

## In Memoriam

**Jerzy Wilkin (1947–2023)**

At the beginning of January this year, we bid our final farewell to Professor Jerzy Wilkin. He was not merely an eminent economist specialising in agricultural economics; he was a much greater scholar, creatively framing issues of economic development with the perspective of the general methodology of sciences, sociology, philosophy, ethics and aesthetics. At the end of his existence – a few months ago, when his diligent life came to an end, prematurely and unexpectedly – an interest in metaphysics<sup>1</sup> emerged. It is difficult to estimate the loss suffered by the economic sciences and, above all, the Polish humanities due to the passing of this unique scholar, whose scientific and research activity (testified by hundreds of publications in the country and abroad<sup>2</sup>) and professional activity (lecturing at numerous

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<sup>1</sup> I note this fact using the study *Od redaktorów* [From editors], in: *Ekonomia jest piękna? Księga dedykowana Profesorowi Jerzemu Wilkinowi* [Economy is beautiful. The book dedicated to Jerzy Wilkin], eds. Jerzy Hardt, Dominika Mielczarek-Andrzejewska, Warszawa 2015, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> He was the author of more than 400 scientific papers – on, inter alia, economic theory, socio-economic development, including in particular rural and agricultural development, the relationship between the state and the economy, systemic transformation and European integration, and the methodology of economic sciences – and numerous books. *W mojej subiektywnej ocenie, dwie z nich – Jaki kapitalizm, jaka Polska?* [Whither Capitalism, whither Poland] (Warszawa 2005, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe); *Współczesna kwestia agrarna* [Contemporary Agrarian Issue] (Warszawa 1986, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe) – are fundamental for the development of this sphere of social sciences, which, during the so-called system transformation (after 1990), focused on issues of rural and agricultural development.

domestic and foreign universities, holding many administrative positions and academic honours in the structures of science<sup>3</sup>) harmoniously combined with *pro bono publico* activities<sup>4</sup>.

Without ascribing any major title to the statements about Wilkin the economist, Wilkin the humanist, not to mention Wilkin the good and righteous man, I would like to focus on the Professor's links with sociology, especially as they were not particularly dwelt on during the funeral ceremony<sup>5</sup>. They were noted not only by my memory but also abundantly confirmed by facts of a so-called objective nature, i.e. in Jerzy Wilkin's extensive writings; similar testimonials are studies on his scientific activities and achievements, published, for example, in the collective work<sup>6</sup> prepared

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<sup>3</sup> In 1970, Wilkin joined the Faculty of Economic Sciences at the University of Warsaw, where he headed the Department of Political Economy from 1996 to 2014, also serving as its vice-dean and dean. For some time, he was also affiliated with the University of Białystok, and for the last several years of his life, with the Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development of the Polish Academy of Sciences, where he headed the Department of European Integration. He also taught at several American and European universities.

After being designated as Professor of Economic Sciences (1994), he performed many important and honourable functions in the structures of Polish science (among others, Member of the Central Commission for Degrees and Titles, Chairman of the Committee on Agricultural Economics, Correspondent Member and Full Member of the Polish Academy of Sciences), he received numerous Polish and foreign honours (including the title of *Fellow of the International Association of Agricultural Economists* and honorary doctorates from the University of Białystok, the Warsaw University of Life Sciences and the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn).

<sup>4</sup> As early as in 1999, Professor Wilkin began a long and fruitful collaboration with the Foundation for the Development of Polish Agriculture (FDPA), to become a member after five years (2004) and, since 2012, Chairman of the FDPA Council. He was the initiator of cyclical reports on the condition of the Polish countryside (see footnote 17) and Chairman of the Award Committee of the competition "Polska wieś - dziedzictwo i przyszłość" [Polish Countryside – Heritage and Future]. Since 2018, he was a member of the Board of "We Citizens of the European Union", established to actively address the crisis phenomena that have affected the European integration process.

<sup>5</sup> I recollect the speeches eulogising the character and achievements of Professor Jerzy Wilkin during the academic farewell in the Hall of Mirrors at the Staszic Palace and the ceremony of placing the urn with ashes in the Alley of the Meritorious at the Powązki Military Cemetery in Warsaw.

<sup>6</sup> *Ekonomia jest piękna? Księga dedykowana Profesorowi Jerzemu Wilkinowi* [Economy is beautiful. A Book Dedicated to Jerzy Wilkin], eds. Jerzy Hardt, Dominika Mielczarek-Andrzejewska, Warszawa 2015, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar.

by a group of friends and colleagues to mark 45 years of his scientific work and his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. We learn about his “entanglement” with sociology from the editors’ introduction, *This attitude was certainly fostered by the Professor’s growing awareness of the limits of economics, which led him towards other sciences, in particular sociology* (p. 10), subsequently developed in a biographical study by Marek Bednarski, who indicated Professor’s activity thus: “*in the sphere of the very broadly understood economic sciences, going even beyond their borders towards agricultural sciences on the one hand, and sociology on the other – for, versatility is undoubtedly a “trademark” of his research activity*”<sup>7</sup>. Another specific testimony to this “entanglement” is the authorial participation of several prominent representatives of both so-called general sociology (Jacek Raciborski and Andrzej Rychard ) and rural sociology, which is particularly close to Jerzy Wilkin (Izabela Bukraba-Rylska and Maria Halamska), in the aforesaid study. At this point, I recall a fact of a different character, equally compelling for me. It is an e-mail from the director of my *alma mater*, the Institute of Sociology at the Nicolaus Copernicus University (NCU), in which – along with the decision to finance my departure for the funeral – he expresses his regret at the death of Professor Wilkin, whose important work on the public choice theory<sup>8</sup> had influenced his scientific development.

I owe Jurek these few words also for a more prosaic reason. From 2004 to 2014, he served as a member of the Advisory Council of the international scientific journal *Eastern European Countryside* affiliated with the NCU, which owes much to his wise counsel, especially as he assisted the editorial board during a critical period of the journal’s existence when it was applying for an Impact Factor<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Marek Bednarski, *Profesor Jerzy Wilkin – badacz i nauczyciel* [Professor Jerzy Wilkin – Researcher and Teacher], in: *ibid*, p. 19.

<sup>8</sup> He dedicated two books to them under his scientific editorship: *Teoria wyboru publicznego. Główne nurty i zastosowania* [Public Choice Theory. Mainstreams and Applications] (Warszawa 2012) and *Teoria wyboru publicznego. Wstęp do ekonomicznej analizy polityki i funkcjonowania sfery publicznej* [Public Choice Theory. An Introduction to the Economic Analysis of Politics and the Functioning of the Public Sphere] (Warszawa 2005), Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar.

<sup>9</sup> At this point, it is noteworthy that he had extensive knowledge of the functioning and social roles of scientific journals, which was appreciated by the Ministry of Science



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I recall that the first traces of Jerzy Wilkin's flirtation with sociology (rural sociology in particular) date back to the end of the 1980s when I drew attention to his book *Współczesna kwestia agrarna* [*Contemporary Agrarian Issue*] (Warsaw 1986). Despite the rigid doctrine of liberal economics – which, in Poland at that time, was gaining the status of the so-called

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and Higher Education, which made him the leader of a specialised team for the evaluation of scientific journals published in Poland between 2012 and 2015.

revealed truth and the sole panacea for the economic follies of the socialist economy sliding into the abyss – in his habilitation thesis, as a less than forty-year-old economist from the University of Warsaw, he “*drew attention to the need to change the approach to economic theory and to restore its social dimension as a matter of science on people in the process of economy considering the system of social values*”<sup>10</sup>. Wilkin’s analyses interested the budding rural sociologist all the more, for he referred in his book primarily to the affairs of Polish agriculture and thus, at least indirectly,<sup>11</sup> also to the Polish countryside. Moreover, he suggested quite explicitly that agriculture and the countryside are not only very complex economic systems but, above all, social systems. Consequent to the impending transformation of the planned economy into a market economy, they will create a serious issue, the solution of which, through simple adaptation mechanisms imported from the so-called West, will develop into multifaceted crisis phenomena involving not only the countryside but also agriculture. Needless to say, such thinking was very much in line with the assumptions of European rural renewal movements of the late 1980s and early 1990s and the rural revitalisation paradigm, making its presence particularly felt in Polish rural sociology<sup>12</sup>. As I was involved in both types of activities at the time,

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<sup>10</sup> *Od redaktorów* [From the editors], in: *Ekonomia jest piękna? Księga dedykowana Profesorowi Jerzemu Wilkinowi* [Economy is Beautiful. A Book Dedicated to Jerzy Wilkin], eds. Jerzy Hardt, Dominika Mielczarek-Andrzejewska, Warszawa 2015, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> In the 1980s, agriculture was one of the basic branches of the Polish economy, accounting for around 20% of the GDP and employing more than 30% of the workforce, with the agricultural population being the dominant segment of the rural population.

<sup>12</sup> Both these terms emerged in close connection with the fundamental re-evaluation that occurred in the social sciences in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century regarding the perception of social transformation and its constituents, which include, above all, the categories of development and progress. In the simplest terms, when applied to rural areas, it meant negating the so-called paradigm of their modernisation and introducing instead the so-called paradigm of revitalisation or renewal, in response to the crisis of the rural areas and the deepening frustration of the people (not only farmers or ranchers) living there. Threats by demographic changes, the elimination of peasant family farms, the progressive ruination of the natural environment, the complete obliteration of the specific character of regional cultures, as well as the physical annihilation of landscape and architectural heritage and the weakening of opportunities to define and shape one’s own distinctive lifestyle, articulation and realisation of one’s needs and value systems, as

I immediately identified in the author of *Contemporary Agrarian Issue* a 'soulmate' in the effort to seek theoretical conceptualisation and practical solutions to several dilemmas arising from the inevitability of transforming agriculture into an economically more (supposedly) rational system of large-scale commodity agriculture.

Wilkin's analyses were confirmed in many dimensions of the so-called social practice in the first period (1989–1995) of the implementation of the reforms transforming the Polish economy. By saying, "*including within the Polish Policy Research Group at the Faculty of Economic Sciences of the University of Warsaw, works devoted to the Balcerowicz Plan*<sup>13</sup> (footnote – AK) *or the sequence and pace of implementation of reforms*", Wilkin prepared the scientific foundation for another important book titled "Jaki Capitalizm? Jaka Polska" [Whither Capitalism, whither Poland] (Warszawa 1995) "*providing an insight into the key issues of the time from the perspective of the output of important currents in economics*<sup>14</sup> *that were relatively unknown in Poland at the time*". I treated this study then, and still treat it today, as a manifesto of the Wilkinist current of Polish agricultural economics, representing a theoretically and empirically argued opposition to the model of social transformation in the countryside and agriculture, implemented with a stubbornness worthy of a better cause in the decade of the 1990s. The controversial (to put it mildly) social effects of market changes in Polish agriculture have led some representatives of the social sciences to hypothesise that it is a specific type of manufacturing activity, in many segments significantly different from industrial activity; just like the countryside is a particular type of social environment. Both deserve

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well as influence on decisions concerning the living environment – all these formulate new assumptions for the development of rural communities, harmonising their cultural values, socio-economic interests and the specificity of the natural environment, providing an opportunity to stimulate specific activities restoring the once-natural relationship between humans and nature.

<sup>13</sup> The Balcerowicz Plan is the colloquial name for the reforms designed to bring about the macroeconomic stabilisation of the Polish state, prepared in late 1989 and introduced in early 1990 under the direction of Leszek Balcerowicz, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance in the first non-communist government.

<sup>14</sup> Marek Bednarski, *Profesor Jerzy Wilkin – badacz i nauczyciel* [Professor Jerzy Wilkin – Researcher and Teacher], in: *ibid*, p. 20.

not only redoubled attention but also a kind of protection (something like the protectionism cursed by liberals) – to the former, because of the specific type of raw materials produced (food), and to the latter, because of the natural and cultural assets of which it remains the depository; for, in both cases, we are dealing with resources of paramount importance to the survival of human civilisation.

Jerzy Wilkin, the economist, identified with this more humanistic perspective on the liberal strategy of change implemented in Polish agriculture since the early 1990s. He drew attention to the shallow nature of the adjustment mechanisms observed in the market economy, mainly involving the substitution of capital factors for labour and the loss of the rural economy's ability to finance its development. Dividing the first period of pro-capitalist transformations into a phase of widespread anarchisation of economic life, a phase of macroeconomic stabilisation and a stage of immature capitalism, he pointed out that at each of these stages, we are dealing with a drama of the agricultural economy, in which systemic changes have led to a radical deterioration of the income situation of farming families. These changes, however, have not brought about the desired structural changes on a scale that would guarantee success in confronting Western European agriculture. In its entirety, it seems he identified with the position of many rural sociologists signalling that modernisation, which, in the case of Poland, was sometimes referred to as “modernisation of peripheral capitalism”, was bringing more and more contradictions to the countryside and agriculture, making them problem areas, even in countries considered worthy of emulation in Poland<sup>15</sup>.

I am slightly oversimplifying when I hypothesise that Polish rural sociology has thus received explicit support from agricultural economics in demanding a new economic positioning of not only farmers but also other rural inhabitants. Its quintessence was expressed by three concepts: *disagrarianisation*, *diversification* and *entrepreneurship*, best defining –

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<sup>15</sup> I know from experience that he highly valued the humanistic perspective of the analysis of the crisis phenomena in the countryside and agriculture of the so-called Western countries, presented in books published since the early 1990s in the series „Socjologia i socjologowie” [Sociology and Sociologists] through the efforts of the Institute of Sociology at Nicolaus Copernicus University, devoted, inter alia, to new directions in rural and agricultural development in Austria, France, Ireland, Germany and the United States.

also according to Jerzy Wilkin – the essence of social change not only in agriculture but in the entire rural economic system of the period of systemic transformation, postulated under the label of multifunctional and, later, sustainable development. He expresses this conviction in numerous publications during Poland's preparation for accession to the European Union structures (before 2004) thus: “*fundamental issues related to the change of the place of agriculture in the economy which is undergoing deep transformations, where it takes on a multifunctional character (e.g. “a guardian” of the natural environment) and is not only a food manufacturer*”, and in the post-accession period (after 2004), taking part “*as a co-editor in the publication of journal volumes in the EU-Monitoring series, presenting the issues faced by Poland while adapting to the Community standards*”<sup>16</sup>.

I consider his concepts particularly important in this respect – already argued in the “Agrarian Question” – referring to the theory of diffusion of innovation in agriculture, ranked by sociologists as one of the most important theoretical achievements of rural sociology. In his writing, Wilkin refers to this theoretical resource under the label of the induced model of agricultural development, according to which overcoming natural barriers to agricultural production growth – for example, shrinking areas of arable land, pastures, freshwater reserves, etc. due to so-called urbanisation pressure) can be achieved through technological and organisational progress, i.e. the introduction of innovations. Although natural (intra-system) factors play a major role in inducing innovation in agriculture – i.e. market-driven changes in the ratio of the price of a product to the cost of producing it, prompting farmers to seek ways of achieving or restoring equilibrium in this respect also by exerting pressure on the institutions responsible for technological and organisational progress – they are not the only ones. Factors of a regulatory nature (external to the system) too play a considerable role in the process of generation and dissemination (diffusion) of innovations, in the form of the institutional background of agriculture (primarily research and development institutions and agricultural advisory services), which determine the success or failure of the analysed process. Much depends on the level of cooperation between farmers and public sector institutions –

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<sup>16</sup> Marek Bednarski, *Profesor Jerzy Wilkin – badacz i nauczyciel* [Professor Jerzy Wilkin – Researcher and Teacher], in: *ibid*, pp. 19–20.



while the former will gain more if they organise themselves into various forms of horizontal cooperation (for example, local producer associations, cooperatives, etc.), the latter will be able to respond better to the needs of the former if they operate in structures as decentralised as possible.

It is precisely such a vision of the countryside and agriculture that emerges from the reports on the state of the Polish countryside<sup>17</sup> published systematically since 2000, published and sponsored by the Foundation for the Development of Polish Agriculture, where Wilkin – the Chairman of its Scientific Board – was primarily responsible for their substantive content, coordinating the work of teams of scientists representing various fields of knowledge and various Polish research centres. The interdisciplinary nature of these studies, the constantly updated statistical data and the reliability and professionalism of the analytical layer mean that they are among the most frequently cited source materials, above all in the Polish sociology of rural areas during the so-called system transformation.

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The preparation of the Polish countryside and Polish agriculture for integration into the structures of the European Union –for which we advocated in not only our scientific articles but also numerous public speeches – was the prime reason for establishing closer cooperation as early as the late 1990s. Several conference meetings and the author's participation in several collective publications have made us aware of a far-reaching convergence of views on many issues, and joint field trips to carry out a series of so-called pre-accession training courses for the staff of, I presume, Agricultural Advisory Centres, have also enabled us to establish closer personal relationships. They emboldened me to request Jurek to strengthen the Advisory Council of the *Eastern European Countryside* (EEC) periodical with my presence, which I directed from 1993 to 2014. He did not refuse; moreover, he conscientiously served on the editorial board throughout his long ten-year term (2004–2014), sharing his opinion,

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<sup>17</sup> *Polska wieś* [*Polish Countryside*] 2000 and subsequent editions: 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018, 2020, 2022 (some – 2012, 2018 – also published in English).

inter alia, on many of the more economically oriented texts received for publication. Given the enormity of his other activities and the lack of any financial compensation, his work for the EEC was an expression of not only absolute selflessness but also the importance he attached to any practical action for rural development. It was no surprise that, at one stage of his life, he and his wife settled in the suburban countryside, expressing his conviction in their intrinsic value, a priceless natural and cultural resource that deserves special care. He put his principles into practice not only in his professional activities but also in his private life, by reconstructing a wooden house transported from Kurpie,<sup>18</sup> in which he later lived, collecting folk art, carving in wood or tending the rural landscape, which he most enjoyed contemplating from his bicycle or canoe.

A peculiar commonality in the decision to move to the countryside – like Jurek, about a quarter of a century ago, I decided to leave the city to live in the countryside – had already spawned, many years ago, the idea of inviting Professor Wilkin to deliver a lecture at the opening of the new academic year of the Open University, which was established in my village 13 years ago. However, the conditions for implementing this idea arose many years later when, on the occasion of one of the conferences – dedicated, incidentally, to the new inhabitants of the village – its host and moderator (a mutual friend of ours and a neighbour of Maria and Jerzy Wilkin) invited us both to his home, where we had the opportunity to refresh the more personal dimensions of our relationship. On the occasion of a lively talk on various matters, including our rural experiences, I dared to invite Jurek to Będźmierowice for a lecture. Jurek not only did not refuse, but the next day invited us to his own aforementioned wooden house, where we finalised the details of the visit of Mr and Mrs Wilkin to Bory Tucholskie<sup>19</sup>.

Accordingly, in the early afternoon of 22 September of 2022 Jurek and his wife Maria arrived in Będźmierowice. Jurek's lecture was preceded by a short excursion around the Grand Brda Canal, with the finale at the unique waterway crossing in Fojutowo. Using both historical achievements

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<sup>18</sup> Kurpie – ethnic and linguistic region in north-eastern Poland

<sup>19</sup> *Bory Tucholskie* – ethnographic region of Gdańsk Pomerania, one of the largest forest complexes in Poland.

of hydro-engineering over 200 years ago as an example, we discussed the perfect integration of the canal – an artificial creation, which once served to irrigate meadows and as a source of grass and hay, the then fuel of horse transport – into the natural and cultural environment of the region, which it still serves as one of the most beautiful canoeing, walking and cycling routes in modern Europe. Jurek also alluded to these issues, i.e. the rural landscape as a natural and cultural value and the need to not only protect it wisely but also to make wise economic use thereof in his lecture on the future of the Polish countryside and Polish agriculture. The lecture was full of not only threats but also development opportunities, inaugurating the eleventh academic year of the Open University of Stowarzyszenie Nasza Wieś Będźmierowice [the Society of Our Village Będźmierowice], Sadly, as it subsequently transpired, this was the Professor's last public utterance.

*Andrzej Kaleta*