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## **Rural Poland at the Beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Halamska, M. (2013), *Wiejska Polska na początku XXI wieku. Rozważania o gospodarce i społeczeństwie [Rural Poland at the beginning of the 21st Century: Reflections about economy and society]*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar.

The characterization of the contemporary rural reality in its complete complexity of the dimensions that it consists of is not a simple task. At the same time, there is no doubt that taking up this challenge is essential with many regards. The Polish village at the beginning of the 21st century is subject to continuous transformations in almost all areas of life: economic, social and cultural. On the one hand, these changes constitute the continuation of the changes, initiated in 1989, connected with the systemic transformation; whereas, on the other hand, they are connected with more general phenomena and processes occurring in the changeable globalised reality of the post-industrial society. For these reasons, the reviewed publication makes an extremely valuable contribution to the existing knowledge on the subject of the Polish village.

The title of the publication suggested by Maria Halamska, the renowned researcher and expert in the rural subject matter and local development, seems to be quite perverse. The use of the term 'Rural Poland at the beginning of the 21st century' would suggest that the reader will find a comprehensive, coherent vision of the rural reality in it. Meanwhile, the author is known for the words, quoted in her statements for a couple of

years, relating to the fact that there is not a one Polish village. Generally speaking, she reports the similar findings in the present read. The discussed publication presents the picture of the fields of the rural life: as the rural economy, and as the social and cultural reality as, in many respects, the extremely comprehensive, diverse systems that cannot be, in no way, put in any rigid frames.

The state of the Polish village at the beginning of the 21st century was depicted through the due analyses of secondary data shown in the form of numerous maps, tables and graphs. The sources of the data used are above all the following: CSO Local Data Bank, REGON, the National Agricultural Census, the General National Census, the Labour Force Survey, the Household Budget Survey, Social Diagnosis, the Public Opinion Research Center and the author's own research.

The structure of the reviewed read has a logical, transparent and well-thought-of composition. One can distinguish in it the two main substantive parts, devoted to different issues that the rural reality consists of, which are preceded by the introduction and crowned with the conclusion. The additional, quite non-standard element in the structure of the book is the annex appearing at the end that contains conclusions from the monographic research, constituting undoubtedly a great added value to the whole.

Each of the two essential parts of the publication consists of the three chapters. The subject of interest of the first of them are the questions relating to the rural economy. In the initial chapter, the author is involved in the theoretical considerations on the nature of the rural economy in the post-industrial times. She suggests to call it 'the new rural economy' due to the essential dissimilarity in relation to the so called period of the post-modernisation breakthrough, when the rural economy's system was treated like specific economic system identified almost exclusively with the agriculture. Basing on the rich literature and pointing to the numerous dilemmas appearing recently within the indicated issue, Maria Halamska poses a series of questions, which organise the picture of the specificity of 'the new rural economy' drawn by her: how in general to distinguish this subsystem of the society (which unit of the analysis would be the most accurate for showing its specificity)? What does 'the new rural economy' produce? What kind of entities are we dealing with in this case? In what way are goods and services produced? And finally – who is their consumer?

As a result, the presented material depicts the remarkable complexity and diversity of the mentioned issues. Under the influence of the civilisation-type changes, including the globalisation, *the new rural economy is the open, dynamic system, undergoing changes and in the continuous process of becoming* (p. 18). It is not the whole anymore, but rather some element of the broader system – the regional, national and global economy. Admittedly, it is limited in the territorial sense, but it is not a closed system. The space of the villages and small cities, historically and culturally shaped, constitutes the integration factor, the basis for the occurrence of the local and trans-local networks of the connections between the managing entities. Moreover, ‘the new rural economy’ is characterised by the variety, multi-exclusivity, the use of several technologies. It is able to generate everything, that the economy can produce that is: the products, services, information and also public goods. The fact that distinguishes her from the non-rural economy is the occurrence of the agricultural production in its structure; but, what is crucial is that apart from it, the most important role play here the products of the remaining sectors – the industry, services and information. Therefore, the description of the agriculture itself neither determines nor is sufficient for the understanding of the economic processes recently taking place in the village. The entities carrying out their activities here are diverse in regard of the size, the ownership of the means of production, the legal form that is the basis of functioning or the specific rationality of management. To a large extent, the dominant type of the rural economy determines the character of the rural space, what causes essentially different appearance of the environments oriented on the industry, services, agriculture etc.

The content of the second chapter covers the presentation and interpretation of the statistical data concerning ‘the new rural economy’ in Poland, constituting the empirical addition to the contents contained in the first chapter. In this publication, the author conducts in-depth analyses concerning the economic activity divided into the entities connected with the agriculture and non-agricultural (what is produced, what is the size of the managing entities, what is the logic of the functioning of the enterprises etc.). Making use of the data coming from the various sources, she points to many controversial issues resulting from them, which interpreted separately or not accompanied by the appropriate comments, could fundamentally distort the real picture of the rural economy.

As a result of the review of the data, the statistical picture of 'the new Polish rural economy' has been sketched, consisting of the elements such as: the big number of managing entities in relation to the number of population, the domination of small, private economic entities, taking up actions mainly in the local scale, the domination of the agriculture entities (due to the individual farms –the very heterogeneous group). Additionally, one can consider as the characteristic the following things: the significant contribution of the activity in the range of 'the grey area', the family relationships in companies and the specific, not fully rational logic of their functioning. What distinguishes the agricultural entities from the non-agricultural ones at the general level of their consideration is that the first ones are definitely more sustainable and stable; while, the non-agricultural are to a large extent flexible and changing. In turn, the introduction of dynamics and innovations to the local economy, irrespective of taking place in the agricultural sector or outside of it, is on the whole the domain of the large enterprises.

The last chapter of the first part of the publication concerns the territorial diversity of the local economy. The phenomenon of the spatial diversity of the development of the Poland's rural areas in the literature was already indicated repeatedly (among others Rosner and Stanny in 2014; Stanny in 2013). Maria Halamska emphasises that the chosen level of the economy's analysis (national, regional, district or communal) has influence on the conclusions drawn from it, for it portrays some tendencies characteristic for the specific level. Thus, for defining 'the new rural economy' she postulates focusing on the units enclosed within the land districts. Applying the accepted criterion of the economic density (part of the communes' revenues per km<sup>2</sup> of surface), the author distinguishes the five groups/types of units reaching the specific figures for this indicator. The determined types have various contribution in the country's area: they are heterogeneous in the respect of the number of population living there, they are characterised by dissimilar economic structures, they have various logics of functioning. It is worth pointing out that the location in relation to cities has an essential influence on the particular types of economies. The first type and partially the second one have been recognised as the rural local economies, in which the large farms set the dynamics and the directions of the development. In turn, in the fourth and fifth type we are dealing with very heterogeneous structure of the economy, in which the farms, even if they exist, they do not

play an important role. At the same time, in the last types there is nearly no unemployment, the population is better educated and more mobile, and it more rarely uses the country's support in the economic processes.

In the conclusion of the chapter, the author proposes the thesis that *the rural economy as the whole is more diverse, but its types – at least the extreme ones – are quite heterogeneous* (p. 71). This thesis, according to the researcher, questions among others the possibilities of implementation of the conception of the multifunctional rural development (for example in the types of units dominated by the agriculture) and implies the necessity of the individualised approach to the construction of the development programmes, which should be fitted to the local types of economies.

The state and the structure of the society living in the rural areas at the beginning of the 21st century have become the axis of the considerations of the second part of the study. In the initial chapter (the fourth chapter) the attention has been focused on the demographic processes and the social and professional structure of the rural population. The main arrangements, that have been included here, relate to a large extent to the heterogeneity of the demographic phenomena and processes, which occur in the rural environments. This diversity is connected with both the regional location (still reflecting the legacy of the period of the Partitions), and also the location with respect to more or less dynamically developing urban centres. It seems to be particularly crucial that the rural population, taken into account as the statistical whole, is no longer visibly different from the urban population with respect to the demographic features such as: age, life expectancy, fertility etc. However, the differences of these characteristics revealing in the spatial dimension are becoming more significant.

The similar principle can be noticed in the case of the migration. At the interregional level all the voivodeships note positive population flows for the village. While, the intra-regional level of the analysis of the phenomenon indicates that the communities bringing the population are located around the local or regional urban centres; whereas, in every region we are also dealing with the units noting the clear population losses, which are the most frequently located in the suburbs of given areas and generally the number of such communities is bigger than those, which increase the number of population.

The social and professional structure of the inhabitants of the village was analysed taking into consideration the three dimensions of the

social location – the character of the performed work – (depending on its connections with the agriculture and the sources of the income), the education and the level of incomes. As a result, in front of the reader emerges for the second time the dynamic, mosaic, complex and heterogeneous picture of the rural society, which is additionally complicated by the fact of the regional diversities occurring within each of these dimensions.

The fifth chapter relates to the systems of values of the inhabitants of the village. Maria Halamska tries to find in the publication both of these elements of the axionormative system, that would differentiate the rural community at the background of the whole Polish society, and also find within it that, what internally differentiates this collectivity. The changes of the systems of values are interpreted in relation to the schemes by Ronald Inglehart, who differentiated systems characteristic to the traditional order, the modernisation order and post-modern order. The conclusion of the considerations presented here is the fact that the axionormative system of the village's inhabitants, as well as the whole society, is very complex and chaotic. The elements specific to each of the three schemes used in the analysis are co-appearing in it, which according to the author of the text results from the changes of global character, the transformations accompanying the systemic transformation, as well as modification taking place within the village itself or the specificity of values formed in the period of the PPR existence. The family values still gain the relatively stable and unquestionable position in the hierarchy. What is more, the health, work and money invariably decide about the successful life. In relation to the remaining norms we are dealing with the individualization and relativisation of their opinions. One need to highlight that the hierarchy of the values are clearly diverse depending on the social and professional status, the earned incomes, the education or the age.

In the last chapter of the second part of the book, the subject matter concerning the ways of life characteristic for rural environment has been taken up. The present issue constitutes some kind of end of the previous analyses. With regard to the huge economic diversity of the rural environments and the heterogeneity of their social and professional content, the put thesis seems to be reasonable, that one can rather talk about the ways of life and not only one way of life of the rural population. These ways of life are not fully shaped and even within the one group selected on the basis of the given feature, the different behaviour or consumption

patterns appear. The variables differentiate the characteristic ways of life are above all the features of the social location including mainly the professional status, the character of the performed work, the obtained incomes and education.

As has been already mentioned, the whole of the read is complemented by the annex entitled "The varieties of the rural Poland", in which the conclusions from the monographic research conducted in the two communities located in the Mazowieckie Voivodeship are presented. The one of these communities (The Karczew Municipality) is the sub-Warsaw urban-rural municipality; whereas, the second (The Rural Municipality Sieciechów) is situated in the suburbs of this region. The choice of the extremely different, though in the geographical sense located within the short distance from themselves, territorial units was surely not coincidental; as, the obtained empirical data constitute an excellent reflection of the complexity of the intra-regional diversities' dimensions, which have been the subject of reflection of the reviewed publication.

### References

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