

*Monika Stanny**

**Continuity and Change – One Hundred Years
of Polish Countryside. Interdisciplinary Cooperation
of Humanities and Social Sciences
For Academic Dialogue**

The year 2018 marked the centennial of Poland's independence. This anniversary was a good reason for various institutions and organisations to review what they have achieved during the century. The Polish Academy of Sciences' Institute for Agriculture and Rural Development (IRWiR PAN) made an attempt at making a synthetic academic presentation of Polish rural areas and agriculture evolution throughout the century; the evolution mechanisms, regularities and effects have been analysed in a long-term. The one hundred years of politically variable development conditions are a fascinating period of reforms and changes observed in all domains of life, of fundamental remodelling of society, culture, education and the economy. Rural areas and agriculture have played a significant role in those changes. Let us remember that, following the regaining of independence, income sources of approximately three quarters of the Polish inhabitants were related with agriculture, while today this proportion has decreased to approximately 10%. Concurrently, for the majority of today's rural inhabitants, the agricultural sector is neither a workplace nor a source of income. Today, rural areas cover 93% of Poland and are inhabited by 40%

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Poland's population; 100 years ago rural areas were home for 75% of the Polish inhabitants.

The anniversary which marks regaining independence by Poland is a good occasion to take a challenge and start a major discussion, followed by an academic synthesis, about rural transformation seen from a number of perspectives. Such a challenge was taken by an interdisciplinary team of academics from IRWiR PAN, who have for many decades been preoccupied with studying rural aspects which must be considered from a multidisciplinary perspective, including economics, sociology, demography, cultural anthropology, spatial planning, socio-economic geography, political sciences, etc. Comprehensive examination of the rural issues is considered effective only when approached from the perspective of various scientific disciplines. Apart from reporting on rural development, another essential goal set and consistently pursued by the team was to ensure that the sciences exploring Polish rural areas are capable of developing in the right direction. Funds for the project implementation were obtained thanks to the "Dialogue" programme of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education and from public institutions dealing with rural and agricultural issues.

The main cognitive goals set by the team members included:

- 1) A description of how and to what extent agriculture (as an economic subsystem and related community) has impacted the character of the 2nd Republic of Poland, the communist Polish People's Republic and the current 3rd Republic;
- 2) Identification and description of adjustment mechanisms observed in agriculture and rural areas during three historic periods which differed with regard to institutional and system backgrounds as well as external conditions;
- 3) Explanation of regularities and peculiarities related with the continuity of agricultural and rural socio-economic institutions and institutional changes, i.e. institutional development taking place in the long term and under the influence of turbulent events in history.

The major analyses were focused on rural community, rural economy and environment and on rural culture, which corresponded with the areas of research conducted by the IRWiR researchers. The same structure was followed throughout the implementation of all the tasks of the project. The most important and measurable results of this stage of the project include:

- 1) An extensive, two volume monograph published by IRWiR PAN, entitled: **„Continuity and Change. One Hundred Years of Polish Countryside”** which describes the most important results of the team’s work, the edition of which was supervised by Maria Halamska, Monika Stanny and Jerzy Wilkin (hereinafter, the Monograph, rys. 1). The Monograph is composed of 38 chapters written by 46 authors representing 14 academic centres. Nearly all IRWiR PAN researchers provided their contributions, along with eminent writers such as Wiesław Myśliwski and professor Andrzej Mencwel. Several dozen articles comprising the publication paint a picture and describe the importance of rural community, with particular focus on peasants – the biggest social group which played especially important in the 20th century history of Poland. The role of peasant community in history and in the development of Poland needs greater emphasis; this was the objective of this publication that has hopefully been achieved. Our intention is that the results of our studies will trigger a discussion which will spread outside the scientific circles.
- 2) An album entitled **„Patrzac na wieś. Sto lat rozwoju polskiej wsi/ Glimpses of the Countryside. One Hundred Years of Polish Countryside”** (hereinafter, the Album, rys. 2) including old pictures to illustrate the transformation analysed, published in Polish and English. The team effort of Andrzej Rosner, Ruta Śpiewak and Edyta Kozdroń, published by IRWiR PAN, is an impressive collection of snapshot images of rural environment, toil and everyday life, holidays and customs. A juxtaposition of pictures from past and contemporary times, sometimes not that obvious, clearly demonstrates that some social, economic and environmental phenomena still prevail, and some things have changed within the last century. A selection of black and white pictures increases the emotional and historical value of the Album. The preface introducing the theme of the Album serves as a guideline and forms an integral part of the publication.

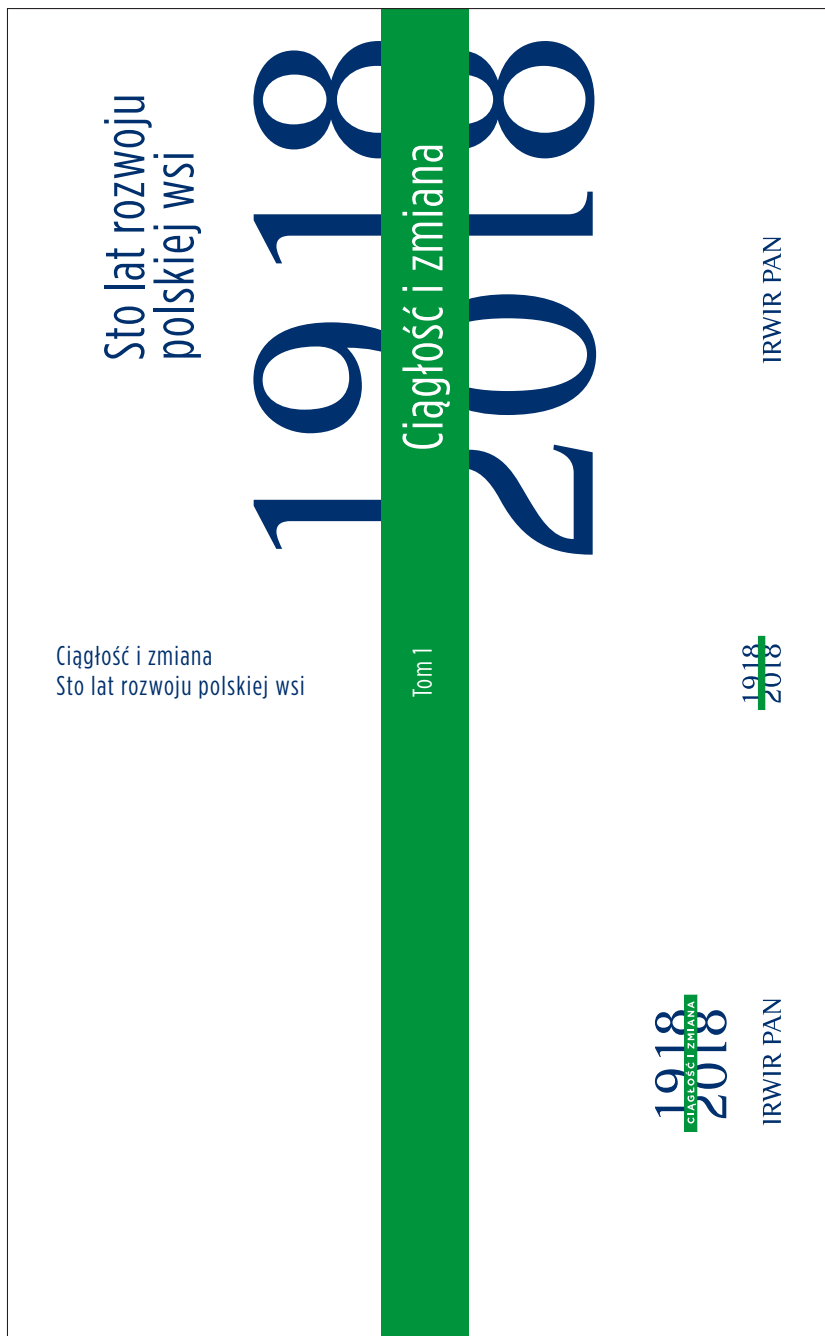
Works are ongoing on a list of bibliography of publications describing Polish rural areas and agriculture of the last century. The list is thought to highlight the achievements of Polish researchers studying the subject. It helps to bring attention to a lot of little known publications and source

materials which are often difficult to access, and to present a certain continuity (including institutional continuity) as far as conducting, what is today referred to as “rural studies”, is concerned.

Hitherto, results of studies point to some common features of „rural studies” which bring together researchers operating in different scientific disciplines. The most important is the interdisciplinary nature of the studies, which enables examining rural issues and communities from a broad perspective. Another one is bringing attention to the continuity and change, which is highlighted in all the articles. Showing what is long-lasting and what is subject to continuous alteration within rural areas makes us see the trajectory of changes and enables a dialogue among generations. The Project itself may be treated as an interesting form of a dialogue between the authors of the articles and reviewers thereof, a dialogue among the authors themselves, among conference lecturers and audience, or among the editors of the Monograph. What unites the participants of the dialogue is the understanding of rural areas, which is not easy because of the complexity of rural development issues. The understanding of rural areas also requires understanding of peasant economy, peasant emotions and peasants themselves. In order to understand all of this, one has to keep observing the life of that group.

The Monograph, intended for a broader circle of readers than researchers and academics, is also thought to trigger a discussion on myths and stereotypes – still present in public as well as academic discourse – concerning the actual role of rural areas and agriculture in the Polish society, national economy and culture. Moreover, the publication of the Monograph results from insufficiency of research in the area of social sciences, which is of not only purely academic importance, but which helps better understand the evolution of the Polish economy, society and culture and the roots of a lot of contemporary problems which Poland is forced to face today.

Figure 1. Cover of the Monograph „Continuity and Change. One Hundred Years of Polish Countryside”



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Figure 2. Cover of the Album „Glimpses of the Countryside. One Hundred Years of Polish Countryside”

