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**Fifty years of rural and agricultural research.
The Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development
at the Polish Academy of Sciences (1971–2022)****

IRWiR PAN in the ‘interesting times’

The Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development at the Polish Academy of Sciences (IRWiR PAN) was formally established in 1971.¹ However, its origins date many years back. The concept of an interdisciplinary institute dedicated to

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¹ The Institute of Agricultural Economics was already operational then. Established in 1950, it was transformed into the Institute of Agricultural and Food Economics in 1983, supervised by the Ministry of Agriculture. In the early 1950s, the Institute (and its renowned scholars) developed the criteria for the classification of peasants in Poland into *kulaks* (higher-income farmers), *serednyaki* (middle-income peasants) and *bednyaki* (poor peasants). Another dynamic research centre operated at the University of Life Sciences in Warsaw.

a comprehensive study of rural and agricultural development was born when Poland gave up the policy of agricultural collectivisation. It first emerged in the circles associated with the monthly 'Wieś Współczesna' (established in 1956²) and eventually spread across the research community of the Industrialised Region Research Committee at the Presidium of the Polish Academy of Sciences (in Polish: *Komitet Badań Rejonów Uprzemysławianych przy Prezydium PAN*, KBRU PAN) and the Industrialised Region Research Department at Faculty I of the Polish Academy of Sciences (in Polish: *Zakład Badań Rejonów Uprzemysławianych przy Wydziale I PAN*, ZBRU PAN) as the Committee's principal research facility.³ Therefore, the origins of the Institute can be traced to 1961, i.e. the year these two research bodies were founded. Connected both formally and through the personas of their scholars, the two newly formed institutions inspired a novel concept of comprehensive – first multidisciplinary and then interdisciplinary – rural and agricultural research.

Upon its formation, the Institute's mission was defined as studying the **transformation processes in rural areas and peasant agriculture** in light of Poland's industrialisation. More than half of the country's population lived in rural areas then, with nearly 50% of Poles working in agriculture and peasant (family) farms, accounting for nearly four-fifths of Poland's agricultural land. Given that the rest of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) was subjected to collectivisation policy unlike the People's Republic of Poland, the Polish countryside offered both an **extensive and unique research potential**. In the conditions of 'abandoned collectivisation' (a modern term coined by Nigel Swain (2000)), the Institute conducted research on 'changes in the essence of family and peasant farming, as well as the peasant class, its models of operation, social position and culture', as described by Professor Dyzma Gałaj, the founder and long-time director of the Institute, in a text celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Institute (1996a: 29). Despite the presence of 'agriculture' in its name (nowadays perceived as slightly old-fashioned), the Institute's research profile does not include agricultural sciences. IRWiR PAN is an institute of social sciences, as reflected by its status in the structure of the Polish Academy of

² A theoretical and political monthly of the people's movement, published between 1957 and 1989 by the Supreme Committee of the United People's Party in Warsaw, 'Wieś Współczesna' was an important opinion-making periodical.

³ More information about the formation of KBRU PAN and ZBRU PAN can be found in the first issue of *Zeszyty Badań Regionów Uprzemysławianych* (1962).

Sciences (PAN). It conducts economic, sociological, demographic, anthropological and spatial research. At times, political themes too emerge in its studies.

This was a unique half-decade for two reasons. First, throughout the 50 years of the Institute's existence, Poland evolved from a pre-industrial into a post-industrial state, with the countryside and agriculture enjoying a different status in both types of social order. Changes in the position and function of rural areas and agriculture from the pre-industrial to the industrial and post-industrial system have been followed in the IRWiR PAN studies published either independently by the IRWiR PAN Publishing House or in cooperation with other publishing partners (437 volumes). A total of 161 volumes have come out in the primary series, 'Problemy rozwoju wsi i rolnictwa' (Problems of Rural and Agricultural Development), with a further 246 released outside the Institute's publishing series. Particular attention should be paid to 'Ciągłość i Zmiana' (Continuity and Change), a new series released in 2018 (nine issues).⁴ The quarterly 'Wieś i Rolnictwo' (The Countryside and Agriculture) has been published since 1973 (a total of 193 issues by the end of 2021⁵). The second reason is the political transformation of the late 20th century, followed by a change in the approach to research policy and freedom of research, both of which are crucial for the operation of research institutions.⁶

⁴ Not all publications by more than 300 IRWiR employees from the last five decades are included in these numbers. Many of them have been released by other institutions without the involvement of the IRWiR PAN Publishing House.

⁵ Issues No 1(190) 2021, 3(184) 2019, 4(181)2018, 4(173) 2016 are available in English at: <https://kwartalnik.irwirpan.waw.pl/wir/issue/archive>

⁶ Both 'transitions' have been discussed in the analyses presented in the 'Continuity and Change' series, in particular in the three-volume monograph *Ciągłość i zmiana. Sto lat rozwoju polskiej wsi* (Continuity and Change. One Hundred Years of Polish Rural Development). It includes 55 sections divided into three parts. Volume I: Population, its structure and living conditions; Rural communities and their institutions; Rural culture, peasant culture. Volume II: Rural space; Land, agriculture and non-agricultural activities; Economic institutions and institutional changes; Przybyszew: Continuity and change. Volume III: Social and cultural correlates of change; Agriculture once again; Space once again. The project synthesis entitled *Wieś polska 1918–2018. W poszukiwaniu źródeł teraźniejszości* was published by the author of this article in 2020 and is also available in English as *Continuity and Change. Rural Poland 1918–2018. Searching for Sources of the Present*.

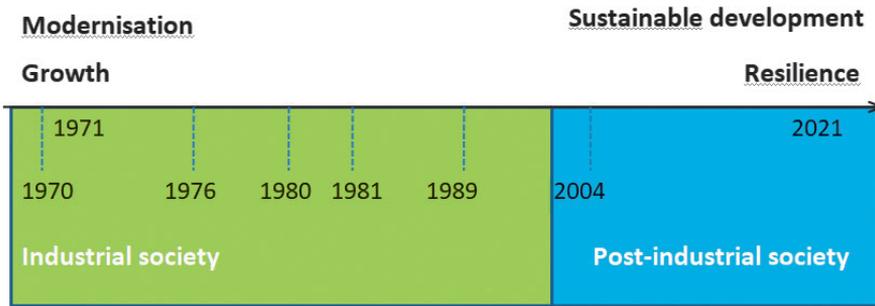


Figure 1. IRWiR PAN's timeline against major timepoints in Poland's history

Time points: 1970 – Massacre of workers in northern Poland, change in the political leadership of the party in power; 1976 – Workers' protests in Ursus and Radom, formation of the Workers' Defence Committee (in Polish: *Komitet Obrony Robotników*, KOR); 1980 – Series of workers' strikes across Poland, formation of the Independent and Self-Governing Trade Union 'Solidarność'; 1981 – Introduction of martial law in Poland (13 December); 1989 – First partially free elections in Poland (4 June) and the formation of the first non-communist government in the CEE region; 2004 – Polish accession to the European Union (EU).

'May you live in interesting times' is said to be a Chinese curse. The phrase 'interesting times' has a bad connotation and is associated with unpredictability, transition, conflict of the old with the new, chaos and anomie. The five decades of the Institute's history coincide with such 'interesting times'. However, far from being a curse, they have essentially proven to be the Institute's primary subject of research. Marked by events of political, civilisational and paradigmatic nature, the major time points in Poland's recent history include December 1970, June 1976, August 1980, 13 December 1981, 4 June 1989 and May 2004. As dates, they can be easily presented on a timeline between the paradigm of modernisation and sustainable development, as well as that of growth and resilience. Both defined the approach to the research topics: the emerging industrial society in the early 1970s and the post-industrial society in the late 2010s.

In my analysis of the changing research topics, I place them in the time-frame of specific events marking the said 'interesting times'. This context prompts the following question: To what extent have the Institute and its

researchers exploited these frequently unique situations and met the challenges posed by the ‘interesting times’? While from today’s perspective this question remains largely rhetorical, I would like to briefly elaborate on the principal research topics addressed by the Institute. It is only a subjective selection, as a discussion on the Institute’s output of 50 years is beyond the purview of this article.

Development, agriculture, rural areas

While generally focused on rural and agricultural (primarily peasant) transformation, the research topics addressed by the Institute continued to evolve. Their modification was largely dictated by Poland’s social and economic transformation. However, there were also other factors at play, such as the number of the Institute’s employees, personalities and managerial skills of its directors, relationships and cooperation with international research centres, or changes in research funding. Let us organise the unfolding discussion by the keywords featuring the Institute’s name.

Development – By definition, development stands at the core of the Institute’s research activity. However, given the shifting objectives and paradigms of the development, its research has evolved as reflected by the adjectives used in the research programmes,⁷ topics and titles of publications. In the initial programmes, development was studied through the processes of ‘industrialisation’ or ‘urbanisation’ (Pawelczyńska & Tomaszewska 1972 Jałowiecki 1987; Czarniecki 2009, 2018), which were, explicitly or implicitly, said to inspire growth ‘towards the socialist form’. In this sense, development was identified with the mechanisation of agriculture, improvement in the individual and collective living conditions (mainly due to the development of agriculture) and ‘denaturalisation of consumption’, where bread from the communal bakery was perceived as more modern (‘progressive’) than the one baked at home.

⁷ Examples: ‘*The transformation of the Socialist Society Structure*’ (1970s), ‘*Research on the Transformation of Agriculture and Food Economy*’ or ‘*Socio-economic Changes in Rural and Agricultural Modernisation in the People’s Republic of Poland*’ (1980s), ‘*Rural Areas in the Face of Challenges of Sustainable Knowledge-based Development*’ (2013–2016) and ‘*Social and Economic Vitality of Polish Countryside under the European “Green” Transformation*’ (presently).

This development was about the pursuit of ‘more’ and ‘better’. In the 1980s, ‘multifunctional development’ came from the West (Kłodziński & Okuniewski 1993; Duczkowska-Małysz 1993), only to be replaced by ‘rural development’ (Zawalińska 2005; Nurzyńska & Drygas 2011; Stanny 2013a). The latter was somewhat inadequately translated into Polish as *rozwój obszarów wiejskich* (literally: ‘development of rural areas’), thus stripping the term of its references to the rural character of development, renouncing urbanisation and industrialisation, processes previously applied to the development of rural areas. Finally, there emerged ‘sustainable development’ (Stanny & Czarnecki 2010) as a new paradigm (applicable not only to rural development) that includes nature, natural environment⁸ and ecology (Stacewicz 1993) among its research topics, as important elements of post-industrial society.

Agriculture is a multifaceted topic analysed in terms of its position in the economy, individual farming in the socialist economy and the post-1990 abolition of ‘socialised agriculture’. The (changing) role of **agriculture in the structure of the national, rural and European economy** was the subject of general studies. Those from the 1970s revolved around a new concept of food economy in Poland (a typical research trend at the industrial stage when the country’s agriculture was recognised as a sector supplying not only raw materials but also products for the market) (Hunek 1973, 1974, 1986, 1991, 2000). These were followed by analyses of agriculture in the global socio-economic macrosystem⁹, supported by studies on the theory of agricultural development. New aspects related to the place of agriculture in the economy emerged in 1989 – upon Poland’s transformation from a post-communist into a market economy and the definition of the post-transformation model of the countryside and agriculture given the EU enlargement and globalisation. This research trend also pursued the topic of agricultural policy or Poland’s agricultural and rural development (Wilkin 2010). The evolution in the perception of the role of agriculture in the economy could be defined by three key phrases: food economy, multifunctional countryside and multifunctional agriculture.

⁸ For example, the project ‘Socio-Economic Determinants of Sustainable Development in Rural Areas Included in the Natura 2000 Network’ seeks to quantify sustainable development levels.

⁹ The programme ‘Countryside and Agriculture in Poland in View of the Intensification of Global Processes: Challenges and Adaptation Models’ for 2009–2013.

Analyses focused primarily on ‘individual’ (peasant, family and private) agriculture. Multiple issues have been explored over those five decades, both by economists and sociologists, as evidenced by several major publications. These studies are important for two reasons: (1) they constitute records of peasant agriculture and its operation in the economic system known as real socialism; and (2) they are a vital part of research history, as they show how neutral terms, borrowed from Western researchers, can change their meaning and connotations. The meaning of the language and concepts whose interpretation was modified was only revealed by historical post-transformation studies, when terms commonly used before 1989, such as ‘socialised agriculture’ or ‘self-government’, had to be put within inverted commas. Many publications on the peasant economy are worth remembering, e.g. Marek Muszyński’s *Rozwój gospodarki chłopskiej* (The Development of the Peasant Economy), published as early as 1975. Discussing Chayanov’s theory of the peasant economy and the mechanism of its evolution, it highlights the specificity and significance of peasant agriculture in the Polish ‘socialist economy’, whose combination produced multiple conflicts (Halamska 1980). There are also studies on income and accumulation (Wiatrak 1982; Kłodziński 1987). Jerzy Wilkin’s (1989) *Peasant Farming in the System of the Socialist Economy* offers a view of the state of peasant agriculture at the end of the ‘socialist’ era.¹⁰ Twenty years after Muszyński’s publication, the specificity of the peasant/family economy, approached with repressive tolerance for 45 years (Gorlach 1989), was juxtaposed with the situation of farms in developed capitalist societies, dependent capitalism and developing societies (Lamarche 1992, 1994).¹¹

The incorporation of Polish farms into such a diverse socio-political context revealed not only the opposition of peasants but also the symbiotic

¹⁰ Published by the University of Warsaw, the work contains six studies: *The Peasant Factor in the History of the Socialist Economy* (Wilkin); *The Peasant Economy and a Non-Capitalist Attempt at Modernisation. Historical and Comparative Perspective* (Kochanowicz); *The Family Peasant Farm: An Essay about the Determination of the Internal Adaptation Potential* (Tomczak); *Ideology and Transformation of the Peasant Economy in the People’s Republic of Poland* (Halamska); *The Ideological and Systemic Assumption of Agricultural Policy* (Łopato); and *On the Stigmatisation and False Integration of Peasant Farming under the Domination of the Administrative Allocation Management System*.

¹¹ These are the publication dates for the first editions in French. Shortly thereafter, the works were also released in Polish and Portuguese.

attachment of Polish farms to the centrally planned economy, all of which contributed to the 'end of peasants' in Poland¹² (Halamska 1999, 2004). In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, many crucial works were published on the impact of real socialism on the peasant economy and the peasants themselves. They included studies on the state of the collective consciousness of 'the last peasants in Europe', studies on farmers' ethos of work (Fedyszak-Radziejowska 1992) and their socio-professional awareness (Łapińska-Tyszka 1992), studies on the mechanisms of succession on peasant farms (Klank 2006) and the adaptation of post-traditional peasant farms to the market economy (Rosner 2004), the mass, albeit a temporary return to the peasant model (Maurel et al. 2003), as well as the benefits and deficit of small farms.¹³ The contemporary transformation of family farming in Poland is largely affected by the past, against which the adapted mechanisms of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) prove help less at times (Wilkin 2011; Halamska 2016; Bilewicz et al. 2021).

Privatisation of **socialised agriculture** inspired several significant studies (Dzun 1991; Dzun 2005), with regular analyses published regarding the condition of farms in this sector, their transformation and the social and structural consequences of their privatisation. 'New owners' of the former State-Owned Farms (in Polish: *Państwowe Gospodarstwo Rolne*, PGR) became the subject of important research (Łapińska-Tyszka et al. 1997), along with social problems emerging in the post-PGR housing estates, particularly due to the liquidation of the PGR patronage over these areas, local unemployment and poverty (Psyk-Piotrowska 2004). Analyses of the decollectivisation covered a large spectrum of issues: from management rationalisation mechanisms to marginalisation processes and the emergence of rural enclaves of the underclass, where Poland was compared to other CEE countries (Maurel 1994, Halamska 1998).

The 21st century brought with it new questions about agricultural (and rural) Poland, with new research topics emerging besides the previous ones. The deagrarianisation of the economy exposed not only the present-day problems in the country's mostly post-peasant agriculture but also its mul-

¹² In my opinion, it was a result of the economy marketisation and the fact that the 'peasant-worker' model lost its validity, as it no longer applied to reality.

¹³ See 'Więś i Rolnictwo', Issue No. 2 (159) (2013).

tifunctionality in the use of agricultural land and the operation of the rural economy in the paradigm of sustainable development. In sum, while until the late 1980s, researchers tended to focus on the systemic specificity of Polish agriculture in the centrally planned economy, the principal reference points in the past three decades have been rural studies and European agriculture research, which has its pros and cons.

Rural areas (the countryside)

The contemporary topics addressed by countryside research (rural studies¹⁴) are both complex and extensive. Given the multitude of disciplines operating in rural areas and their blurring boundaries, there are several reasons to believe that the time of 'rural sociology' is over.¹⁵ Nevertheless, following the disciplinary, sociological approach, I would like to focus on two motives visible in rural studies: **social problems and changes in rural social structure**.

'**Social problems**' can be differently defined in sociology and social sciences. For a social problem to be identified, one not only has to find oneself in a certain situation but also realise it. Merton argues that while an overt social problem can be realised by those experiencing it, only outsiders (e.g. researchers) can make people aware of covert problems. In the Institute's activity, I have found and selected three examples of the latter, where the Institute identified the problem, highlighted it and disseminated knowledge about it, thereby functioning in its capacity as a social advocate. The said problems pertained to (1) rural schools and education, (2) the material and social situation of the agricultural population and (3) the situation of rural women.

Rural schools and education were the subject of many studies launched in the 1960s by a team of Toruń-based researchers and continued until the mid-1990s.¹⁶ Many of the resulting publications revealed the 'mechanism of

¹⁴ Routledge has published two volumes titled *The Handbook of Rural Studies* (2006 and 2016).

¹⁵ See 'Études Rurales', Special Issue No. 183/2009, entitled *La sociologie rurale en questions*.

¹⁶ A research station (in Polish: *Stacja Naukowo-Badawcza*) dedicated to the study of rural education and school, as well as rural youth and their fates operated between 1973 and 2016.

the educational poverty spiral' driven by the low educational aspirations of young people (primarily due to the low cultural capital of rural communities and the generation of parents), who repeated the cycle upon becoming parents themselves. Analyses were conducted to study the specificity of rural educational environments (Kwieciński 1971; Winclawski 1973, 1976), the operation of rural schools (Kwieciński 1975, 1982, 1990), school dropouts, inequalities and pathologies in the education system (Borowicz 1988; Kwieciński 1992), and the school and life fates of the youth (Borowicz 1991; Szafraniec 1991, 1999, 2010, 2022). Reliable and critical, the works presented by the Toruń research team exposed numerous deficits not only in the rural school and education process but also in real socialism in general. As such, they were a subject of particular interest to censorship services until 1989.

The **income and social inequality of farmers** had been studied even before IRWiR was established. These issues required some linguistic meandering as, by definition, there was no poverty in socialism, making its research impossible. Nevertheless, disparities in the countryside, particularly among peasant farmers, were revealed. Income inequality was explored primarily by economists (Ignar 1980; Klank 1985; Pięcek 1999), while sociologists focused on social conditions. Particular attention was paid to the situation of the elderly, as well as the absence and the subsequent gradual implementation of health insurance and pension schemes (Tryfan 1977, 1978, 1991, 1993, 1996, 2000; Rutkowski 1978; Lutyk 1984). It is worth reminding, particularly to younger readers, that the social situation of agricultural families was a significant social problem, while the process of providing them access to their social rights started only in the 1970s and was completed in 1990. However, poverty has never disappeared from the countryside and is analysed eventoday (Kalinowski 1919, 2021).

While **the issue of women in the countryside** has now gained a new perspective, the evolution of the position of women in rural families and communities has always been present in the Institute's analyses. Many of them were based on the journals of rural women (Jagięło-Łysiowa 1975; Tryfan 1975, 1976, 1987, 2003; Gałaj 1986). Particular interest was evinced in the role of women in the family's critical moments such as unemployment or poverty when they assumed material responsibility. In the new context (Poland joining the EU, the post-transformation period), the perspective of gender has emerged, placing the rural women's issue in a new light while allowing us to

consider the evolution of the rural family through the prism of the changing family, professional and public roles (Michalska 2019, 2020).

Changes in the social structure

Historically, research on farm area structure has been followed by that of social rural structure, including studies **of the rural biprofessional population: peasant-workers**. As early as 1972, the Institute published the *Raport o stanie i tendencjach rozwojowych wiejskiej ludności dwuzawodowej* (Report on the State and Development Trends in the Rural Biprofessional Population), partially in response to the public and political discourse on how to solve this problem. The Institute's analysis (Muszyński 1973; Kłodziński 1974) indicated that the double role of peasant-workers resulted primarily from their material situation; however, other factors were also indicated, such as rapid industrialisation, insufficient urbanisation and the fragmentation of the peasant economy (Muszyński 1974, 1976; Kłodziński 1978, 1986). The biprofession of the rural agricultural population was studied as a multi-faceted issue. Particularly interesting was its economic analysis (territorial coverage and working time, including commuting) and impact studies on the operation of farms: asimplified production structure, a different division of work in the family and changes in the position of women. The mass phenomenon of biprofession initiated the heterogenisation of social structure in the countryside, leading to its proletarianisation, defined as increased participation of workers in the socio-professional structure.

Among the regular and highly regarded analyses are those of the **demographic structure** by gender, age, migration, birth rate, etc. Between the Institute's foundation and 2019, multiple studies were published by Izasław Frenkel (1974, 1983, 1987, 1995, 1997, 2003, 2008, 2013), focused primarily on the demography of the rural population. The latter emerged as one of the most significant research topics, with the Institute and its research team of Andrzej Rosner (1991, 1995, 2002, 2008, 2012) and Monika Stanny (2008, 2012a, 2012b, 2020, 2022) as the unquestionable leaders in this area. Demographic research continued to evolve and address issues related to the rural labour force, employment in agriculture, rural unemployment (overt and covert), population changes, urban-rural migrations and their impact

on the demographic structure. They included multidimensional analyses based on general and agricultural census data. This research culminated in a study on the formation of the rural population in the last century marked by two demographic transitions (Frenkel et al. 2019).¹⁷ In terms of demographic dynamics, the rural population increasingly resembled the urban one. The Institute's demographic studies coincided also with spatial research. The first to use modern methods of spatial analysis was *Atlas demograficzny i społeczno-zawodowy* (Demographic and Socio-Occupational Atlas; Frenkel & Rosner 1995). The emergence of advanced spatial analyses was driven by technological progress; however, what served as a reorienting point was a shift from grand evolutionary theories towards a greater focus on social space and spatial diversity of economic and social structures in the second half of the 20th century. The Institute has considerable achievements in that area too. Since 2014, it has implemented its two-year research cycle, 'Monitoring of Rural Areas', presenting the spatial diversity and socio-economic diversity, socio-economic structures and dynamics of local administrative units at NUTS 5 level (e.g., Rosner & Stanny 2017; Stanny et al. 2021).

Naturally, research on the rural social structure also includes analyses of the **socio-professional structure**, a topic ever-present in the Institute's work, as indicated in its programme. Social motives can be found in demographic surveys distinguishing the 'peasant population' (i.e., people in possession of an agricultural holding) from the 'non-peasant population', studies on the area/property diversity of peasant/family-owned farms (for a very long time recognised as a criterion in the classification of the entire rural population), the division of rural households into those of farmers and peasant-workers (non-farmers), and studies on rural intelligence (Grzelak 1981). Sociologists were among the first to study depeasantisation (from 'peasant to farmer') (Gałaj 1996), while changes in the rural social structure were also reflected in the descriptions of cultural change, e.g. lifestyle differentiation in the rural population (Jagiello-Łysiowa 1978, 1980). This perception of rural diversity

¹⁷ The first demographic transition (1970s/1980s) was a process of historical changes leading to the modification of population reproduction patterns, essentially marking a gradual shift from the demographic balance of an archaic type (high reproduction and high mortality) to that of modern type (low mortality and low reproduction). The second transition (2010s) refers to changes in people's attitudes, systems of values, attitudes to the family and society, which determine new demographic behaviours.

was justified by its structure, long dominated by (broadly and imprecisely defined) farmers. The need for a different approach to the socio-professional structure arose with the post-communist transformation, which changed not much in the urban social structure but a lot in the rural one. Studies conducted as part of the project ‘Struktura społeczna wsi i jej świadomościowe korelaty’ (Rural Social Structure and Awareness Correlates) (2015–2018) used classic, profession-based categories of social structure (ISCO-08) and covered the period between 1992 and 2015 (Halamska 2016b). They were prompted by extremely dynamic changes and overlapping processes that shook Poland after 1989. The latter inspired a discussion on Poland’s transition in the early 1990s (professionalisation manifested by depeasantisation, proletarianisation and gentrification), with the rural social structure dominated by workers (increase from 41% to 45%) and characterised by a decrease in the population of farmers (from 46% to 26%) and an increase in the middle class (from 13% to 28%) (Halamska 2020). In terms of spatial diversity, four types of structure were identified at NUTS 4 (local) level (agrarianised, proletarianised, gentrified and mixed), and their relationship with the respective local economy level and structure and the dynamics of the said social processes was demonstrated (Halamska & Stanny 2021). The latest research focuses on the largely understudied (in Poland) rural gentrification and rural lifestyles, highlighting the cultural dimension of social diversity (Zwęglińska-Gałecka 2021).¹⁸

It is impossible to list all the issues addressed by the Institute’s researchers, let alone describe their results. The observations of the past five decades reveal an evolution in the meaning and function of almost all elements of the countryside and rurality, including agriculture. Given the new paradigms of development, different research questions are asked. Consequently, the objectives met in the past and their unforeseen (or underestimated) effects are today subjected to re-evaluation. While in the 1970s and 1980s a researcher concentrated on the progressive denaturalisation of consumption, his/her colleague nowadays studies short food supply chains (SFSC), which shorten

¹⁸ As a result of this project, four volumes of *Studia nad strukturą wiejskiej Polski* (Studies on the Structure of Rural Poland) have been published: ‘Old and New Dimensions of Social Diversity’ in 2016, ‘Spatial Diversity of Social Structure’ in 2017, ‘Awareness Correlates of Social Structure’ in 2018, and ‘Social Structure and Changes in Social Roles of Rural Women’ in 2020. The fifth volume is under preparation.

the producer-consumer purchase path, effectively leading to the re-naturalisation of consumption (Goszczyński 2019). This is hardly a solely Polish phenomenon.¹⁹

The struggle with interdisciplinarity

Upon its establishment, the Institute adopted several crucial methodological assumptions: research was to focus on social processes as the subject of interdisciplinary studies and synthesis. This approach originated from the belief in the integrity of rural reality, which ‘is neither economic, nor social, sociological, ethnographic or cultural – it is a component of all those elements. (...) The processes of rural and agricultural development are integral; however, they have different sides and aspects distinguished by researchers–specialists (...) who now tend to focus on “their” portion of that reality’ (Woś 1996: 33). It was a novel idea that inspired a spirited discussion in the community on how such research should be organised and conducted.

One of the long-cherished ideas was that of comprehensive field research dedicated to important aspects of peasant agriculture and rural communities. Using network programming techniques, the studies were mapped to reflect their mutual links. Displayed on the four walls of the office of the then director of the Institute, Dyzma Gałaj, the resulting image was affectionately referred to by the employees as the ‘Raclawice Panorama’.²⁰ Not only did it make everyone realise the complexity of the intended research, but, as Woś

¹⁹ A few years ago, when visiting my French friend Huques Lamarche, with whom I have collaborated on many projects, I asked what he was working on then. He said that in his last project before retirement he studied the negative effects of the liquidation of *bocage* in Brittany. After a while, he added: ‘And do you know what my first project was? A study of the advantages of their liquidation.’ *Bocage* is a ‘pasture land divided into small, hedged fields interspersed with groves of trees’ (Oxford University Press 2005).

²⁰ This term refers to *Panorama Raclawicka* (The Panorama of the Battle of Raclawice), a monumental (15x114 m!) painting depicting a heroic battle against the Russian army at Raclawice in 1794, in which Polish peasants armed with scythes (in Polish: *koszniery* – scythe-bearers) played a major role. Completed in 1874, the painting carried a significant emotional load. It was exhibited in Lviv until the Second World War, and since 1985, has been on display in the National Museum in Wrocław.

wrote in the previously quoted text, it also proved horrifying, as it exposed the sheer scale of methodological challenges. It sparked a lively dispute on how to proceed with such an interdisciplinary approach. The idea was that (predominantly joint) research should be located within a commune (in Polish: *gmina*) as a newly established administrative unit. To this end, 34 communes were selected, representing different socio-economic structures characteristic of a given region, to reflect Poland's regional diversity. It was recommended that all empirical research be located in these communes to collect possible material for future synthesis.

Another idea (revived in 1980) was the project of the Great Rural Survey, which was to be conducted every five years in selected, always the same, villages representing different types of communes. It would provide a common database for all employees of the Institute to 'feed on'. However, this organisation of research met with resistance from the research staff – and rightly so, as it is not the method that should determine the subject of research but the other way around. Reflecting the general spirit of those times, voices were raised calling for freedom in the choice of research topics. Moreover, the methods employed in different scientific disciplines required different databases. Finally, there was a shortage of the 'actual ammo in this battle': the funding for extensive and costly research.

Although the overarching principle of interdisciplinarity in joint field research collapsed, the idea prevailed. The interdisciplinary character of research was to be ensured '(during empirical studies) by looking into every possible important aspect of reality' (Woś 1996: 33). Particular progress in the use of this method was made during the largest post-transformation research project 'Ciągłość i zmiana. Sto lat rozwoju polskiej wsi' [Continuity and Change. One Hundred Years of Polish Rural Development] implemented between 2015 and 2020. Given the fundamental assumptions regarding the historical nature of research, the dynamics of the ever-changing social reality and numerous seminar discussions, partial syntheses (analyses of the main processes of change) were developed, with conclusions summarised in *Rural Poland 1918–2018. Searching for Sources of the Present* (Halamska 2020). The application of the rules behind the interdisciplinarity idea translated into the Institute's success after 50 years of its existence.

The recurring discussion on the interdisciplinarity of research clouded other trends resurfacing in Western social sciences. Disputes about the status

of rural sociology, which lost its subject of research in the aftermath of changes in rural (village) communities, went largely unnoticed. An increasing number of rural studies focused on the rural varieties of general social phenomena and processes, rather than rural communities. Rural sociology turned into the sociology of rurality. Some analyses also mark a shift towards the past, studying not only the change but also the duration.

In general, researchers at IRWiR PAN employed methods corresponding to a given discipline and subject of research. Increasingly, they used the analytical options offered by IT. Given the accessibility of methods for generating complex econometric models, optimisation, spatial analysis and Big Data, researchers can now conduct multi-dimensional comparative analyses, build computable general equilibrium (CGE) models and structural equations and use programming (Zawalińska 2016, 2018). However, the 'old' methods such as the biographical/diary method (approached with great suspicion by the communist authorities until the 1970s) do continue. Recognised as valuable source material, diaries and personal documents were commonly used by many sociologists until the 1990s and are still employed by some (Michalska et al. 2018).

Concluding remarks and a personal note

It is an extremely challenging task for me to analyse the 50 years of the history of IRWiR PAN, also because I have been professionally linked to this research institution since its inception. Consequently, this article reflects my personal views and presents only a selection of subjects addressed by the Institute. Owing its existence partially to a political chance (liberalisation after the 1970 political breakthrough), IRWiR PAN was a politically sensitive construct in the times of the People's Republic of Poland, perhaps more so than other centres of social studies, due to its primary research subject – peasant agriculture and peasant countryside. Research from that period provides a unique, albeit not fully appreciated material for the study of rural history in this semi-peripheral part of Europe. It forms a solid database for analyses of the post-communist transformation and its spontaneity, as well as the 'dictate' of the CAP, or its local implementations. As indicated, the CAP tools have not always yielded the expected results (Bilewicz et al. 2021).

The Institute, where I have worked for 50 years, can boast a significant publishing legacy and has always served as an opinion-making centre of repute. Its history is a vital part of the history of research and research policy in Poland. It is only regrettable that the latter was and remains the policy of a peripheral country. Last but not least, as a place of work, the Institute has proven to be 'researcher-friendly', offering the necessary freedom of research to all of us who needed it.

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* It is a list of works (mostly monographs) dedicated to topics discussed in this paper. I also tried to find publications (frequently articles) published in popular international languages of communication in science.

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