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The border between rural and urban areas will be not that clear as today

Modernizing Rural Areas

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Systemic change in Poland since 1989 and the EU integration process has brought new economic functions to rural areas. Our research projects focus on the problems of transformation and strive to identify the right path of development

The Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development is comprised within Division I of the Polish Academy, i. e. the Social Sciences Division. Although it is an interdisciplinary unit, all the scientific disciplines represented at the Institute lie within this scope, and the problems being researched all relate to the social sciences. The Institute's staff includes economists, demographers, rural sociologists, sociologists of education, economic geographers, ethnographers, etc., all bound together by the Institute's subject of research: Polish rural areas.

Agriculture (a field that figures in the Institute's very name), despite being the principal economic function of rural areas, is not the only such function, and the signi-

ficance of agriculture is indeed waning. Nevertheless, even whilst agriculture is losing its dominant position, the agricultural character of Polish rural areas will continue to have an impact on their social image and on the customs and views of their inhabitants. From the social point of view, therefore, the presence of the word „agricultural” in the Institute's name will remain well-founded for a long time to come.

Changing scope of research

The systemic changes in Poland since 1989 have led the Institute's research to increasingly concentrate - apart from its focus on agriculture - on local communities, the social and economic bonds between rural areas and local towns, and local governments and their economic policies. The structural adjustment of agriculture is a prospect that has imparted greater significance to problems involving the entrepreneurial abilities of rural areas' inhabitants, non-agricultural activities, social activity, the self-organization of rural communities, as well as the emergence of new social structures. We have analyzed trends in agriculture, the rural labor and land market, the breakdown of property ownership and state policy towards rural areas.

During the late 90s, the focus of research at the Institute gradually shifted towards the problems of European integra-

tion and the consequences of this process for the development of Polish rural areas. A special research cell devoted to these problems has been operating at the Institute for more than a year.

For many years, unceasing analysis has been underway on the processes by which the attitudes of young people in rural areas and their educational aspirations are shaped, as well as how pupils and students are selected at various educational levels. Another subject of analysis has included the development of the educational system in rural areas and rural inhabitants' access to educational system elements concentrated in cities.

Small but strong

The Institute is a relatively small unit, with 25 scientific staff members, including 10 professors. Nevertheless, it is considered to be a leading Polish scientific establishment dealing with rural problems, and it holds an important place within the Polish scientific environment. This has been achieved via monthly seminars attended not only by Institute staff but also by guests from universities, other institutes as well as state administration employees and local government activists interested in the problems discussed. Information on these seminars is published in the weekly *Nowe Życie Gospodarcze*.

The Institute is proud to have been publishing the quarterly *Village and Agriculture* for more than 25 years, presenting articles by authors from all over Poland as well as from abroad. A special issue in English is published once every 2 years. *The Problems of Rural and Agricultural Development* book series published by the Institute brings out 6-7 new volumes a year. Both the quarterly journal and the book series are ranked very high by the State Scientific Research Committee (whose ranking classifies the Institute itself in category I, the highest group).

The Institute organizes conferences several times a year. Two conferences held in 2003 were of particular importance: the first, entitled „Self-Organization in Rural Communities - The Local Aspect of Transformation,” dealt with self-organization problems, while the second, „Problems of Villages and Agriculture During the Market Reorientation of the Economy,” was organized in Warsaw jointly with the Rural Development Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing.

The Institute maintains regular scientific contacts with numerous foreign organizations, including the aforementioned Institute in Beijing, Plymouth and Exeter Universities (England), Helsinki and Turku Universities (Finland), the National Scientific Research Centre in Paris and the Institute of Economics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The prestigious *Review* published by the British Academy has described the cooperation between the Institute and British organizations as a model example of scientific cooperation.

Expert role

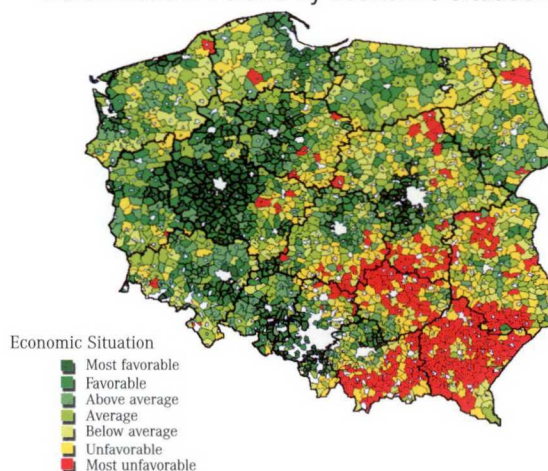
Due to the Institute's high standing among scientific organizations, its staff members are often asked to hold seats on advisory bodies and various consultative boards, and to prepare expert opinions for domestic and international institutions. Worthy of mention here is staff involvement in committees concerned with the SAPARD program for Poland, the utilization of EU structural funds and public finance reform. Expert opinions have been commissioned from the Institute by such organizations as the Chancellery of the President of Poland, the World Bank, the Polish Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Polish Ministry of the Environment.

Many foreign delegations (composed of both scientists and economic “practitioners”) visit the Institute each year. Such visits often lead to further cooperation in the future.

Nevertheless, the Institute is above all an active research unit pursuing its own research program, in addition to carrying out research projects commissioned both domestically and (recently) internationally. Of the latter, particular attention should be drawn to the EU research project entitled “The Role of Small and Medium-Sized Towns in the Development of Rural Areas” carried out in 5 countries, as well as the Institute's active participation in the ENARPRI project (the European Network of Agricultural and Rural Policy Research Institutes).

The Institute's organizational structure reflects the research topics it addresses, encompassing the following parts: the European Integration Unit, the Rural Area Socioeconomic Activation Unit, the Sociology and Culture Anthropology Unit and the Unit of Education Sociology and Rural Youth in Toruń. It is a proven practice at the Institute to organize research teams (which frequently include members from across these different units, and also sometimes include persons from outside the Institute) to carry out specific research projects. ■

Rural Areas in Poland by Economic Situation



Andrzej Rosner