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## Processes of Change in the Social Structure of Poland's Rural Population in the Years 1991–2013\*

**Abstract:** The article discusses changes in the social structure of rural population in the years 1991–2013. In that period the share of farmers decreased from 46% to 27%, the share of workers increasing from 33% to 45% and the share of middle class – from 15% to 27%. These changes are the result of three overlapping processes: deagrarianisation / depeasantization (the specific, two-phase “end” of the peasants), proletarianization (saturation of rural community by the representatives of social groups classified as blue-collar workers) and gentrification (i.e. the growth of middle class, also called bourgeois). In Poland, those processes took a different course than in the West: they are not only shifted in time, but they also overlap. The article is based on the data from 1991, 2003 and 2013.

**Key words:** social structure of the rural population, deagrarianisation, proletarianization, gentrification.

### 1. Introduction

This article provides an analysis of alterations in Poland's social structure. According to Gilejko, social structure “always characterizes the state of a given society, forming its identity, its set of traits, while simultaneously being an element and causal factor of social change” (Gilejko 2010, p. 17). This succinct statement points to the importance of research into the social structure. Such research is essential for diagnosing the state and dynamics of a society that has been undergoing far-reaching change for a quarter of a century under the impact of political, economic, and global factors. These factors, their consequences and coexistence, have been the object of many analyses. Their social effects, including changes in the social structure of Polish society, have also been the object of study and analysis.

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In spite of many analyses of the changes occurring in rural areas, there has been no comprehensive analysis of change in the social structure of the rural population, even though that structure is a synthetic indicator of the present state of rural areas and a diversified indicator of economic changes, social mobility, level of education, and wealth. This article will present the changes in the social and occupational structure, as occupation is a synthetic indicator of education, type of work, income, and place in the social stratification. The analysis is based on representative data (including for the countryside) of sociological research conducted at the beginning of the 1990s: the *Polish General Social Survey*, the *Social Diagnosis* (further the SD, including the years in which these studies were conducted), and the *European Social Survey* (ESS) in 2010. These studies divide people into socio-occupational groups to enable comparisons. Such a division is made by the Central Statistical Office based on the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-88 and ISCO-08).<sup>1</sup>

Social structure – like other social phenomena – is subject to change. In history, there have been periods of its “long duration”; its transformation was hastened by the industrial revolution and the birth of industrial society. The changes that occurred in this connection shaped fundamental relations between the two basic social organizations: town and country. The population of rural areas declined both in number and in percentage of the whole as a result of the process of de-ruralization, and in addition, it lost some of its specific features through urbanization. The social structure of the rural community changed: the agrarian segment shrank and underwent deep transformations, called the “end of the peasants” in sociological literature<sup>2</sup>; representatives of social strata other than that of the farmers appeared in the countryside. The processes of change occurred similarly in all the developed countries of the West, where capitalist economics predominated. A passage to the post-industrial society of late modernity resulted in a new series of changes, including in the rural social structure. These demographic changes in the social composition of local structures and the appearance of new socio-occupational groups, including those belonging to the middle classes, are analysed by Bernard Kayser in a work with a meaningful title: *La renaissance rurale: Sociologie des campagnes du monde occidental*. This work was the fruit of many

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<sup>1</sup> This classification has 10 categories: 0 – military occupations; 1 – managers; 2 – professionals; 3 – technicians and associate professionals; 4 – clerical support workers; 5 – services and sales workers; 6 – skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers; 7 – craft and related trades workers; 8 – plant and machine operators and assemblers; 9 – elementary occupations.

<sup>2</sup> This idea originated with Henri Mendras, who described it in the work *La fin des paysans* (1967). An analysis of this process in Poland is contained in Halamska 2004.

years of observation not only in France, but also in Great Britain, the United States, and the Federal Republic of Germany.

Changes in the rural social structure occurred in Poland as well. In the second half of the twentieth century they had a specific course on account of the political and economic regime of the time. In 1989 Poland began a period of rapid change, which was also accompanied by alterations in the social structure. Here we will follow the changes that occurred in the rural social structure in the period 1991–2013 according to data from the above-mentioned empirical studies. An attempt will also be made to analyse the processes that led to these changes.

## **2. Evolution of the rural social and occupational structure**

The evolution of the rural social structure will be analyzed by means of the categorical approach, in which that structure is perceived as an arrangement of separate social categories. Occupation is the indicator of belonging to a given category, as occupation contains “the most important criteria of a summary indicator in social structure” (Domański et al. 2012, p. 21). For existing occupations, classifications are established that can be defined as “a set of categories whose task is identification of the basic segments of the social structure, but without prejudging to what extent these categories are a reflection of a hierarchy” (Domański et al. 2012, p. 21). Here I have recourse to the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO), as the research on which I base my analysis makes use of this classification.

In 1991, at the beginning of the period under analysis, the social and occupational structure of rural areas was significantly different than in Poland as a whole, as farmers (46.4%) were a dominant group. They were more numerous than all the groups of labourers combined with sales personnel and people providing services (41.1%). The group of white-collar workers (groups 1–4) was scarcely 12% of the rural population. Twelve years later (2003) the group of farmers had shrunk by around 9 percentage points and the dominant groups in the structure of the rural working population were manual labourers and trade and service personnel (40.3%). This trend was maintained over the next decade: the social and occupational group of farmers diminished significantly; the group of manual labourers and service employees grew significantly; and the various groups of white-collar workers increased to a lesser degree.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For further analysis see Halamska 2016.

**Table 1.** The socio-occupational structure of the rural working population in the years 1991–2013. Data in percentages

Socio-occupational groups*	Year and type of study		
	PGSS 1991	SD 2003	SD 2013
0. Military	0.0	0.4	0.4
1. High civil servants, members of representative organs, management personnel of enterprises and organizations	0.4	2.5	2.8
2. Specialists, the freelancers	1.8	6.6	9.3
3. Technicians and middle-grade specialists	7.0	7.5	5.2
4. Civil servants	3.3	5.2	4.7
5. Trade and service employees	6.5	8.8	10.9
6. Farmers and farm workers	46.4	37.7	27.4
7. Foremen and skilled labour	16.4	15.5	22.5
8. Machine operators, production-line workers, drivers	7.8	9.0	9.5
9. Manual labourers	10.4	7.0	7.3

\* Legend: in 1991 the order accords with the first numeral of the four-numeral code of occupation according to ISCO-88; afterwards, it accords with the Polish adaptation of ISCO-88 and ISCO-08 – “Classification of occupations and skills” of the Central Statistical Office.

Source: own compilation on the foundation of the databases of PGSS 1991, Social Diagnosis 2003, and Social Diagnosis 2013.

The direction of change becomes clearer if we group distinct social and occupational groups, which are often differentiated, into a larger whole: farmers, as an endemically rural social and occupational group, manual labourers, and the middle class.<sup>4</sup> Distinguishing the latter can be rather problematic due to its complex composition, with the division between the “old” and “new” middle class. The new middle class is formed by white-collar social and occupational groups,<sup>5</sup> while the old middle class is usually identified with the self-employed. In such a division, the evolution of the rural social structure appears as follows (Table 2).

The social and occupational structure of the rural population is gradually losing its separateness, its distinctness, which was previously defined by its agrarian nature. Two processes have become visible above all: growth in the middle-class segment

<sup>4</sup> I do not distinguish here the third element of the triad, that is, the upper class, because (after Domański 2002) I consider that it has not yet formed in Poland.

<sup>5</sup> In this case, occupational position determines the middle class, because “occupation is the most visible attribute of the middle class” (Domański 2004, p. 84).

and shrinkage of the percentage of farmers. Manual labourers have become the dominant segment in the social and occupational structure, while the percentage of farmers has become the same as the diversified collective of groups counted in the middle class. In the period under analysis the percentage of farmers in the rural social structure decreased by around 40%; the share of the middle class grew significantly (the share of the “new” middle class more than doubled); and the percentage of the social and occupational group that could be considered manual labourers grew by approximately one third.

**Table 2.** A simplified picture of the evolution of the rural social and occupational structure

Segments of the structure	1991	2003	2013	1991 = 100
<b>All Poland</b>				
Farmers*	20.4	16.1	11.6	57
Labourers**	42.6	36.6	43.2	101
Middle Class***	36.7	47.9	44.5	121
<i>Including: the “new”</i>	<i>27.7</i>	<i>38.9</i>	<i>37.2</i>	<i>134</i>
<i>the “old”</i>	<i>9.0</i>	<i>9.0</i>	<i>7.3</i>	<i>81</i>
<b>Rural population</b>				
Farmers*	46.4	37.6	27.2	59
Labourers**	33.4	35.7	45.4	136
Middle Class***	15.3	26.1	27.1	177
<i>Including: the “new”</i>	<i>9.1</i>	<i>20.0</i>	<i>20.9</i>	<i>230</i>
<i>the “old”</i>	<i>6.2</i>	<i>6.1</i>	<i>6.2</i>	<i>100</i>

Legend: \* group no. 6 less self-employed persons; \*\* groups nos. 5 and 6–9 less self-employed persons; \*\*\* groups nos. 1–4 less self-employed persons, plus the self-employed in all groups.

Source: own work on the basis of PGSS data, 1991, Social Diagnosis 2003 and Social Diagnosis 2013.

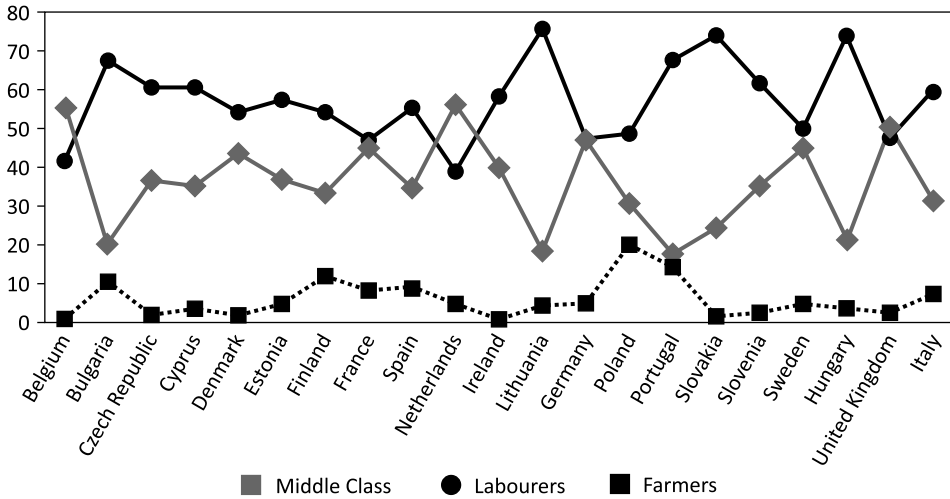
These major changes have brought rural Poland closer to rural Western Europe, but nevertheless its social structure is still specific, or even anachronistic,<sup>6</sup> as some outstanding researchers would say. This specific nature is defined by a large percentage of farmers (which indicates its anachronism in the European context) and the considerable proportion of social and occupational groups of the new middle class (which points to its modernity).<sup>7</sup> The three segments distinguished here have a similar composition in Bulgaria, Finland, and Portugal.<sup>8</sup> At the same

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Domański 2004.

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed analysis of this problem cf. Halamska 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Research for this edition of the European Social Survey (ESS) was conducted in only 21 EU Member States countries of the EU (see Figure 1).

time, the progress of modernization in this structure is fairly clearly visible here. If the proportion of the new middle class is taken as an indicator of modernization, then rural Poland is within the same range as the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Spain, Slovenia, and Italy.



**Figure 1.** Structure of the rural population, divided into social and occupational segments, in EU Member States in 2010. Data in percentages.

Source: own work on the basis of the ESS 2010 database.

This brief presentation of the evolution of rural social structures in Poland gives rise to several important questions. Below I will try to answer one of them: the question of the nature and mechanisms of the processes that led to the shaping of such a structure.

### 3. The processes of change in the social structure

In the period under analysis, three basic processes occurred and overlapped with one another, which changed the rural social structure: deagrarianisation, proletarianization, and gentrification/bourgeoisification. They will be analysed in this order. I will try to draw attention to their similarities to, and differences from, processes occurring in the rest of Europe.

## Deagrarianisation

An analysis of change occurring in the countryside should begin by considering the most frequent kind – de-peasantization-deagrarianisation<sup>9</sup> (although in the case of Poland's rural areas it is connected with proletarianization). This process is related to the “end of the peasants” in its classical sense, that is, with the loss of the family farm's specific character of operation and the subordination of its operation to market mechanisms (Halamska 2004). In Poland, de-peasantization-deagrarianisation had a specific course: this was the phenomenon of “the disappearing peasants”<sup>10</sup> a process occurring considerably more slowly than deagrarianisation in the West. Two phases in which the process accelerated can be distinguished. The first (*de-peasantization*), which fell in the period of the “socialist” modernization of agriculture, began in the 1960s and continued with greater vigour in the following decades.

The second phase, *deagrarianisation*, which began at the moment of the systemic transformation in 1989, clearly shows agriculture's decline in the structure of the population's sources of maintenance to around 5% nationwide and to 12%–13% in rural areas. Moreover, agriculture – from being the most common source of maintenance of the rural population at the turn of the 1980s/1990s (for peasants, peasants employed off the farm, and also for the 400,000 people working on collective farms) – becomes a secondary source of income after 2005, even though after Poland's accession to the EU agricultural revenues grew more quickly than other types of income for the rural population. The period between 1995 and the years 2005–2007 were marked by a major change, giving shape to the present structure of the rural population's sources of income and social and occupational structure.

However, deagrarianisation did not occur uniformly in that period. At the beginning of the 1990s a growth in employment on individual farms was even observed; between 1988 and 1995 the number of people working in agriculture grew by 10.7%, which was also the result of the disappearance of peasants employed in manual labour. Andrzej Kaleta (2005) estimates that in 2002 they accounted only for around 5% of the population. This re-peasantization of agriculture was temporary in nature, though, because already in the period 1996–2002 that employment fell by 44.4% (Błąd 2009; Frenkel 2007). The fall in employment proceeded through

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<sup>9</sup> I use this name to draw attention to the complexity of the process: with the term “de-peasantization” I call attention to the disappearance of peasant characteristics in farming, resulting in modernized (post-traditional) family farms, and with the term “deagrarianisation” I point to shrinking employment in agriculture (not only in peasant farming).

<sup>10</sup> See Maurel, Halamska, Lamarche, 2003.

the next decade as well. Changes in the manner of family farms' operation can be indicated among the causes. After 1990, diversified post-traditional peasant farms faced the aggressive environment of the market economy. Under its influence, farms began to vary and concomitantly, the status of the farmer changed. Two typical trajectories can be distinguished: a rising trajectory and a declining one. About one third of family farms find themselves on the first, forming closer bonds with the market, increasing their size, and intensifying production. An evolution in social identity is also occurring in this group of farmers: the erstwhile peasants are changing into professional farmers, agricultural producers, and agricultural entrepreneurs – an economically strong group, culturally well integrated with society and already belonging or aspiring to the middle classes. In defining their identity they more often point to elements connected with ownership and possession and note their connections with other, non-agricultural enterprises (Gorlach, Drag, Serega 2003). If, in their self-identification, they refer to their peasant origin it is either to disarm or to air agrarian resentment. It can also reflect a kind of “agrarian fundamentalism”, which is typical of European farmers and has served to create a successful political lobby protecting the economic interests of the group.

The second, declining, trajectory leads either to the failure or marginalization of farms. In the period 1988–2010, the number of individual farms above 1 hectare declined by around 600,000, i.e., by around 30%. This is the path of “self-elimination”, when many farmers (or their heirs) move into other, non-agricultural socio-occupational groups, cease to farm the land, and become members of the group of manual labourers or of the middle class. Their defunct farms are taken over by operating farms, which leads to growth in the average area of agricultural holdings.<sup>11</sup> However, the departure from farming might be only partial; if a farm does not disappear and farming does not cease due to the farm owner's non-agricultural source of income, there is a change in the farm owner's social identity. Both work on the farm and the farm income may constitute an additional – sometimes fairly essential – source of income (maintenance) for many rural families. In this case, landowners include not only farmers but also representatives of nearly all the occupational categories of people living in the countryside, including sometimes those who have come to the country from the city. Thus, the number of people working in agriculture (most often on a small scale) is significantly larger than the number of farmers.<sup>12</sup> On account of EU direct payments, a large group of “pretend farmers” appeared after accession to the EU in 2004; these were landowners

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<sup>11</sup> It should be noted, however, that this has mainly occurred due to the privatization (still partial) of the state sector in agriculture.

<sup>12</sup> This question is analyzed in detail in the following part of the article.



who only kept the land in good condition, which was a prerequisite for receiving payments, and also landowners who did not farm the land themselves but leased it informally, while receiving EU subsidies.<sup>13</sup>

This process results in changes to the rural social and occupational structure. While at the beginning of the 1990s every second inhabitant of rural areas was a farmer, a quarter of a century later only one in four was a farmer. The proportion of farmers in the rural social structure decreased; the fewest farmers are in areas with diversified multifunctional or suburban farms. This process is very visible, although the de-peasantization of consciousness is, or will be, a much longer and more complicated process.

### Proletarianization

“The proletarianization of the countryside” is not a new idea; among Marxists, we encounter many analyses of the subject. The works of economists, sociologists, geographers, and ethnographers – and not only of the Marxist orientation – on the “rural proletariat” or “semi-proletariat” (labourers, hired hands, or other wage-earners) show that already in the nineteenth century the proletariat was a significant group in certain types of villages, sometimes amounting to half or more of the inhabitants. The phenomenon was associated with poverty and lack of land; it signified lack of income and work.

In this article the term is used in another sense. Proletarianization signifies the process whereby rural society is saturated with members of social and occupational groups considered to be labourers. Labourers in the Polish countryside are not a new group. In the interwar period the rural proletariat was numerous, but these were not industrial workers. As a mass, they started to appear in the Polish countryside in the 1950s along with the (communist) process of industrializing the country. In 1979 the process was summarized by Ryszard Turcki in the following manner:

participation of the rural population in the processes of industrializing the country was indubitably reflected in the engagement of that population's considerable and relatively cheap manpower in industrial production – by means of migration to the cities and industrial centres and by daily commuting. In particular, commuters constituted a source of relatively inexpensive labour. Workers were recruited from among the rural population, particularly people living on individual farms, who were satisfied with relatively low wages, with financially less attractive positions [...] (Turcki 1970, p. 239).

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<sup>13</sup> The terms of such leases are set by local custom. In general they are short term. The owner pays the agricultural tax himself and collects the subsidies, while the lease-holder ordinarily does not pay any rent.

This process was especially rapid in the industrial regions. "In 1950 in the Płock county [*powiat*] scarcely 670 workers were commuters, in the years of building the Petrochemical-MH Works the number grew and amounted to 1,960 people in 1960, 4,900 in 1962, 5,610 in 1964, and over 5,000 people in 1966" (Gałąj 1970, p. 310). The category of labourer-farmers emerged and grew rapidly; in the 1960s more than one fifth of farm owners belonged to it and in 1988 nearly two-fifths did – or over half according to some estimates (Kaleta 2005). The higher income and also contact with a different social environment led to the disappearance of elements of peasant culture and identity.

A new stage in the process began with the transformation of the political system, which caused a revolution in ownership and trade. This was primarily the effect of economic restructuring, which resulted in decreased employment in industry. The process was especially intensive in the 1990s: 3,728,000 people were employed in industry in 1995; 2,858,000 in 2005; and 2,909,000 in 2010. Employment also decreased in construction, where rural inhabitants often worked: from 887,000 people in 1995 to 662,000 in 2005, before it grew to 865,000 in 2010 (GUS 2015). The drop is illustrated by the above data: toward the end of the 1990s and at the beginning of the 2000s, the category of labourers in the rural social structure temporarily shrank. Growth in this segment began only in 2004. Its internal structure was also changing: the group of skilled workers was growing (employees in trade and services, industrial workers, and machine operators); the share of unskilled workers, doing simple manual labour, was decreasing. This was connected with the effects of modernizing production technology and the fact that a young, better educated generation entered the labour market.

In recent years, the proletarianization of rural areas occurred primarily under the influence of the exogenous process of economic restructuring. In this process, some sectors of employment disappeared, eliminating jobs; others grew, creating them. The structure of business ownership also changed: in 1990, 67% of business entities were state-owned; in 2013 such businesses accounted for only 4% of all business entities, while 3.5% were companies in which the State Treasury held shares. In 2013, labourers were primarily working in the private sector,<sup>14</sup> often in small firms owned by natural persons. These small companies, which are very common in rural areas, create a so-called peripheral sector: they often make little use of modern technology, pay their employees less, and have fewer requirements in regard to employee qualifications.

In the quarter of a century under analysis, the proletarianization of the rural population increased and simultaneously the workers were changing, including in terms of their awareness and social identity.

<sup>14</sup> There are four times more persons employed in the private sector than in the public and state sector.

When in the study "Working Poles 2007" respondents were asked an open question about what social class, level, or group they belonged to, both skilled and unskilled workers rarely mentioned "the working class" or "labourers"; they defined their group as "employed", "average", or belonging to the "middle group" or "lower" group. (...) The data cited is a good commentary on the observations of Guglielmo Meardi: "the idea of 'the working class' has been partially driven out of the awareness of many Polish labourers; they rarely define themselves as its members" (Gardawski 2008, p. 97).

This has a certain justification in their better education (70% of employees in trade and services and 40% in the remaining labour groups have at least a secondary education) and in a change in the nature of work, where there is ever less simple manual labour. A hypothesis can fairly safely be advanced that these tendencies can also be encountered among labourers living in rural areas.

### Gentrification

In this article, the process of growth of a middle class in rural areas is called gentrification; in the literature it is sometimes encountered interchangeably with the idea of *embourgeoisement*. This idea emerged in the 1960s and it defined a broader phenomenon, one of whose components was a change in the social structure. The term was coined by Ruth Glass, who in the 1960s used this metaphorical description ("gentrification" from "gentry") to characterize the complex metamorphosis of a working-class industrial district of London. An important element in this metamorphosis was a change in the social composition of the district, when the labourers who had previously lived there were displaced by the upper and lower middle classes. The idea was also transferred to descriptions of processes occurring in rural areas, and in more recent literature the descriptions *embourgeoisement rural* ("rural bourgeoisification") (Guimond, Simard 2010), or "gentrification in rural settings" (Maloutas 2011, p. 35), are encountered. When writing about the gentrification of rural areas I mean changes in the social and occupational structure of the rural population, consisting in growth in the percentages of various categories of the middle class. This involves the entry to rural social structures of people occupying higher positions in the social structure, with better cultural capital, higher incomes, and different lifestyles from the country-folk lifestyle.

The "middle class" is never a rural phenomenon. It appears in industrialized capitalist communities, and grows and changes with the community's evolution. In contemporary developed market communities of Europe, the share of the "middle class" in the social structure is similar in both rural and urban areas. In the UK, whose rural areas and agriculture have developed in a specific manner, its share

in the rural population structure is larger than in the cities (Halamska 2015). In the Polish countryside, which also followed a particular path of development, the middle class appeared at the beginning of the twentieth century in the form of fairly isolated members of the intelligentsia: usually a priest and a teacher, later an agronomist and district administrative clerk, sometimes a doctor. They were not part of rural society but representatives of an “alien world” as Józef Chałasiński phrased it in *Młode pokolenie chłopów* [*The Young Generation of Peasants*] (1938). But there was also a second, larger group of the “old” middle class: rural craftsmen, who before the Second World War very often originated in the Jewish population, and thus were also “alien”. During the Second World War this latter community disappeared from rural areas as a result of the Holocaust. A further decline of the group of craftsmen and small entrepreneurs was caused by the nationalization of the economy. Although agriculture remained largely in private hands, its entire environment was socialized and involved a mass of wage-earning employees, the better educated of whom entered the ranks of “white-collar workers”. The criteria for belonging to this group were not overly rigorous, and admission was possible by various routes, including, before 1958, by means of academic courses. In acquiring an education, rural youth was “given to the city” and a return to the countryside, particularly after university graduation, was most often treated as a personal failure (see Wasielewski 2013, p. 18–57).

Increase in the proportion of the middle class – the gentrification (*embourgeoisement*) of Poland’s rural social structure – began only in 1989. Statistically it became noticeable primarily through increase in the level of education of the rural population, as education gave rural inhabitants access to occupations considered to be characteristic of the middle class.<sup>15</sup> The process was most visible in the period under analysis. Furthermore, it was above all an increase in the proportion of the “new” middle class. At the beginning of the period, the proportion of the “old” craftsman-merchant segment of the middle class was significantly higher in rural areas than in Poland as a whole: in 1991 for one member of the “old” middle class, there were one and a half members of the “new” middle class; in 2013, there were more than three (3.37). The internal composition of the rural middle class was approaching its composition in the rest of Poland, and the *embourgeoisement* of rural areas occurred chiefly through growth of the “new” middle class.

The gentrification of social structures in Poland’s rural areas was very rapid in the 1990s, but after 2003 its pace started to decline noticeably, for reasons that

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<sup>15</sup> This is shown by the rate of growth in the share of the population with at least a secondary education. In 1960, 3.7% of the rural population had a high school diploma; 5.7% in 1970; 9.8% in 1978; 14.9% in 1988; 26.7% in 2002; and 33% in 2011 (Frenkel 2003, 2014).

were both endogenous and exogenous. First, the increase in education level of the rural population is endogenous, particularly the increased share of the population holding a university degree and thus occupying higher positions in the social and occupational structure. In the period under analysis the share of rural inhabitants with a university degree grew fivefold (according to the National Census from 1.8% in 1988 to 4.2% in 2002 and 9.9% in 2011).<sup>16</sup> In this process the second factor is also important: the slowed flow of educated rural youth to urban areas. In 1990 the balance of internal migration between rural and urban areas was negative for the former (-112,000 people); in the year 2000 it became positive (4,000), and since 2003 it has remained at the level of 30,000–40,000 annually (Frenkel 2014). Several elements influenced the process, which proceeded with various intensities in the period under analysis: the transformation crisis in the 1990s, which resulted in unemployment; the reconstruction of the rural economy and the emergence in it of new, mainly non-agricultural entities; and the improvement of living conditions in the countryside, which inclined young educated people to continue living there. Research by Krzysztof Gorlach's team at the turn of the millennium showed that every second young educated inhabitant of a rural area wanted to continue to reside there, but over 70% wanted to work in the city, as only there could they find satisfactory employment and achieve their career aims (Gorlach et al. 2003: after Wasielewski 2013, p. 53). This has contributed to the spatial change in the population density of rural areas; the districts with population concentrations, including of the well-educated, are located in the vicinity of urban agglomerations, while peripheral districts have been losing population.

Exogenous causes for the growth of the middle class in rural areas include migration from cities to the countryside. This migration from urban to rural areas is described through many varieties of “rural urbanization” processes, such as suburbanization, re-ruralization, semi-urbanization, counter-urbanization, and urban sprawl.<sup>17</sup> Such terms draw attention to various phases or aspects of the same phenomenon: migration from the city to rural land. Migration to the countryside is a characteristic element of the process of gentrification/*embourgeoisement*. Analyses identify two migrating groups: representatives of the middle class, and people of retirement age, who are often seeking a rural idyll, that is, “the positive valuation of the countryside as a friendly, healthy environment, close to man. [...] The vision of a rural idyll is an expression of the human longing for harmony resulting from contact with nature and social interaction” (Wójcik, 2011, p. 47). From the middle

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<sup>16</sup> The rapid pace of change in this sphere is illustrated by the fact that only .3% of rural inhabitants had a higher education in 1960, while in 1978 – 1%.

<sup>17</sup> An interesting discussion on the mutual dependence of these concepts can be found in Wójcik 2013.

of the 1990s, the balance of domestic migration has been positive for rural areas (Rosner 2012). According to the statistical data, it is predominantly young people, in the age group of 25–44 years, with a stable family situation, who migrate from Polish cities to the countryside, while the migration of older people is relatively rare.<sup>18</sup>

Analyses of the process of *embourgeoisement* (gentrification) find support in two different theoretical concepts. The first is based on production, or more precisely, on structures appearing in the economy. In developed market economies, distinct class divisions disappear; this is described as the “death of classes” and is due to the spread, in various manners, of ownership. These changes occur gradually, but an increasing number of people become the owners or co-owners of some property that has a major significance for their own description of their place in society.

This current of explanations also encompasses transformations in the rural economy, including its large proportion of services, as well as social services such as schools, health care, and social aid. All these require qualified personnel, as does the expanding rural local government bureaucracy, in which a major place is occupied by the “project” class.<sup>19</sup>

The second concept of gentrification is based on consumption, which is determined by cultural resources. Cultural and social resources bring higher incomes and allow people to occupy higher social positions. Such resources determine social behaviour, aspirations, and levels – and above all styles – of consumption. This concept refers directly to the theories of Max Weber or Pierre Bourdieu. *Embourgeoisement* rests here on the cultural resources of individuals and is culturally manifested. According to the sociological dictionary, *embourgeoisement* is “a process by which the working class comes to view bourgeois aspirations, standards, and lifestyles to be proper” (Marshall 2004, p. 36). The appearance of people whose cultural resources give them higher social positions, larger material resources, and a different lifestyle, gentrifies society, as is revealed in two simultaneous processes: diversification and homogenization (Maloutas 2011).

Gentrification of the rural population in Poland is a comparatively new process with considerable dynamism. The human, social, and cultural capital of rural areas is being enriched, as if to make up the gap that was once created by migration

<sup>18</sup> According to Frenkel, in the years 2008, 2010, and 2012, the proportion of the age group of 25–29 year olds grew respectively by 14.8%, 13.1%, and 12.2%, and the group of 60+ grew by 3.2%, 3.5%, and 3.4% respectively. In each of these years, the category of married people constituted around 70% (Frenkel 2014, p. 40). Younger age groups are better educated than older ones, and therefore, in spite of the lack of data concerning the education of migrants, it can be concluded that they also are a source of gentrification. Moreover, this is confirmed by case studies (see Zwięglińska 2016).

<sup>19</sup> This is what Imre Kovach (2000) called the civil servants who prepare various types of projects with the aim of acquiring funds from the European Union.

to the cities, drawing the young and best educated people from the rural areas. A recomposition and recomplexification (according to the description of Yves Gilbert 2002) of the social fabric of rural areas has been occurring. As a result of this process, a rural society is being formed that must organize its social life in a different manner.

#### 4. Conclusions

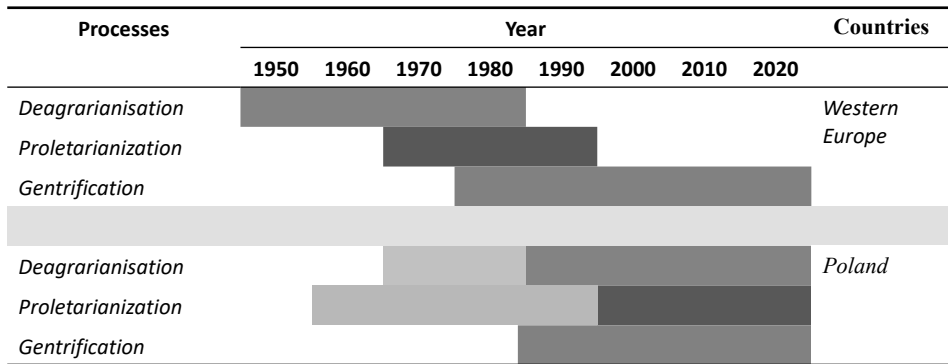
The processes of change in the social structure that took place in the last quarter-century in the Polish countryside are not specific in themselves. They have been occurring in Western Europe since the 1950s and are part of change within the entire economy. Reconstruction of the post-war economy involved industrialization of the whole state and modernization of agriculture in order to provide hands to work in industry, which was primarily located in cities. This led to multifaceted changes in rural areas. Above all, the modernization of agriculture, its mechanization and intensification, led to basic changes in farming methods (*the end of the peasants*). On the other hand, it released the labour force, which migrated from the countryside and found employment in industry (*the exodus from farming and the countryside*). This caused a drop in the rural population (deruralization), and the desertion of peripheral areas. The natural consequences included a change in the rural social structure: rural society ceased to be a homogenous structure, dominated by farmers (deagrarianisation) and became a heterogeneous collective, with a diverse occupational structure which – all over Europe – is dominated by labourers (proletarianization). The rural social transformation accords with the development of industrial society.

New tendencies of change in rural social structures appeared in various countries at different times in the last quarter of the twentieth century, when European society entered the post-industrial phase and services became the core of the economy. Opposition to the previous model of development appeared and was accompanied by an interest in the urbanized and deagrarianised rural areas, which came to be seen not as places of production but as attractive areas to be consumed and in which to consume. This interest is manifested primarily by the basic consuming element of post-industrial society: the middle class. Some academics perceive this as a renaissance of the countryside; it indubitably entails change in the rural social structure and growth in the percentages of a diverse middle class – in other words, gentrification.

It can naturally be disputed whether it is proper to treat the processes occurring in the countries of Western Europe as a model to which to compare the processes occurring in Poland. Convergence theory supports such a treatment, and Poland

in the 1990s (as well as the Czech Republic and Hungary) was already on the path to modern social macrostructures (Domański 1996). On the other hand, it is also obvious that the processes are occurring differently in Poland than in the countries of the West, as a result of Poland’s peripheral location in Europe, its relative isolation in the years 1944–1989, and global circumstances. It is fairly hard to indicate which of these factors has had the largest influence on the transformations. However, in my opinion, this factor is the social time period. While in the West, changes in the rural social structure were dictated primarily by the expansion of industrial society, in Poland these changes were occurring in a period of ongoing de-industrialization and under the influence of mechanisms of post-industrial consumer society. Poland entered the 1990s with an incompletely modernized agriculture, a non-modern economy requiring industrial restructuring and deindustrialization, and a poorly educated work force. The extent of change was dictated by the model of the European Union; thus, the changes can be seen as a special example of dependent development, with all the consequences.

This fairly broad sketch of the transformation was intended to show the reasons for its appearance over time. With a certain simplification it can be said that from the 1950s to present, the rural social structure of Europe has undergone deagrarianisation, then proletarianization, and finally gentrification, as is shown in the table below.



**Figure 2.** Illustration of the course of change in rural social structures in Poland and Europe as a whole

Source: own work.

The course of these processes in Poland has been different. They began later, and were delayed in time in relation to the West. The conditions of their unfolding were thus different; for example, in a situation of disindustrialization, the labour force



leaving agriculture cannot be absorbed by industry. It is true that proletarianization and deagrarianisation began in Poland at nearly the same time as in the West. However, Poland's industrialization first absorbed the excess agrarian population and then the two processes were seemingly stopped in the middle, producing peasant-labourers in the countryside. Proletarianization and deagrarianisation accelerated only in the period 1990–2010, followed by gentrification. The postponement and then simultaneous appearance and overlapping of the processes constitutes their special quality in rural Poland.

Translated by Michelle Granas

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## Procesy zmian struktury społecznej ludności wiejskiej w latach 1991–2013

**Streszczenie:** Artykuł jest poświęcony zmianom struktury społecznej mieszkańców wsi w latach 1991–2013. W tym okresie udział rolników zmalał z 46% do 27% pracujących, natomiast udział robotników wzrósł z 33% do 45%, klasy średniej – z 15% do 27%. Zmiany te są rezultatem trzech nakładających się procesów: dezagraryzacji/depeząntyzacji (specyficznego, dwufazowego „końca chłopów”), proletaryzacji (nasycania społeczności wiejskich przedstawicielami grup społeczno-zawodowych zaliczanych do robotników) oraz gentryfikacji (czyli wzrostu klasy średniej, nazywanym też burżuazyjnieniem). Przebieg tych procesów w Polsce ma w stosunku do Zachodu odmienny przebieg: procesy te nie tylko są przesunięte w czasie, ale także nakładają się.

Artykuł oparty na badaniach reprezentatywnych z lat 1991, 2003, 2013.

**Słowa kluczowe:** struktura społeczna ludności wiejskiej, dezagraryzacja, proletaryzacja, gentryfikacja.

