitoring of the projects' beneficiaries (as for example the users of a newly build infrastructure) because this would take more time and enhance the costs of evaluation. All the same, a great deal of responsibility lays with social sciences, rural sociology included, which could not offer anything more original and efficient than procedures based either on a range of indicators, it means upon measuring qualitative changes by means of quantitative measures supposed to reflect them (number of meetings, training courses, reports, kilometers of built roads etc.), or possibly on additional opinion polls addressed to the staff and / or beneficiaries of the project.

Still bigger challenges must face the rural sociology as applied science. They result from the need to justify and popularize political activities in favour of development understood as broadly as possible – termed presently as if by decree with the adjective *sustainable* – and to monitor its consequences. In such a case, the basic area of interest for our discipline will remain economic development of rural areas – which for over a decade now has been restlessly determined by requirements imposed by the imperative of integration of the Polish countryside and Polish agriculture with the structures of the European Union – and social development, necessary as a condition for laying the foundations of information society in the countryside.

## 5. Instead of a summary – tortuous paths of institutional development

At least a question mark is needed for the capacity or incapacity of meeting the signalled challenges because the Polish rural sociology has been systematically weakening its institutional base for the past two decades. By comparing the fundamental characteristics, determining the status of every discipline in the domain of social sciences – number of scientific and research institutions concentrating solely or mainly on sociological research of rural areas, number of specialist magazines, teaching on academic level, publishing houses offering specialist textbooks – with what we had at our disposal in this respect in the beginning of the transformation period (1989), we must state with sorrow a regression.

By far and wide better in relation to less distant (1945–1989) and more distant (1818–1939) past, we have succeeded only with regard to academic manuals. We have achieved a very radical change in this aspect during the transformation period. Upon the market of sociological publications, three books appeared of this kind: Jan Turowski (*Socjologia wsi i rolnictwa* [Sociology of the countryside and agriculture], 1995), Krzysztof Gorlach (*Socjologia obszarów wiejskich* [Sociology of rural areas], 2004) and Izabella Bukraba-Rylska (*Socjologia wsi polskiej*

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<sup>24</sup> Two brilliant monographic studies have been dedicated in recent years to the assessment of consequences of EU programmes of support for the Polish countryside and agriculture, also in the context of encountered methodological difficulties. The first publication (Zawalińska, 2009) approaches these issues from the perspective of agricultural economics, the second one (Knieć, 2012) from the perspective of rural sociology.

[Sociology of the Polish countryside], 2008)<sup>25</sup>. The second and the third of the above named publications undoubtedly fulfil the complex criteria of modernity and suitability for academic teaching of rural sociology because they not only arrange systematically the problems of contemporary rural communities, but they also formulate fundamental questions concerning the past and the future. The mentioned textbooks therefore rise to the rank of visit cards of the Polish rural sociology in the whole period of political and social transformation.

Unfortunately, the effort made by the authors of academic manuals has led to no spectacular expansion of rural sociology as an academic teaching discipline (no mention made of it becoming an autonomous degree course) despite the fact that in 1999, it was possible to establish a unique, not only in Poland, but across all Europe, special major under the name of Development Policy of Europe's Rural Areas within the sociological bachelor's degree course. Highly specialized knowledge and very good practical preparation obtained by graduates (over 200 persons) enabled them to easily find employment with the institutions of state and local self-government administration of all tiers, and to hold positions there connected with acquisition and distribution of EU funds and with development of rural areas. Unfortunately, this unique in the post-war Poland form of academic education for rural sociologists ceased to exist in 2013 when the student recruitment process had broken down. So we have made obviously a distinct step backwards in the education of rural sociologists, returning to the state of the 1960s and 1970s. Several academic centres (universities of Cracow, Lublin, Łódź, Rzeszów, Toruń, Warsaw, Wrocław, and the Warsaw University of Life Sciences) offer the possibility of starting bachelor's or master's degree courses in the field of rural sociology on the educational base of general sociology.

To be sure, less distinctly in comparison with academic teaching, but in equal measure sorrowfully, de-institutionalization of rural psychology becomes visible on the market of specialist magazines. Not always the previous state of achievements could have been maintained. While in the 60s, 70s and 80s, four magazines appeared in Poland featuring at regular intervals articles written by rural sociologists, only two of them survived the social and political changes – the oldest *Roczniki Socjologii Wsi* [Yearbooks of Rural Sociology] (founded in 1938 and reactivated in 1963) and *Wieś i Rolnictwo* [Countryside and Agriculture] (published since 1973)<sup>26</sup> – and were joined in 1993 by the new *Eastern European Countryside*<sup>27</sup> in English. Additionally, the presence of social rural problems as a topic has decreased in other sociological magazines: *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* [Culture and Society] (since 1957), *Przegląd Socjologiczny* [Sociological Review] (since 1957), *Studia Socjologiczne* [Sociological Studies] (since 1961) or in English *Polish Sociological Review* (since 1961). Even more concern arouses the only irregular publishing of *Roczniki Socjologii Wsi* [Yearbooks of Rural Sociology], which is the only Polish specialist magazine with the name of the discipline in its title. The last one is not playing the scientific role to which it would seem to be predestined at least because of its long tradition, although the obstacles of doctrinal nature disappeared after 1989.

The didactic situation and the situation on the market of specialist magazines remain to a decisive degree the result of the generally unfavourable for our discipline changes which are taking place in the academic sociology, practiced in the institutes and departments at

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<sup>25</sup> We are knowingly omitting other publications having the character of textbooks because they are dedicated to narrow issues from the area of interest of rural sociology. Such an example are modern academic manuals which have been edited systematically for several years now by Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń in connection with the initiative of starting degree courses in the field of animation of development of rural areas. See Wierzbicki (2008), Kaleta (2008), Kwiecińska-Zdrenka (2010), Kaleta (2016).

<sup>26</sup> In 1986 the publication of Polish *Zeszyty Badania Rejonów Uprzemysławianych* [Journal of Research Reports on Areas in the course of Industrialization] was stopped. This magazine was set up in 1962 and issued in 79 volumes. Four years later (1990), the monthly *Wieś Współczesna* [Contemporary Countryside], published since 1957, was liquidated. The monthly was of outstanding merit for propagating scientific achievements in particular of rural sociology.

<sup>27</sup> The yearbook in English *Eastern European Countryside*, founded by a group of rural sociologists at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, was in some sense a kind of continuation of the specialist magazine *Wieś Współczesna* [Contemporary Countryside]. Barbara Weber (1930-2007), person of outstanding merit for the Polish rural sociology, was the deputy editor-in-chief in both periodicals (Winclawski, 2008).

17 classical universities and 1 confessional university (Catholic University of Lublin) out of 20<sup>28</sup> functioning in Poland. Only in one of them (Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń), the rural sociology is represented as an autonomous organizational entity – **Department of Rustic Aerias Sociology** [in Polish: Zakład Socjologii Obszarów Rustykalnych] **of the Institute of Sociology of Nicolaus Copernicus University** – and constitutes there the definitely dominant object of research interest of all (6) employed scholars. In four other institutes of sociology at universities (Lublin, Łódź, Warsaw, Wrocław), there are only Rural and Urban Sociology Units (Polish: Zakład) or Departments (Polish: Katedra) (Łódź), headed in three cases (Łódź, Warsaw, Wrocław) by outstanding rural sociologists. In the Institute of Sociology at the Jagellonian University of Cracow, the equally excellent sociologist Krzysztof Gorlach with a small team conducts sociological research under the banner of **Social Structures Department** [in Polish: Zakład Struktur Społecznych]. I have to state with sorrow that five university organizational units, presently cultivating rural sociology chiefly or in addition to other research areas, ceased to get support from the renowned Warsaw University of Life Sciences, institution of great merit for the academic institutionalization of rural sociology, where rural sociology has been now included in the Department of General Sociology.

A substantial strengthening for the academic sociology remains the Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development of the Polish Academy of Sciences where there is a **Rural Sociology Unit** [in Polish: Zakład Socjologii Wsi], employing 4 persons, including 3 with professorial titles<sup>29</sup>. To the institutional base of our discipline, the **Section of Rural Sociology and Agriculture of the Polish Sociological Society** should also be counted [in Polish: Sekcja Socjologii Wsi i Rolnictwa Polskiego Polskiego Towarzystwa Socjologicznego], which was the most numerous (over 200 persons) and one of the most active sections in the beginning of the transformation period, but nowadays it has to cope with many problems resulting first and foremost from a low activity level of its members whose number has shrunk by now to little over 80. Nevertheless, this section still ensures the presence of rural sociology during the sociological conventions in Poland by organizing specialist sessions or study groups devoted to problems of rural areas<sup>30</sup>.

In light of the above-presented facts, we do not exaggerate much if we define the situation regarding the state of institutional base of our discipline by drawing a comparison with a diagnosis of a patient shortly before a heart attack. In any case, the state of affairs is not promising when confronted with challenges that rural sociology must overcome if we want to think about it in terms of future. No comfort is provided by the fact that the situation of our discipline is still more complicated in other European countries where it is fighting for survival with increasing desperation.

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<sup>28</sup> At the University of Gdańsk, the departments of sociology are parts of the Institute of Philosophy, Sociology and Journalism. There are no institutes or departments of sociology at the University of Kielce and the Papal University of Cracow.

<sup>29</sup> We do not say that no rural sociology is practiced outside classical universities – it means in special universities (institutions in Poland having the word university in their names but completed by an adjective) and in other colleges or scientific institutions. We simply do not know it. We leave aside, of course, the so-called social research on rural areas, conducted in Poland by numerous scientific institutions. Our data-collection is based on available information from the homepages of institutes of sociology at universities, some of which surely happen not to be quite up-to-date sometimes.

<sup>30</sup> Rural sociology has been present in both most recent conventions – the last but one, i.e. the 14<sup>th</sup> Convention (8–11.09.2011 in Cracow, study group – Countryside, rurality, rural areas in Poland: variety and processes of differentiation) and the last, i.e. the 15<sup>th</sup> Convention (11–14.09.2013 in Szczecin, study group – New authors of social changes in the countryside). Both above-named Sociological Conventions of the Polish Sociological Society had been organized by Hanna Podedworna and Andrzej Pilichowski.

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