

*Włodzimierz Winclawski*

**Bogusław Gałęski (1921–2010),  
Rural Sociologist, Professor at the Polish Academy  
of Sciences and the University of Wisconsin-Madison**

Professor Bogusław Gałęski died in Warsaw at the age of almost 90. His academic oeuvre is known to rural sociologists throughout the world, particularly in Poland and the USA where he worked for almost 4 decades during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

He belongs to the generation of sociologists who took part in the rebirth and shaping of a new paradigm of Polish sociology after its absence during the period of intensified Stalinist repressions between 1948 and 1955. That was a generation whose road to sociology was not easy, at times heroic. Those young people acquired their knowledge at clandestine university courses during the Nazi occupation (two underground universities functioned in Warsaw), often reconciling learning with participation in the resistance movement. Soon after the war Gałęski obtained a degree in philosophy from Warsaw University.

From 1947 he worked at the Institute of Agricultural and Food Economics where he was entrusted with the responsibility of carrying out national research on the socio-economic structure of the Polish countryside, so-called “class conflicts in the countryside” according to the categories of vulgar Marxism at the time. He and his team devised a research scheme referring to research carried out during the thirties by the Institute of Social Economy, at that time headed by Ludwik Krzywicki, the doyen of Polish sociology. Carrying out objective research in rural sociology in the early fifties which he and the team undertook was a phenomenon in the Soviet bloc. The high esteem of the research led the institute authorities to establishing the Department of Socio-economic Rural Structure. He headed the department. The research tools which were devised in the department serve the institute in running cyclical research of the changes in social-economic structure of the Polish countryside until this day. Most results of his early academic

work appeared in 'Myśl Filozoficzna' (Philosophical Thought), 'Zagadnienia Ekonomiki Rolnej' (The Issues of Agricultural Economics) and later in *Wieś Współczesna* (Modern Countryside). Some years later he compiled them in a volume *Studia nad społeczną strukturą wsi* (Studies on the Social Structure of the Countryside) (1973).

After the "political thaw" in Poland at the end of 1956 he was employed by the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the Polish Academy of Sciences as head of the Department of Rural Sociology. The department soon became the leading rural sociology institution in Poland, with him as the unquestioned authority in this sub-discipline of sociology. The annual national rural sociology conferences organised by the department from 1962 and the "Rural Sociology Annuals" (1963–1970) whose editor-in-chief he was, became the integrators of rural sociologists throughout the country, outlining the standards for this science in Poland. He became the first chairman of the Section of Rural Sociology of the Polish Sociological Association. It was mainly due to his initiative that a working relationship was established with the European Association of Rural Sociology (he being its vice-chairman for a few years) and the World Association of Rural Sociology (in 1976 Toruń hosted the World Rural Sociology Congress).

He was primarily an empirical researcher. He held a distance to all social doctrines and theories built on a priori principles. This protected him from both becoming an ideological propagandist during the Stalinist years (behind an imposed façade of quasi-Marxist terminology in those times, lay his reliable analysis of the state of social stratification of the countryside), and after 1956 from uncritically yielding to the examples of American sociology. He created Polish sociology in the sixties and seventies, following the methodological principles of building a medium-range theory, the American empirical sociology which was new at the time. However, he did not succumb to "American sociology" which was omnipotent in this science throughout the world in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. He was protected from that through his perception of the characteristic problems of the Polish countryside, thanks to both referring to the tradition of Polish rural sociology research and its problems already carried out at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as well as his competent observation of research of current phenomena. He expressed this in an interview in the press *Powrót do pojęć podstawowych* (A Return to Basic Ideas) (1976) and in an extensive historical study *Sociologia wsi w Polsce* (Rural Sociology in Poland) (1970).

His book *Chłopi i zawód rolnika* (Peasants and the Work of the Farmer) (1963) was one of the leading achievements in rural sociology and Polish sociology in general in the sixties and seventies. The book showed the historical process taking place of the so-called professionalisation of the farmer's work in Poland. The changing social conditions were examined (organisation and life style) of the agricultural producer, involved in the social processes of modernisation, progressing from the historical class category of the "peasant" to the professional category of "farmer". He also expressed his interest in the processes of modernisation of agriculture in a book *Innowacje a społeczność wiejska* (Innovations and Rural Society) (1971). His book *Sociologia wsi. Podstawowe pojęcia* (Rural Sociology. Basic Principles), published in 1966 was the outcome of his lectures for students at Warsaw University. For many years it was to be the ABC for adepts of rural sociology in Poland. It also announced his studies on the foundations of rural sociology, its topic, achievements, functions and prospects. He presented the results of those studies in the *Basic Concepts of Rural Sociology* (1972) and in a few articles. At that time more and more of his writings appeared outside Poland in English, Spanish, Italian, French and German publications.

In 1977 he accepted an invitation to lecture as visiting professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His many years in the USA were crowned by a book *Family Farming in Europe and America* (1987), published by him and Eugene A. Wilkenig. After returning to Poland in about 1990 he no longer worked as an academic. In 2005 he decided to publish a volume of poetry which he had written between 1945 and 1951.

He has a permanent place in Polish sociology and was respected in the milieu of rural sociologists throughout the world.