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What is rural Poland like? Over a quarter of a century ago, rapid and radical changes began on many levels of social life. These transformations were different in extent and rhythm, and were the result of both internal and external forces. Not only the political system but also the structure and functioning of the economy, the principles regulating social life, and the place of groups and individuals in the social hierarchy changed profoundly. There was a shift in society's attitude to the countryside, which began to be called "rural areas." However, it is not the areas but the people living in them that constitute "rural Poland."

Rural Poland matters, because two fifths of Polish population live in rural areas. It is thus legitimate to ask who these people are, what are their occupations, what is their social position in comparison with the entire of society (including urban residents), whether this community is homogenous or diverse, what factors influence social diversification, how rural Poland sees itself in comparison to the rest of the country, and how it perceives internal variations. Such a list of questions forms the bones of the research project "The Rural Social Structure and its Correlates of Consciousness," which is financed by the National Science Center. The present volume is the first of three projected publications which are to appear as a result and is composed of three separate studies.

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The first study ("The Social Structure of the Rural Population at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century" [*Struktura społeczna ludności wiejskiej na początku*

XXI wieku] by Maria Halamska, pp. 11-96) describes rural Poland's socio-occupational structure, including its particular traits and the processes of change that have occurred in it in the past quarter century. The Author's analysis relies on the databases of representative nationwide research: the Polish General Social Survey (1991) and the Social Diagnosis (2003 and 2013). The theoretical foundation for the study is the Polish tradition of research into the social structure (consisting of research into the rural social structure extending back to the 1930s). Three components of social position are analysed: education, occupation, and income. The key element of the description is occupation, which indicates a person's level of education and potential income; the Author's basis for differentiating socio-occupational groups is the International Standard Classification of Occupations 1988 and 2008 (ISCO-88 and ISCO-08).

In 1991, at the beginning of the period analysed, the socio-occupational structure of rural areas was significantly different from the rest of the country, as farmers were the decidedly dominant group (46.4%). They were more numerous than all the other groups of rural workers together, including workers providing personal services and salespeople (41.1%). The diverse collective of the intelligentsia-middle class (groups 1-4) formed scarcely 12% of the rural population. Twelve years later, the group of farmers had diminished by around 9 percentage points and the dominant groups in the structure of the working population had become labourers and (physical) service workers (40.3%). The intelligentsia had significantly

Table 1. Socio-occupational structure of the rural population in the years 1991–2013 (in %)

Socio-occupational groups	1991	2003	2013
0. Armed forces	0.0	0.4	0.4
1. Public officials, senior civil servants, and managers	0.4	2.5	2.8
2. Specialists	1.8	6.6	9.3
3. Technicians and associate professionals	7.0	7.5	5.2
4. Clerical support personnel	3.3	5.2	4.7
5. Service and sales workers	6.5	8.8	10.9
6. Skilled agricultural, forestry, and fishery workers	46.4	37.7	27.4
7. Craft and related trades workers	16.4	15.5	22.5
8. Plant and machine operators	7.8	9.0	9.5
9. Elementary occupations	10.4	7.0	7.3

Source: Table 2, p. 23.

increased its share – to one fifth (21.8%) of the working population. This trend continued in the following decade: the group of farmers diminished, while the group of labourers and physical service workers grew substantially; various groups of the intelligentsia also grew, if less strongly (to 22%).

The rural social structure has lost its specific agricultural nature, although that nature is still visible in the internal structure of socio-occupational groups (occupations, level of education, income), particularly in comparison with their structure in cities. The analysis also takes into consideration specific, rarely studied, categories of rural inhabitants: people at a crossroads, above all the young, who are seeking their place in life and whose situation is the result of globalization as well as of the post-communist transformation (Ch. 4, “Beyond Structure: Groups or Only a Temporary Situation?” [*Poza strukturą: grupy czy tylko sytuacje przejściowe?*]).

The focus of this part is the process and dynamics of change in the rural social structure. The changes appear as three processes: disagrarianization/depeasantization, proletarianization (the process by which rural society is saturated with labourers), and gentrification (a growth in the share of diverse categories of the middle class). The changes in the social structure that have occurred in the last quarter century in the Polish countryside are not specific in themselves. The same processes occurred in Western Europe at the end of the 1950s. With a certain degree of simplification it can be said that from the 1950s to date the social structure of rural Europe has undergone disagrarianization, then proletarianization, and in the end, gentrification, as is shown in the graph below.

Processes	Year								Countries
	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020	
<i>Disagrarianization</i>									<i>Western Europe</i>
<i>Proletarianization</i>									
<i>Gentrification</i>									
<i>Disagrarianization</i>									<i>Poland</i>
<i>Proletarianization</i>									
<i>Gentrification</i>									

Figure 1. Diagram of the course of changes in the rural social structure in Europe and Poland

* The shade of color signifies the intensity of the processes.

Source: own study.

In Poland, the course of these processes was different. They began later than in the West, and the conditions in which they occurred were thus dissimilar: for example, in a time of disindustrialization the labour force leaving agriculture could not be absorbed by industry. Actually, proletarianization and disagrarianization began in Poland at nearly the same time as in the West, but Polish industrialization first absorbed the agrarian overpopulation and then both processes stopped, as if halfway, to produce a countryside of peasant-labourers. These processes accelerated only in the period 1990–2010, accompanied by gentrification which followed. The delay in time, as well as the simultaneous appearance and overlap of the processes, constitutes the specificity of their occurrence in rural Poland. It is difficult to decide in what measure this is due to the different social era and to what extent it is conditioned by Poland's peripheral place in the world-system.

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In the second part (“Sex, Gender, and the Social Structure” [*Płeć, gender i struktura społeczna*] by Sylwia Michalska), the author discusses methodological problems encountered by researchers who want to take account of differences between sex and gender in studying social structures. The Author also reflects on research that shows how the rural social structure differs when the sex of the respondents is taken into consideration.

The author discusses theoretical and methodological issues connected with studying social structures, and the difficulties encountered by researchers who want to encompass the presence of women within the structure. For a long time a family was the basic unit in the social structure, and its position was signified by a man – the head of the family. A change in attitude and the inclusion of women as subjects of research into social structures has produced many methodological problems which remain difficult to solve. Methodological problems related with considering sex in the study of structures has led to the incorporation of the category of gender, which describes cultural connotations rather than biological. In Poland, however, this term has become strongly ideological and may either facilitate or hinder conducting research and analyses.

The second part of that text contains a review of the literature and a discussion of research that encompassed gender in investigating rural communities. The Author points to the changing interests of researchers, who have noticed that a description of a social environment is less complete if it does not encompass all social groups. Over time, research involving gender criteria has become ever more complex and is no longer limited exclusively to comparing the situation of men and women. It has also begun to reflect the internal diversity of the group of women. The intersectional perspective, in which attention is paid to the situation of manifoldly

marginalized individuals, has currently become an important element in analyses. The Author points out that rural women are marginalized due to their gender and place of residence, among other reasons.

The study also contains a discussion of research into rural communities in Poland and an analysis, using the Social Diagnosis 2013 databases, of the present situation of rural women. Level of education, socio-occupational situation and income level are taken into consideration. Thus, in regard of education, the data from the SD 2013 confirms that rural women spend longer time on education than men, and that an important change in this regard has occurred in recent years. In 2013, rural women were slightly better educated than men: the education rate for women was 102% of the education rate for men, while 10 years previously it had been only 99%. This is caused by the significantly larger share of women in the group of people with a university degree (65%) or a secondary school diploma (55%) in rural communities. In the case of both men and women, education level is a factor favouring employment. In rural areas, the employment rate for women with a university degree in 2013 was 73.3%, and for men it was 83.3%.

The occupational structure of the working rural population indicates a fairly clear division into male and female occupations. Women are decidedly dominant in the group of specialists (350 where M=100), services personnel and salespersons (360), clerical workers (219) and mid-level personnel (187), while there are clearly fewer women in management positions (60) and physical labour categories (27-13). The analyses show that women belonging to the occupational group of high social prestige – senior civil servants, high-ranking public officials, or executive managers – spent more years in education than men in similar positions and they represent smaller share in these occupational groups. In order to obtain a prestigious position connected with having real power, women must have higher skills than men, and better education (obtained following a longer period of studying). Income is also an indicator of the meritocracy of a given social structure. As it appears from the DS 2013 data, income discrimination against rural women exists in all socio-occupational groups: in the group of public authorities, civil servants, and managers, women earned 85% of what men did in 2013 – in the group of specialists – 75%; technicians and mid-level personnel – 85%; clerical workers – 90%; personal services workers and salespeople – 77%; farmers, gardeners, and fishers – 82%; industrial workers and physical laborers – 71%; machine and equipment operators and assemblers – 68%; and unskilled workers – 71%. In no socio-occupational group did women's incomes equal men's. The situation of women in rural communities is thus ambiguous. While their incomes, lower rate of occupational activeness, and kinds of work place them lower in the hierarchy, having better education than men raises them. Women have a chance to achieve high and valued positions,

but in order to do so they must study longer than men, and regardless of their job and socio-occupational group they always earn less, even when they have higher qualifications and more experience.

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The third part (“Rural Gentrification: Definition, Significance, and Effects of the Process” [*Wiejska gentryfikacja: definicja, znaczenie i skutki procesu*] by Ruta Śpiewak) discusses rural gentrification and its effects on the social structure of the Polish countryside.

An idea of rural gentrification appeared in the analyses of the 1980s primarily by British geographers, is occurring already in the Polish countryside but appears sporadically in Polish research. The lack of study could result from researchers’ dislike of the concept itself and preference for the idea of suburbanization. In recent years, the study of “second homes,” their location and owners, has also begun; this phenomenon is treated as “wild gentrification” in the literature.

Rural gentrification is a vague and multidimensional phenomenon, both with regard to the forms it takes as well as the effects it brings. In terms of social structure, the results of migration to rural areas can be viewed from quantitative and qualitative angles. From the former angle, gentrification is visible in the growing number of people with degrees and relatively high incomes who have moved to a rural area, mostly from a city. To a certain degree this process overlaps with suburbanization, because the majority of individuals migrating to rural areas choose an area near a big town or city. Such migration has had an impact on changes in the social and demographic structure, and in the price of real estate. Gentrification can also be viewed through the prism of its qualitative effects: the impact on local society, the strengthening of local social and cultural capital, and changes in the local economy – where further decline of agriculture is visible and evokes the original meaning of the word “gentrification” – improvement.

In Polish conditions, gentrification is too recent phenomenon to be able to speak of its essential influence or lack of influence on the social structure. A proper choice of indicators is also a problem. To what extent can we say that gentrification in Poland is analogous to gentrification in countries where more advanced research has been done on the issue (as mentioned in the first part of the article)? In terms of the social structure, what effects of the migration process on rural areas can be expected, given the Polish conditions? Does the fact that rural inhabitants are a significant number of migrants to suburban areas constitute the Polish specific feature of the phenomenon? The answers to these questions can only be found in individual case-study analyses, which to-date have been

conducted only occasionally. For example, from a study of the district of Prażmów (in the Mazowieckie voivodeship), it appears that the new inhabitants of Polish rural areas are not causing the other inhabitants to migrate. Their presence, however, speeds the process of leaving agriculture. They trigger changes of the social structure of a given area. The newcomers (or relative newcomers) are better educated and occupy more advantageous positions in the socio-occupational structure. This is clearly correlated with culturally defined patterns of behaviour, including consumption. They are also more active socially and culturally. They go more often to a cinema and a theater, meet with their friends and read more books. Above all, the differences are visible in the sphere of social and civil behaviour – significantly more newcomers belong to foundations or associations. Their social and civil proactivity influences the development of the community. Gentrification can affect various types of rural areas – those lying closer to an agglomeration as well as those in peripheral districts. In reference to the typology of Thierry Marsden's team, the examples presented in the publication can be considered to be of the type described as "preserved countryside," that is, an attractive rural area that draws a new middle class, and where the local economy is developing based on new types of services. The middle class is migrating to the district of Prażmów and changing it from within, transforming the local economy. Specific services connected with the needs of the middle class are created and the local social capital is strengthened. In this case, the appearance of new inhabitants – representatives of the middle class – has become an opportunity for the advancement of lower classes: social capital should move from one group to the other. The access to various services is also increasing. Even though gentrification, with which we are undoubtedly dealing, is important in spatial, economic, and social terms, it is an elemental and uncontrolled process, as shown by the reactive behaviour of the local authorities. It is also a process that has hardly been studied in Poland.