

*Adam Dąbrowski\**

## **Think locally, act globally: Polish farmers in the global era of sustainability and resilience**

The SARS-CoV-2 outbreak has frustrated many scientific plans. For the sake of safety, scientists around the world have been forced to change the methodology of their research, often with the need to postpone its implementation. The exchanging of thoughts and sharing of results from already-carried-out research have also undergone significant modifications. Many crucial, top-ranking meetings and conferences (e.g. XV World Congress of Rural Sociology) have had to be cancelled or postponed. Another solution to the problem of reduced mobility, and one which has become a daily academic practice over the last year, is the organisation of online meetings. This was also the case with a scientific workshop crowning a five-year project carried out by a team of sociologists from the Jagiellonian University, the University of Kentucky, and Wageningen University, called *Think Locally, Act Globally: Polish Farmers in the Global World of Sustainability and Resilience*. The project, carried out under the supervision of Professor Krzysztof Gorlach, Ph.D. (Jagiellonian University), was financed by the Polish National Science Centre. A book with the same title, published in March this year, provided the impetus for the meeting. The book summarises the research and analytical work carried out as part of the project, and the conference which was organised served as an opportunity to discuss the described problems (<https://wuj.pl/ksiazka/think-locally-act-globally>).

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On March 25, 2021, the conference took place, and was divided into two sessions separated by a “virtual lunch break”. Three speakers delivered their papers in each session.

The workshop was opened by the project manager and event organiser, Professor Krzysztof Góralach. The first paper, entitled *Family Farming in Global Histories and Contexts*, was delivered by the preface author to the “post-project” book, Jan Douwe van der Ploeg (China Agricultural University, Beijing, China; Wageningen University, the Netherlands). In his speech, the author drew the audience’s attention to various aspects and perspectives of understanding family farming. From a sociological perspective, agriculture is associated with family values such as solidarity, continuity, and commitment. From an economic perspective, the concept is linked with specific entrepreneurial skills, as well as owning and managing one’s own business. Working on a family farm is also a lifestyle based on beliefs and traditions related to agriculture and the countryside. The paper was not limited to presenting the theoretical background of the discussed issue. The author mentioned the implementability of the concept of small family farms in the field of formulating rural development and agriculture policy in Europe, pointing out that the values stemming from small family farms’ development are considered increasingly often in contemporary debate. Fortunately, there is still a relatively large family farming sector in Europe. Family farms have been neglected, and the advantages of their operation denied by policymakers for decades. However, they are now re-entering public debate as one of the promises for a better future.

The following speech was given by Professor Henryk Domański (Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland). The paper, entitled *Cultural Distinctions of Polish Farmers: Enduring Stability in the Intergenerational Perspective*, was based on the results of the author’s research concerning the social structure in Poland, in which he showed the reproduction of cultural patterns among farmers from an intergenerational perspective. Admittedly, the presented results were not the outcome of the MAESTRO project implementation, but the mentioned subject matter was substantially in line with the issues raised.

The last speech in the morning session was given by Professor Aleksandra Wagner (Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland) – *Towards Energy Citizenship: Rural Areas in the Energy Transition in Poland*. In her speech, the author drew the audience’s attention to the critical issue of the energy

transformation Poland is facing, which significantly affects both social and infrastructural changes in rural areas. As the energy transformation will radically change the way citizens of the entire European Union live, work, and rest, the EU energy policy must be based on accessibility, social justice, and democracy. The author described how to implement transformational changes.

The range of topics presented during the workshops was extensive. After the lunch break, Professor Ilona Matysiak (Maria Grzegorzewska Pedagogical University, Warsaw, Poland) delivered a paper on *Young University Graduates Living in Rural Areas in Poland – Motivations, Choices and Life Strategies*. The author presented the results of her qualitative research conducted in selected rural communes all over Poland. The aim was to analyse the motivation of young adults with an academic degree aged 25–34 living in rural areas. This issue is of crucial importance from the perspective of the development of rural areas in Poland and in the face of the ongoing processes of deruralisation, depopulation, ageing of society, and gentrification. Understanding the motivation behind this social group's decision to settle in the countryside may be an essential factor in creating solutions that include them in the process of rural development. In her speech, the author discussed the most critical social, cultural, and economic factors constituting the respondents' motivation to live in the countryside.

In her speech, *Social Exclusions in Polish Alternative Food Networks*, Professor Ruta Śpiewak (Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland) presented the issues of development and functioning of alternative food networks (AFN). Based on the analyses carried out thanks to a secondary analysis of research material from seven case studies on AFN in Poland, the author distinguished three network models allowing her to develop an original theory of AFN development in Poland after the transformation.

Professor Patrick H. Mooney (University of Kentucky-Lexington, USA) concluded the workshop, summarising the implementation of the MAESTRO project, just as he did with the book. The author of the chapter *Renewing a Sociology of Agriculture* delivered a paper of the same title, pointing to the need to redefine the subject of interest of rural sociology and suggesting that agriculture should not be a marginal topic of this sub-discipline. Sociology, as such, deals with relations and interactions between individuals and groups. Therefore, it is essentially relational, and hence its problem area must be broadly defined. Therefore, the author emphasised

the importance and significance of the publication edited by Krzysztof Gorlach and Zbigniew Drąg, which collected various issues concerning the Polish countryside's transformation, indicating that the rather untoward title "Think Locally, Act Globally" is not an editorial error but an interesting and inspiring development mechanism constituting the essence of a globalised society where the involvement of local people, organisations, and resources is necessary for supra-local social networks.

After the first part and at the end of the conference, numerous participants attended an exciting discussion. Over 30 people participated in the conference, mainly rural sociologists from several European countries, e.g. the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Germany.