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ALEKSANDRA PAPROT-WIELOPOLSKA

Post-war Agriculture in Żuławy versus Changes
in the Region's Cultural and Social Landscape in Source
Materials, Diaries and Farmers' Narratives

AMANDA KRZYWORZEKA

Changes in Farmers' Modes of Work in Podlasie

ILONA MATYSIAK

Between Passion and Rejection – Attitudes to Farming
among Young University Graduates in Rural Areas of Poland

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Editors' Note. Social Aspects of Agrarian Transformation – the Voices of Young Polish Scholars

In this special issue, we present a collection of articles by young scholars who discuss different aspects of transformations occurring in Polish agriculture. The idea for this special issue originated from the series of seminars on “Social aspects of agriculture” organised in the Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development, Polish Academy of Sciences, together with Koźmiński University.

Agriculture in Poland has been facing a radical transformation since the economic transition of 1989, and especially since the country joined the EU in 2004. The establishment of the free market for agricultural products and the implementation of the CAP triggered deep changes in the Polish agricultural landscape. Due to many factors, such as peri-urbanisation on one hand and the depopulation process of remote rural regions on the other, the area of arable land has quickly decreased. Rapid deagrarianisation has many aspects, such as the diminishing percentage of the labour force engaged in agriculture. The countryside faces depeasantisation, proletarianisation and gentrification (Halamska 2016a). Small farms have been closed down, abandoned or become deactivated (see Ploeg van der 2008) while the number of large-scale, commercial farms and agricultural holdings have increased. These processes are profoundly changing the rural social structure (Halamska, Michalska and Śpiewak 2016; Halamska and Zwęglińska-Gałecka 2018).

As Maria Halamska (2016b) writes, the process of deagrarianisation began during the Polish Peoples' Republic, and unfolded more slowly than in Western Europe (2016b, p. 73). Deagrarianisation accelerated after 1989, when the number of people working in agriculture halved (Halamska 2016b, p. 74). Halamska notes two kinds of development trajectory of farms resulting from those transformations: the first involves tightening their relationship with the market, intensifying production and enlarging the farm; the second entails dissolution or marginalisation (during the years 1989–2010, 600,000 farms disappeared, as their owners mostly joined

the rural working class, Halamska 2016b, p. 76). Moreover, we have been witnessing an emergence of inactive farms keeping a low level of production or informally leasing the land just to receive subsidies (2016b, p. 77) or other public support. This contributes to the emergence of the so-called “subsidy culture” (Kovacs 2019), which has not yet been described in the Polish context. Thus we can summarise that the traditional Polish rural structure is being dissolved, although farms up to five hectares still predominate in the agrarian landscape.

Despite the significance of the transformations described above, their agricultural aspect has rarely been a subject of analysis in Polish social sciences (with some notable exceptions, however, covering the beginning of this period, see Fedyszak-Radziejowska 1992; Gorlach 1995; Podedworna 2001). Moreover, the changes in agriculture have mostly been analysed from their economic perspective while their social and cultural aspects have been largely disregarded. This is a serious omission, considering the fact that economic changes in Polish agriculture have fundamentally transformed the rural structure, and, consequently, the way in which farmers and non-farmers understand their work, relations to each other and relations with the city. These processes are peculiar to Poland and cannot be fully compared to what happened in Western Europe in the course of deagrarianisation, mainly due to the history of Polish agriculture, marked by failed collectivisation in the 1950s and the long-lasting preservation of an agrarian structure based on small-scale, peasant farms until 1989.

The reasons for the rare occurrence of the topic of agriculture in Polish social sciences are manifold. It seems to be connected to the lack of interest in agriculture in the Polish public sphere. Since the farmers' protests in the early 1990s, the issues of agriculture have rarely reached a wider audience. However, the situation has recently begun to change. Firstly, agriculture has been an important topic in the Western public sphere. For example, the new CAP perspective is widely discussed in relation to issues such as of its (un)sustainability. In contrast, large-scale farmers' protests have been occurring on the streets of Europe (see Ploeg van der 2020), among others concerning regulations aimed at sustainability. Also in Poland (although for different reasons, such as the discrimination against Polish farmers on the local market) farmers have been taking the street since 2013, and recently, in 2018, the AGROunia social movement emerged, the spectacular actions of which have provoked a growing interest in social media and beyond (see Bilewicz 2020). These protests triggered interest in agriculture among journalists and publicists, but also academicians.

There is a considerable body of literature on agrarian transformations in various different parts of the world (for most notable examples see Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2009; Bernstein 2010). However, recent literature on this matter

has mainly concerned countries of the Global South and Asia, and only rarely refers to the European, and especially Eastern European issues (see e.g. Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2009; Rambo 2017; Hopkins 2019; Rigg 2019; Mkodzongi 2020, for the historical exception see Richards 2020). In this context, our special issue dedicated entirely to Poland can be seen as one of the few contributions on agrarian transformation and its social correlates in Eastern Europe.

The history of the process of deagrarianisation and change in the agrarian structure has prompted us to ask the question concerning the future of family farms and of the countryside as a whole. Is the social fabric of the countryside “irreversible”, as Władysław Grabski, the founder of Polish rural sociology, claimed? (Grabski 2004). How have the transformations of agriculture since the WWII affected rural communities? Does deagrarianisation threaten the existence of the countryside itself? How does the social structure of the countryside change under pressure of agricultural transformations? And how do farmers react to these transformations? Last but not least, how do these transformations shape farmers’ worldviews, lifestyles and modes of work?

These questions are addressed by the authors of papers presented in this special issue. The articles have been written by young scholars from different disciplines, such as sociology, social anthropology and economics.

The article by Aleksandra Paprot-Wielopolska entitled “Post-war Agriculture in Żuławy versus Changes in the Region’s Cultural and Social Landscape in Source Materials, Diaries and Farmers’ Narratives” describes the process of adaptation of newcomers from the former eastern parts of Poland to the specific character of local agriculture and multi-ethnic cultural heritage. She describes how the new residents had to learn to farm on lands that are below sea level, typical of the region. The settlers differed in farming skills and culture, and their move into the new geographical and social setting often resulted in lower productivity. The author writes: “The settlers thus had to develop new ways of cultivating the land, adjusted to the climate and economic conditions but also to local industry” (Paprot-Wielopolska, this volume: p. 25). The newcomers had to learn how to “read” the new landscape, but they also had to reinvent their identity. Paprot-Wielopolska shows how the agrarian and social structure of the Żuławy region, deeply affected by the WWII operations, was further changed after the settling of newcomers, originating mostly from the eastern part of Poland.

The subject of post-war transformations of agriculture is also present in Jolanta Kluba and Barbara Szczepańska’s article “Ownership Changes Through the Eyes of Workers on Large Farms”. The authors investigate how workers on the large farms, former PGRs (State Agricultural Farms) perceive the structural changes of their workplaces. The article revolves around the history of PGRs, which suffered a deep

crisis during the economic transformation of 1990s and were closed down or privatised. Szczepańska and Kluba outline the history of transformation of the farm throughout the communist period until the present day. In addition, they show the role of leaders in the functioning and restructuring the PGRs. The interviewees, for example, recount the blurring of boundaries between private and state property during the People's Republic and the reshaping of PGRs after the transformation, which forced them to become profit-oriented.

The ethnographic work of Amanda Krzyworzeka concerns the change in farmers' mode of work in Poland's eastern region of Podlasie. She argues that recent transformations of agriculture have fundamentally shaped the way farmers work (those who modernised their farms and were able to function under free-market conditions) and how they understand their labour. The author presents an outline of the traditional mode of work in the Polish countryside and then describes deep changes that she noted during her fieldwork. She shows that in this region affected by depopulation, farm enlargement due to land purchase or lease has led to growing frustration and fatigue (due to the reluctance to work on somebody else's farm there has been a low rate of employment of wage workers) and also a feeling of loneliness, partly due to the fact that farmers can no longer count on the help of neighbours, children or other family members. Krzyworzeka argues that changes in the mode of work deeply influence the rural community. This entails exacerbating social inequalities. Due to technological changes, large-scale farmers have lost control over their produce. In general, as she concludes, farmers' work has become bereft of its social character and has become an alienating element.

Another contribution to this volume deals with the attitudes to farming of young university graduates living in rural areas. The author, Ilona Matysiak, investigates how these young people perceive farming in the era of deagrarianisation and ongoing modernisation of farms in Poland. Matysiak shows various factors that encourage young people to pursue farming as well as the factors that discourage them. Among the encouraging factors she notes family obligation, while low profitability, low quality of arable land, associating farming with low social status and a negative perception of farmers and agriculture discourage young graduates from taking over the farm. The young people who have decided to run a farm "claimed that only large-scale highly modernised farms provide sufficient income and are worth the effort" (Matysiak, this volume: p. 92). This shows that they have internalised the modernisation paradigm that predominates in Poland in the era of deagrarianisation.

Only a few of Matysiak's interviewees said they were engaged in farming or planned to take over a farm. This is further elaborated in the final article of this volume entitled "Does a Demographic Crisis Threaten European and Polish

Agriculture?”, by Michał Dudek and Tomasz Wojewodziec. The authors analyse policies aimed at countering the demographic crisis at EU level, with a special regard to Poland. Basing on legal acts and an analysis of statistical data, the authors reveal that the policy of support for young farmers in Poland has been rather unsuccessful. As they write, it is nowadays hard to claim that financial support for young farmers solves the problem of farms without successors and contributes to rejuvenating the farming population.

Despite the different disciplines and different approaches of the contributors to this issue, we can attempt to draw a general picture of the transformations in the Polish agriculture. In the era of deagrarianisation, depeasantisation and urbanisation, farms are facing rapid modernisation, as large entrepreneurial units supersede smaller, family farms and traditional ways of farming. As Krzyworzeka has shown, the farmers' mode of work changes as they modernise their farms. This modernisation, however, has its economic and social costs. Agriculture faces a demographic crisis, and those who continue farming experience work overload, frustration and loneliness. As the gap between owners of small, often stagnating farms and the entrepreneurs widens, the social fabric of the countryside erodes, as mutual help and social life decreases.

The contributors to this special issue describe in detail how these processes unfold in different regions and contexts. We hope that the contributions in this volume can be an inspiration for the reflections on the future of farming and the society affected by these rapid transformations.

Aleksandra Bilewicz (editor of the issue)

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Aleksandra Paprot-Wielopolska

Post-war Agriculture in Żuławy versus Changes in the Region's Cultural and Social Landscape in Source Materials, Diaries and Farmers' Narratives

Abstract: On the example of Żuławy, the paper discusses questions connected with post-war migrations to the Polish Western and Northern Territories, and their consequences for agriculture. It focuses on issues related to the development of the region by new settlers and the changes taking place in the cultural and social landscape. The text highlights the region's character and its economic conditions before 1945, and considers agricultural settlement and the agrarian and social structure after 1945. Post-war agriculture in the region is presented in the light of the cultural heritage described in scientific literature, the first settlers' recollections written in the form of diaries in the early 1970s, and biographical accounts that the author recorded in Żuławy in 2018.

Keywords: Polish Western and Northern Territories, Żuławy, cultural landscape, cultural heritage, migrations after World War II, agriculture.

1. Introduction

Located in and around the Vistula river delta, the Żuławy region is characterised by the high utility value of its soil, which defines the area's agricultural character. Grassland is prevalent here, while orchards and forests are scarce. Nevertheless, there is also a substantial proportion of other usable land and wasteland, including polder-system components (Matusik and Szczyński 1976, p. 458). However, the anthropogenic landscape of Żuławy is linked to centuries-long human

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activity in dealing with water in depression areas. Transformations of the natural landscape and the incorporation of new cultural contexts and meanings, in the form of a planned hydrological and reclamation system or distinctive regional architecture, have influenced the development of a unique social ecosystem accounting for that landscape's natural, economic and cultural resources (cf. Kowalik 2006, p. 24). Żuławys's landscape has been jointly created by the region's residents representing various local ethnicities, religions and cultures, thus forming the multicultural society of Żuławys until 1945. The situation in the region changed in the wake of World War II and the subsequent great migrations, when the Western and Northern Territories together with the Free City of Danzig were incorporated into Poland and new – mainly Polish – settlers were moved there, thus forcing the previous residents of German descent to leave Żuławys.

The issue of post-war migrations to the Western and Northern Territories was subject of research conducted by the Polish ethnologists and sociologists as early as in the 1950s. It presented village and rural community in the context of studies on folk culture (Jasiewicz 2004, p. 43) as well as the mechanisms of cultural changes and creating of culture in the countryside from the moment of its settlement by new settlers (Burszta 1964, p. 9). At that time, for example, in Western Pomerania, attention was paid to tradition and progress in agricultural culture including cooperation between settlers. Moreover the researchers' interest was focused primarily on the clash of cultures of many regional groups (Burszta and Jasiewicz 1962, p. 199), but in the following decades scope of interest moved towards analysis and description of social integration and the issues of small towns (Burszta 1987). Contemporary village in the Polish Western and Northern Territories is considered especially in the context of cultural heritage and issues related to the identity and collective memory of its inhabitants (Kluba et al. 2020).

The researchers did not study the cultural heritage of the Żuławys region until 2008, when e.g. ethnologists from the University of Adam Mickiewicz in Poznań, conducted over 400 questionnaire interviews with the native population and post-war settlers living mainly in rural areas.¹ Their analysis has been presented in several publications which constitute a significant contribution to the knowledge of the situation after World War II in the region (Brzezińska 2011). In addition to scientific research that consists of collecting narratives in the form of memories of settlers and biographical narratives, one can point out the amateur activities of history enthusiasts who collect such stories in Żuławys. They refer to the oral history method and constitute a valuable documentary base, especially for those dealing with the history of agriculture and everyday agricultural practices. It is best to look

¹ The author of the text was also a member of the research team.

for testimonies of such practices in local sources (Grele 2006, p. 51). Many local cultural institutions also encourage the oldest settlers and their families to write down their memories of their arrival in Żuławy as a result of which diaries are created. It is also a kind of reference to the tradition of diaries competitions in Poland directed, among others, to the villagers. They were organized in the interwar period and were used by sociologists to obtain research materials. However, after World War II, there was a development of diaries competitions, which also documented the experiences of the rural population (see Michalska 2018). Among them, there are contests for the diaries of the settlers of the Polish Western and Northern Territories in 1956, 1966 and 1970, organized e.g. by the Institute for Western Affairs in Poznań.² However, there are no scientific studies of personal stories and narratives of the settlers who settled in Żuławy and began to work in agriculture.

The aim of the paper is to look at post-war agriculture in Żuławy in the context of heritage, including the region's social and cultural landscape, and also to consider the changes that have taken place as a result. Therefore heritage can be defined as the tangible and intangible cultural products of individual communities (together with the historical context), which are transmitted, adopted and evaluated in a specific way by successive generations, and thus can undergo changes under the influence of people's different traditions and experiences (Jasiewicz 1987; Szacki 2011). The cultural landscape, meanwhile, comprises all human activity in transforming the natural environment. It includes natural elements as well as civilisational ones linked to human activity in a given geographic space (Brzezińska 2008, p. 46). These concepts are applied in the paper to the context of the Western and Northern Territories (including the broken cultural continuity). There is also assumed that Żuławy is a region that requires farmers who farm the land there to have skills in draining depression areas, whereas immediately after the war the communist authorities presented the migrants with a vision in which Żuławy was shown as a fertile region where the settlers could make a lot of money at a low cost, while the large amount of labour they would have to put in would quickly be recompensed by good crops.

The above issues will be analysed through nine accounts of witnesses to history, namely post-war settlers who took up agriculture after arriving in Żuławy, whom text author recorded in 2018 using the oral history method.³ This will enable

² *Konkursy pamiętnikarskie w Instytucie Zachodnim*, <https://www.iz.poznan.pl/azzip/konkursy-pamiętnikarskie/> [access: 29th January 2021].

³ The recordings were part of a project entitled *The Cultural Landscape of Żuławy vs. the Work of Farmers in the Narratives of Post-War Settlers Living in Rural Areas*, financed by the Remembrance and Future Centre in Wrocław under the eighth edition of the Oral History Grant. For a report on the project and a characterisation of the group being studied (see Paprot-Wielopolska 2018).

the biographical experiences of farmers from the region to be presented in the context of their work on the land, the development of farms and emerging difficulties related to adapting to a foreign cultural space. The empirical material will be juxtaposed with: 1) selected recollections of post-war farmer settlers published in the book *Żuławiacy. Wspomnienia osadników żuławskich* [People of Żuławy: Recollections of Żuławy Settlers] (Pawlik 1973) in the spirit of communist People's Poland propaganda;⁴ 2) scientific literature on farming and structural transformations in Żuławy immediately after the war and in People's Poland (mainly up to the end of the 1970s), i.e. the period when the witnesses of history were developing their farms in terms of crop growing and animal breeding.

There also will be drawn attention to the importance of the region's pre-war agriculture-based cultural heritage for the formation and legitimisation of the Żuławy farmers' work ethos in the context of the identity practices of the post-migration communities of rural Żuławy. The historical context presented in the first part of the paper is intended as a framework for the post-1945 narratives of the settlers presented in the early 1970s (written down in the form of a diary) and in 2018 (free-form biographical narratives) in the context of unfolding events and changes in the countryside and in the social structure. In this, the author analyses the period between 1945 and the early 1970s in rural Żuławy in detail because it is highlighted more strongly in both the narrative types.⁵

2. The Cultural Heritage and Landscape of Rural Żuławy up to 1945

Żuławy is one of the youngest but also most fertile regions of Poland. It was "formed as a result of the delta-shaping process on the River Vistula" (Lipińska 2011, p. 10), i.e. the aggradation of mud at the river's outlet to Gdańsk Bay, which began about 5,000 years ago and continues to this day. On the one hand, the soils within the Vistula delta (mainly river and humus fen soils, clay soils, peat soils, but also lake silts, meadow lime and river sand) are fertile, which enabled agriculture to develop in the region (Szukalski 1966, p. 10, 28). On the other hand, the area was constantly in danger of flooding due to its location. Terrain lying below sea

⁴ I mainly analyse nine recollections of peasant farmers. The publication also contains ten reminiscences written by state-farm directors, cooperative members, mechanics, an agronomist, a teacher and others who were distinctive for their high level of involvement in various kinds of institutions and organisations of the People's Poland period.

⁵ The recorded witnesses of history were more forthcoming and detailed, and sometimes quite critical, when they described the time right after they settled in Żuławy. This might have been the effect of "unblocked memory", of traumas having been processed, and no longer concealing things that had had to be left unsaid due to the policies of People's Poland, i.e. now they could talk about previously disregarded issues (Ratkowska-Widlarz 2011, p. 46).

level, reaching down as far as 1.8 m below mean sea level (BMSL),⁶ required new forms of settlement to be developed over the centuries, together with skills to deal with the element of water.

The Teutonic Order already carried out the first land reclamation projects in the Middle Ages, which facilitated the region's economic development. It was in the Teutonic period that the first dyke associations were formed, introducing a new model of water management and spatial planning in the polders; e.g. one was already set up in 1407 in Gdańsk Żuławy. This was a kind of "water constitution" creating the structure of water control in the dyke districts, which were managed by "dyke counts", "dyke sworn men" and stewards. The duty to protect the polders and the water-and-reclamation system also lay with the whole community inhabiting a given area (Cebulak 2010, pp. 19–20). This means that the main profile of agriculture had developed by the 15th century, and was characterised by permanent surpluses in grain production, high crop yields and progressive breeding of farm animals. The social structure was also consolidated; it was determined by social relations in rural areas as well as the tenant economy and peasants' personal freedom (Okoniewska 1986, p. 94).

The 16th century saw the arrival of settlers from the Netherlands – Mennonites,⁷ who improved the hydrographic network and introduced their own land cultivation techniques in depression areas. In subsequent centuries, people living in the Vistula delta formed polders in the depressions, with an expertly organised network of drainage ditches, drainage windmills, sluices, weirs and pumping stations separated by strips of dykes preventing them from being flooded completely or partially. Water was drained from the polders via ditches and canals to higher-lying areas, thus reducing the risk of flooding (Szukalski 1966, p. 21). Furthermore, the planting of willows was widespread, e.g. along transport routes, tracks between fields and ditches, as "natural pumps" that evaporated excess water from the area.

⁶ Today the lowest point in Poland is considered to be located in the village of Raczki Elbląskie, in Elbląg Żuławy. Specialists have indicated for several years that there is an even lower point near the village of Marzęcino, at 2.07 m BMSL. The highest hill, at 14.6 m AMSL, lies in the village of Grabiny Zameczek in Gdańsk Żuławy (Lipińska 2011, p. 10).

⁷ Mennonites were Anabaptists from the Netherlands, where they were persecuted. This religious movement was founded by Menno Simons, a former Roman Catholic priest. He propagated the introduction of reforms that would be based on the teachings of Christ and the New Testament. The movement was characterised by the baptism of adults, supporting those in need and the poor, renouncing any violence, war or military service, and also any secular offices. Mennonites were brought to Poland, including Żuławy, in the 16th century, when the country was pursuing a policy of religious tolerance towards people of different religions. For more, see: Kizik 1994; Klassen 2016, pp. 25–54.

Another anthropogenic element of the Żuławy landscape is the distinctive type of settlement and architecture. Settlers from the Netherlands often worked the land in dispersed villages or in linear marsh villages, e.g. in Elbląg Żuławy (Lipińska 2011, p. 24). Moreover, the region's inhabitants started building their houses and homesteads on terps (artificial dwelling mounds), the reason also being the risk of floods. To this aim, a system of local embankments around homes, settlements or villages was developed. The "Hollander" type of homestead was very popular (in oblong, corner or cross form), as was the construction of arcaded homes. The region's cultural landscape was also dominated by rotatable windmills for pumping water (paltrok mills and post mills) and smock mills for milling grain (Koperska-Kośmicka 2014, pp. 95–97).

The special qualities of local soils and the dairy cattle pastures that grew on them had a positive impact on milk quality, which in turn led to the development of cheesemaking traditions in Żuławy. Cheese was made on farms at first, and later at dairies, whose number grew steadily. This occurred in the second half of the 19th century and was connected with the development of dairy-beef cattle breeding, especially of the lowland black-and-white breed, but also with Swiss families specialising in cheesemaking being brought to the region (Opitz 2015).

Żuławy was considered an extremely fertile region, which also had an impact on the high level of wealth of landed-estate owners. Arable land accounted for a very high percentage of the area in individual subregions of Żuławy; e.g. in Gdańsk Żuławy the land cultivated by peasant and smallholder (*zagrodnik*) farms in feudal villages and peasant farms in free villages totalled more than 18,000 hectares. On the other hand, the social structure of the rural communities in this part of the region comprised large-scale farming peasants, smallholders (*zagrodniks*), landless peasants (tenants and craftsmen), hired servants and seasonal labourers (Szafran 2017, pp. 48–49, Tables 1–4; cf. Mączak 1962).

A watershed for agriculture in Żuławy came in the 19th century when the drainage system was improved, among other things, which had a positive impact on the regulation of the hydrographic network and thus improved the soil quality. Wheat, barley and oil-producing plant growing became widespread during this period. In addition, "the global demand for sugar combined with the raw material-orientated development of sugar factories means that in the late 19th century numerous new sugar factories were set up in the Vistula delta and along its fringes" (Bebenow and Strzyżewski 2018, p. 15). Several sugar factories were established in Żuławy and its environs, and they bought up sugar beets. This also resulted in the construction and expansion of a narrow-gauge railway network leading to the factories that processed this raw material. From then onwards, large peasant farms and small manor farms developed in the region:

In the agrarian structure of Żuławy [...] small farms (2–5 ha) occupied just 2.8% of arable land. They were mainly concentrated in the coastal zone. Farms between 5 and 20 ha occupied 22.4% of arable land. These were farms based largely on family labour. The strength of Żuławy's economy was created by large peasant (*gebur*) farms of 20–50 ha, which occupied 28.4%, and manor farms (50–100 ha), which controlled 22.6% of Żuławy's arable land. There were not many estates of over 100 ha in Żuławy, and they took up 23.8% of arable land. Before 1945, large peasant and manor farms accounted for about 75% of Żuławy's area, while some 25% was occupied by small and medium-sized farms (Matusik and Szczęsny 1976, p. 459).⁸

In administrative terms, on the eve of World War II Żuławy lay within the Free City of Danzig (Gdańsk Żuławy, Great Żuławy), while a smaller part (Elbląg Żuławy) lays in the western part of the province of East Prussia. The region's population was mainly of German origin and, to a lesser extent, Dutch, Jewish and Polish. Żuławy's pre-war rural residents were mainly involved in agriculture, which focused on crop farming and animal breeding. However, the high development level of this segment of the economy was halted by the outbreak of World War II and then its consequences. Due to the treaties ending the war, the people living in the region around and within the Vistula delta, who were mainly of German descent, were forced to leave.

3. Changes in Rural Żuławy after 1945

3.1. Restoring the Region to Use

As World War II drew to a close, the German forces withdrawing from Żuławy in the face of the advancing Red Army blew up the flood banks in 16 places along the Vistula, Nogat, Stara Radunia and Tuga rivers and Młyński Canal, as well as the polder embankments (Zieliński 1966, p. 36). More than 130 pumping stations as well as drainage and irrigation equipment were destroyed, and sluice gates were left open. These actions led to damage on 120,000 hectares, including 50,000 hectares of polder depression area that was completely flooded (Cebulak 2010, p. 24). Many rural residential and farm buildings were destroyed, while fields, meadows and pastures turned into swamps, which quickly became overgrown with reeds and wicker. A plague of mice appeared around this time, destroying the crops. The first settlers described these events in detail and commented on them in their diaries; anti-German sentiments can be heard in these narratives:

⁸ See also data on arable land and agricultural production in Żuławy up to 1939 (Okoniewska 1992, pp. 19–20, Tables 3, 4).

Jan Arbasz: The land in our area was partly flooded. The Germans had dug through the protective embankment so the water would flood in and prevent the enemy forces' pursuit. The water stayed a long time. Even tree roots rotted and withered. Where it wasn't flooded, enormous thistles grew, up to two metres high (Pawlik 1973, p. 116).

The ethnically German population still living in Żuławy⁹ as an area of the "Recovered Territories" (Western and Northern Territories) were forced to leave their homes and farms. These were taken over by new settlers from central and south-eastern regions of Poland and the (former) Eastern Borderland, Ukrainians forcibly resettled as part of Operation Vistula, and also re-emigrants and people returning from forced labour, who were relocated to Żuławy – some voluntarily, some not – between 1945 and the turn of the 1950s and 1960s¹⁰ (Brzezińska 2011). Substantial wartime destruction, poor living conditions and a small volume of land for cultivation in their place of origin were often important factors inclining people to resettle. Farmers justified their move as follows:

Jan Arbasz: In 1945, as soon as the war was over the Polish government issued an appeal for anyone wanting more land to leave for the Western Territories. Very many people left, the greatest number from destroyed areas (Pawlik 1973, p. 115).

Marcin Kostuś: When I heard about settling in Żuławy, I decided to settle there because I'd heard a lot about the fertile Żuławy soil [...] I had two hectares of land scattered across six plots, and my family comprised ten people. The village was poor [Czątkowice, Jarosław *powiat/county*]. Ninety per cent of its residents had farms of around two hectares, and you wouldn't find a five-hectare farm if you tried (Pawlik 1973, p. 219).

Wanda Dolecka: We lived there in the Lublin region [...] It was tough living there because we had one cottage for two families and there were only two rooms [...] and we had little land there. It was two or maybe three morgs [1 morg, a historical unit of land area, equalled approximately 0.56 ha] (OPiP AHM-752¹¹).

⁹ According to Ludwik Zieliński (1966, p. 38), in spring 1945 Żuławy was inhabited by about 26,000 ethnic Germans, about 2,800 people who can be considered the Polish autochthonous population, and over 3,000 Polish people from other parts of Poland.

¹⁰ Up to 1950, the greatest number of people came to Żuławy's Elbląg, Gdańsk and Malbork counties from Soviet territories, Bydgoskie and Warszawskie provinces, and neighbouring regions (Kosiński 1960, Tables 1 and 2). In subsequent years, it is possible to show that the settlers migrating to Żuławy considered their stay to be temporary and wanted to get rich quickly. A second resettlement of Polish people from the Soviet Union was carried out in the latter half of the 1950s.

¹¹ OPiP AHM – Ośrodek "Pamięć i Przyszłość" Archiwum Historii Mówionej (Oral History Archive of the Remembrance and Future Centre in Wrocław).

Maria Mazurek: I was glad [...] because we came here from such poverty [...] At home we had lived under a straw roof (OPiP AHM-750).

However, most of the immigrants did not have the knowledge and skills needed for farming in terrain lying below sea level. As Józef Liguz remarked:

I have to admit I didn't know how to farm on this land. That's why I watched those who had come earlier, and especially those who had worked here for Germans. They knew the soil and its fertility best (Pawlik 1973, p. 259).

The settlers thus had to learn to "read" the landscape and shape their new identity. The myth of Żuławy pioneers, who could get rich quickly on the region's land, was also promoted in the first years after the war. However, some people tried to find out how to cultivate the soil from the few Germans who still remained:

Marcin Kostuś: I asked what the soil required. They all said the soil needed fertilisers, and manure most of all. If there wasn't enough, the land had to be fallowed, used for grazing cattle, and ploughed after two years and sown with sugar beets. After that, you could grow wheat and other crops (Pawlik 1973, p. 221).

Leokadia Bieńka: And there were still Germans around [...] One of them lived there [...] and taught us how to work with beets [...] and there were lots of tools for the beets, all of them, because they sowed beets. But we were still ignorant, the Poles [...] they were still in the dark (AHM-900).

Shortly after the war ended, measures were undertaken to drain Żuławy as part of hydrotechnical and drainage/irrigation projects, and to restore the region to its former economic glory. This is why a Regional Management for Land Reclamation was formed in Gdańsk as well as Elbląg. As regards local traditions, initially there were plans to re-establish the old dyke associations, but the new authorities did not accept the idea of polder cooperative associations.¹² "Operation Żuławy", aimed at restoring the polder depression areas in the Vistula delta, was planned for the years 1945–1949. Its key element involved identifying and locating the main damage, filling in excavations and breaks in flood banks, repairing pumping stations and clearing drainage ditches (Cebulak 2010, pp. 24–25). The flooding and draining of Żuławy is described in detail in the settlers' diaries and in a few of the farmers' biographical accounts, the latter being more general in character:

¹² The traditions of dyke associations in Żuławy were not restored until a new water resources law was passed on 18 July 2001, whose section VII described the aim and scope of operation of water companies and dyke associations (Cebulak 2010, p. 21).

Lucjan Nagrodzki: here in [19]45 [...] as far as the eye can see, from just behind that home, the water stretched all the way to Nowy Dwór [Gdański] and to Elbląg (OPIP AHM-749).

Kazimierz Papiewski: The Germans had this land drained [...] there was a drainage system here, but the war [happened] and [...] it all became overgrown [...] those pumps [...] for draining [...] this was also damaged, stolen, so they got it working some time later, but it took almost two years before they started the drainage system [...] [when] there was heavier rainfall, there was flooding (OPIP AHM-884).

Western media argued that the scale of wartime damage was so great that the Poles would be unable to cultivate the region for the next hundred years. Echoes of this can be found in the diaries of settlers, who repeatedly underlined how People's Poland had contributed to overcoming the problems. In the case of the biographical interviews, only Franciszek Komasa conceded that:

These were the Recovered Territories and they had to be cultivated, because the United Nations claimed that the Poles would not cultivate this land for a hundred years. But it turned out that everything was functioning within ten years (OPIP AHM-805).

Restoring Żuławy to economic use was such a priority for the national authorities that they even appointed a Minister of Agriculture Special Representative for Żuławy, a move that also aimed to strengthen Poland's image. A new wave of settlement occurred after part of Żuławy had been drained. Importantly, efforts were made to provide farmers with knowledge on how to cultivate and take care of the soil in the region. To this aim, the *Żuławy* monthly was published for a short period, presenting charters of rights and obligations related to agricultural use of polders, while relevant announcements were put up at *gmina*/municipal offices and read out during the smaller *gromada* units' meetings (Cebulak 2010, p. 26).

3.2. Settlement of Żuławy

In the first years after the war, mass-scale resettlement to the "Recovered Territories" was organised by the State Repatriation Office, which existed from 1944 to 1951. County and stopover centres were set up alongside its provincial divisions (Dziurzyński 1983, pp. 41–45). In Żuławy itself, an important role in developing the region's rural areas was played by settlement committees, which were appointed in May 1945 and whose tasks included informing settlers about the local economic and climate conditions and controlling how the settlers were

allocated in the area. Farms of up to 100 ha and homes with gardens and plots up to 0.5 ha were assigned for settlement. This was the kind of large farm taken over by Franciszek Miller:

I took over a farm that used to belong to a German, Rembagel, who did not emigrate and lived in a different building in the village. The farm comprised 81 hectares and large buildings [...] There was a lot of machinery, but nothing to haul it. Anyone who had a horse was a happy man (Pawlik 1973, p. 279).

It was assumed that it would be possible to settle some 25,000 people in Żuławy. A little later, the settlement operation and the management of former German assets was also supported by the Ministry of the Recovered Territories. Circulars were issued, e.g. one such document from 1946 gave precedence of settlement to farmers from areas that had suffered serious wartime damage (Zieliński 1966, pp. 41–43).

However, initially the settlement operation was rather unstructured and spontaneous; settlers took over the best and largest farms where former German equipment could still be found or which had food supplies, and where surrounding fields included crops such as grain, potatoes and rapeseed. The settlers and farmers recalled:

Stanisław Kowalczyk: And spring moves forward quickly, as if nature wanted to make up for lost time and heal its war wounds. The winter crops have sprouted into stalks. These are still the few crops sown by the Germans in autumn 1944. The meadows are covered with luscious green growth, while weeds thick as a forest grow in the unsown fields (Pawlik 1973, p. 241).

Lucjan Nagrodzki: There were some crops, too. There were some potatoes left, because we dug there, because [...] those Russians wouldn't let us at first, [for] they were guarding it all [...] [There was] former German wheat, we had the German variety for a long time afterwards (OPiP AHM-749).

Piotr Przedcieczyński: in [19]45 we took over the wheat left by the Germans, the cornfields were lovely, beautiful. And there was rapeseed (OPiP AHM-748).

A short time after military activity had ceased, Soviet soldiers were still stationed in Żuławy, occupying farms of under 100 ha. At this time the Red Army troops were transporting former German property, such as farm machinery and livestock, to the Soviet Union. The presence of troops on many estates undermined agricultural production and the supply of food to the Polish market (Golon 2014, pp. 147–149, 160–161).

Despite widespread looting, there was still a lot of agricultural machinery left in Żuławy. The reminiscing settlers and farmers mention tractors, reapers, binders, threshers, carts and corn crushers. They served the farms for many more years, often being a godsend because the equipment the settlers had brought with them to Żuławy was not suited to cultivating the heavy soils there, as indicated by Andrzej Głowacki: “The period of work in the field threatened to be terrible [...] the plough we had brought was no good for ploughing this soil” (Pawlik 1973, p. 167).

Furthermore, the new settlers often had just a few heads of livestock, which they had brought with them. There was an acute shortage of horses for work in the field. This deficit was only filled by animals provided by UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration), although, as Piotr Przedcieczyński remarked: “I collected the horse, signed the pledge. We had to pay off that horse later” (OPiP AHM-748). In addition, tractors were imported from the United States in 1947.

The idea was that farms in particular villages would be taken over collectively by a population who had already worked in agriculture (Zieliński 1966, p. 46). Meanwhile, people who had nothing in common with agriculture were still moving here, from the Lublin region for example, as reported by Antoni Banaszekiewicz:

I called a meeting of residents in my village, with the participation of the county authorities. At this meeting, in January 1947, I called for the resettlement of landless [peasants] and smallholders to the recovered territories. The idea caught on. From my village alone, [...] twenty families relocated (Pawlik 1973, p. 133).

The limited number of farms in Żuławy meant that new families started being moved into buildings already occupied. This caused conflicts among the settlers, many of whom treated their stay in the “Recovered Territories” as temporary. Many believed they would be able to move back to their native parts after a few years.

3.3. The Post-war Agrarian Structure

The agrarian structure of peasant farms in the Western and Northern Territories, including Żuławy, stabilised in the years 1946–1949. A decree dated 6 September 1946 stipulated that a private farm could measure between 7 ha and 15 ha, while a breeding farm could have up to 20 ha. At a later stage, this enabled farmers to be granted property rights, although the distribution of land was re-examined in 1948 by the Ministry of Agriculture and Agricultural Reforms and the Ministry of the Recovered Territories; the latter distinguished two economic districts in the rural areas that had been incorporated into Poland. In this structure, Żuławy became part of a district with favourable conditions, where the farm area was allowed

to reach 7 ha, and 9 ha in exceptional cases. As a result, the agrarian structure of peasant farms was dominated by medium-sized farms (Matusik and Szczęsny 1976, p. 463; Zieliński 1966, pp. 49–52). All this caused a lot of frustration among the settlers; so soon after the war, and having worked to prepare fallow land for use, they were forced to move again, to a different area. As Józef Liguz recalled:

Spring 1949 came. The hard work started again. We sowed all the land, and with the wife we started cutting out the rest of the wicker. We did it! Then the surveyor came and there was a new directive: farms couldn't have more than 10 hectares. Again, I was given a plot in a completely different place, and our work went to waste. The cleared plot went to someone else, while I had wicker all over again (Pawlik 1973, p. 259).

The new settlers represented different levels of farming culture as well, and different farming methods, which often resulted in lower productivity, poorer organisation and fewer economic resources. Farmers also had an insufficient amount of farming machinery, and what they had was of poor quality. At first the settler population drew on their own traditions and farming habits from their native parts, because they did not have the knowledge needed for the special kind of farming that Żuławy required.

This is why it was a widespread practice to plough grassland and introduce cereal cultivation, mainly rye and oats, but also potatoes, which do not fare well in heavy fen soils, which meant that crop yields were low (Matusik and Szczęsny 1976, p. 479). Lucjan Nagrodzki recalls: "Even here, that neighbour of mine [...] brought buckwheat with him. But the buckwheat wouldn't grow here. My grandpa brought millet, and he couldn't drive off the sparrows" (OPiP AHM-749). Franciszek Komasa admitted: "I cultivated caraway, poppies, as a kind of experiment" (OPiP AHM-805). This kind of approach was widespread among farmers who came from elsewhere in (pre-war) Poland, e.g. the Lublin, Kielce or Podlasie regions, where the soils were light. As Piotr Przedcieczyński remarked: "The soil there, it [was light] [...] for rye and potatoes [...] because here in Żuławy the soil is heavy, loamy" (OPiP AHM-748). The settlers thus had to develop new ways of cultivating the land, adjusted to the climate and economic conditions but also to local industry; e.g. they started growing hemp, which was contracted for the MAKOP Linen Industry Factory in Malbork.

The area of arable land grew significantly in the years 1949–1956: "Socialist [i.e. communist] forms of agriculture predominated in Żuławy in 1955. State farms used 52.1% [of the land] and production cooperatives used 21.3%"¹³ (Laskowski 1966,

¹³ According to other sources, it was a little less, i.e. 20.2% of farmland (Matusik and Szczęsny 1976, p. 466).

p. 77). About 43% of previously peasant-held land was taken over by production cooperatives. Under the Six-Year Plan, the number of dairy cattle was increased substantially in state- and cooperative-run farms, which resulted in increased milk production (Laskowski 1966, p. 92).

The development of agriculture in Żuławy was also supported by the Scientific Research Unit in Stare Pole, formed in 1952 under affiliation with the Central Institute of Agriculture in Warsaw.¹⁴ During this period, many private farmers also decided to bank on breeding lowland black-and-white cattle, which they continued to develop in subsequent decades. As Wanda Dolecka underlined: “there wasn’t a household that didn’t have a cow” (OPiP AHM-752). Kazimierz Papiewski added that “farmers here were mostly focused on cattle breeding [...] there was not a farmer who didn’t have [...] cattle. The first biggest income was in fact from cattle” (OPiP AHM-884). The dairy industry developed in Żuławy during this period, and farmers began working on the boards of district dairy cooperatives, e.g. in Nowy Dwór Gdański, Elbląg and Malbork, then and in successive years.

After the changes brought about in 1956, private farms accounted for 47.3% of the total farm area, state farms (PGRs) for 39.5%, production cooperatives for just 2%, while other users had 11.2% of farmland at their disposal. At this point, the cultivation of sugar beets, rapeseed and other crops for industrial purposes was increased, as being more high-yield and profitable in Żuławy. According to the data available, in the years 1957–1959 the average peasant farm in Żuławy grew from 7.4 ha to 9.1 ha (Matusik and Szczęśny 1976, p. 469).

However, sugar beets had already started being cultivated by the settlers shortly after they arrived in Żuławy, in connection with the launch of sugar factories, e.g. in Stare Pole. Only small areas of about 0.5 ha were sown with sugar beets at first, due to the lack of farming equipment and the need for a lot of manual labour, as recalled by Kazimierz Papiewski: “they started sowing beets here [...] Those beets were densely sown, so later this was all [dug up] by hand. You had to thin them, every blade, leaving some” (OPiP AHM-884). The farmers struggled with large amounts of mud, which also stuck to the beets, as described by Genowefa Szymańska: “When you [dug up] those beets in autumn, there was so much mud that you had to tread through” (OPiP AHM-928). The beets were most often transported to the sugar factories via the narrow-gauge railway, which was partially rebuilt after the war.

Efforts aimed at the technical improvement of drainage and irrigation systems were undertaken in the years 1956–1960. Economic self-government developed

¹⁴ Dairy cattle breeding was important for the region during People’s Poland, and distinguished it from Poland’s other regions. To highlight its great productivity, in the late 1970s the village of Stare Pole decided to honour a cow with record-high milk production, erecting a statue of it.

more effectively after 1956 as well, which had an impact on the organisation of milk purchases in villages (collection points were set up) and the establishment of farmers' associations and water companies, among other things. Furthermore, starting in 1964, the development of climate-oriented afforestation was organised with the aim of protecting large spaces from winds and bringing diversity to the monotonous flat landscape (Majchrzak 1966, pp. 115–116, 126–128).

Migrations, the agrarian structure, ownership relations and the crop structure stabilised in the region in the early 1960s. In 1970, private farms occupied 45% of the total farmland area in Żuławy, state farms 44.7%, production cooperatives 1.2%, while other users accounted for just 9.1% of farmland. Employment in services for agriculture and production services grew significantly in this period, although Żuławy had one of the lowest employment rates compared with the rest of the country (Matusik and Szczęsny 1976, pp. 472, 478).

Stanisław Kowalczyk wrote in his diary that in 1970 he mainly based his agricultural production on wheat, sugar beets, rapeseed and cattle breeding. As for the structure of farms in the village of Stogi:

There are 37 of us farmers working on 569 hectares of land, of which almost a quarter is arable land. Among these there is also one farm two hectares in area, as a craftsman plot (Pawlik 1973, p. 249).

In addition, the turn of the 1960s and 1970s was a time of great prosperity for many farmers. They mention the wealth of rural Żuławy in their diaries and narratives, owing it to high yields from the fields and animal pens, which led to good economic results. Measures of the wealth and prestige of Żuławy farmers include the degree of mechanisation of agriculture (purchases of new farm machinery, especially tractors) as well as the appearance of new household appliances (TV sets, washing machines, vacuum cleaners, refrigerators) and increased mobility thanks to the purchase of a car or motorcycle.

We can learn about the situation in subsequent decades from the narratives of private farmers recorded in 2018. Looking back, Kazimierz Papiewski noticed that “back then there were a great many farmers [...] now there are much fewer of them. For example [...] over here in the village we had over 30 farms, farmers. And right now [2018] there are two farms left” (OPiP AHM-884). It is possible to conclude from other statements that people who saw their future in agriculture increased the amount of land under cultivation and purchased agricultural machinery in successive decades of the 20th century, with the aim of developing their farm and leaving it to their children in future, e.g. as was the case with Genowefa Szymańska: “We had 9 ha, and later, when I was handing it over to my

son [in the 1980s], we had 35 [ha] [...] He himself bought, I don't know, 13 [ha]. Now he has almost 50 [ha]" (OPiP AHM-928).

Moreover, the witnesses of history who recounted their experiences in 2018 were more aware of the region's agricultural heritage, the uniqueness of its cultural landscape and the achievements of their predecessors – the Mennonites and wealthy German farmers (to whom they referred as "bauers"). This issue had been marginal in the settlers' diaries.

3.4. Żuławy's Post-war Social Structure

Immediately after the war the gender and age structure in Żuławy was distorted and included a high feminisation rate. There were still many women of German origin living there, and there had been losses of life among the men as a result of military operations. The influx of new, relatively young settlers evened out the initial disproportions in the 1950s; significant demographic growth and the fact that Żuławy was a "young region" was underlined in the 1960s. Men were reported to outnumber women in 1970, which was also connected with the migration of women to towns and cities to work in retail trade, catering or healthcare. Moreover, a high percentage of children aged up to 14 was maintained: 34.3% compared to 26.5% for the whole of Poland. That is why Żuławy, including its rural areas, was seen as having great demographic potential (Sobczak and Kaleńczyk 1976, pp. 439–449).

The social-occupational structure of rural Żuławy's population immediately after the war covered the native population as well as settlers who had previously worked in agriculture. One can also distinguish settlers who were only just starting to pursue farming or to work in this sector of the economy. Alongside them, there was also a small number of labourers employed on state-run agricultural estates managed by the State Land Properties organisation (Zieliński 166, p. 69). A much greater influx of people to rural Żuławy occurred after state farms were set up, including seasonal labourers from various regions around Poland who ultimately settled in Żuławy for good.

However, the farmers indicated that the non-agricultural immigrants to the region quickly gave up their private farms in Żuławy, even as soon as the late 1940s. As Franciszek Komasa recalled:

Warsaw had been [...] destroyed and Varsovians who [...] were a bit more resourceful started looking for somewhere to [...] get a start, where they could gain something. Here [...] they settled on the next-door farm: a father and three sons came there. And they farmed [...] but they didn't know much about farming and it didn't work out [...] they left that farm and went back to Warsaw (OPiP AHM-805).

Meanwhile, Henryk Szyszka's diary mentions specific occupations of the people leaving Żuławy: "Those who were leaving the farms mainly included people unused to working in agriculture: people like cobblers, tailors, watchmakers, traders. For them, this kind of work was too hard" (Pawlik 1973, p. 403).

People also found agricultural jobs in towns, thanks to the development of industry and services for agriculture, e.g. in Nowy Dwór Gdański and Nowy Staw. This is why the percentage of people making a living from agricultural occupations in towns grew in the years 1950–1970. On the other hand, the non-agricultural population accounted for 32% of employment in rural Żuławy on average. This concerned areas located along major transport routes and within the coastal belt (the Vistula Spit area). The percentage of professionally active people employed in agriculture was 62% in 1970 in the region, whereas a downward trend was already being observed in the country as a whole (Sobczak and Kaleńczyk 1976, p. 446).

This generally small population growth in rural areas in the 1970s after the high post-war wave was caused by migrations to urban areas, where there were more possibilities of finding employment (Rosner and Stanny 2019, p. 130). In this context, Żuławy should be viewed as a dynamic social system than underwent transformations. Some of the settlers' diaries already mentioned that farms were increasingly lacking successors to run them and that rural society was ageing. For example, Jan Pantuła wrote:

[The children] don't want to work on the farm. [...] I'm getting weaker, so is the wife. And there's a lot of work here [...] the process of farmers' ageing is quite rapid, because the children go away to school, to crafts, and at the age of around 65 the fathers hand over their farms to the State Treasury in exchange for pensions (Pawlik 1973, pp. 287, 297–298).

People pointed out that youngsters were migrating to big cities, obtaining an education there, training for an occupation and getting a job, for example in industry in Gdańsk and Elbląg, while a small number were going on to university to get a higher education. They also mentioned the emigration of post-war settlers from the countryside to urban areas in the 1960s, because "jobs were to be had in the city", even though they had been working in agriculture over the previous years.

Moreover, a few farmers mentioned that compulsory deliveries to the state in People's Poland had caused some farmers to go bankrupt and necessitated finding other work. However, this posed a serious problem due to the lack of vocational education among the oldest settlers, i.e. the generation whose education had been interrupted by World War II:

Genowefa Szymańska: everybody lived off the land back then. Well, the men could only go to work in the drainage system [...] So they dug those ditches with spades, they cut the grass in the ditches. That was the work to be had for men in those days, because the men of that generation most often had no training [...] Here [...] when the [farmers'] associations were set up, if someone had a driving licence they worked as a tractor driver or some other kind of driver somewhere (OPiP AHM-928).

One can see from the farmers' biographical narratives that at some point, running a farm on a small amount of cultivated land was not enough to keep a family. That is why some farmers did extra work in services for agriculture, e.g. at State Machinery Centres, production cooperatives, PGRs, milk depots, and later in farmers' associations. Three farmers also developed activity in beekeeping and poultry farming, others made extra money as artificial insemination technicians, carpenters and dressmakers. People often took seasonal jobs at sugar factories or sugar-beet collection points. Sometimes work in agriculture was combined with jobs in culture, cooperative banks, shipbuilding or retail trade, as Lucjan Nagrodzki described:

Later [...] I was the manager of the library in Lasowice Wielkie in [19]53 [...] and I got the youth club in Kmiecin. I didn't like it and we set off for Gdańsk, to the shipyard [...] I was the village leader here a few times, and later a councillor [...] in Nowy Staw [...] my [father] worked in the cooperative, and I did [too] and did the accounting [...] I ran a shop here, to supply goods [...] I worked at the sugar factory in Malbork [...] I did artificial insemination [of cows] (OPiP-AHM-749).

This shows that the rural population in Żuławy as a post-migration society slowly acquired new skills and qualifications, thus being open to changes resulting from the current economic situation. These factors may be considered conducive to "the bi-professionalism of the population involved in agriculture and the development of non-agricultural functions in rural areas, and thus the deagrarianisation of rural residents' sources of income" (Rosner and Stanny 2019, p. 142).

4. Conclusions: Being a Farmer in Żuławy

In conclusion, on the basis of the analysis of the materials, it can be indicated that the narratives presented in the diaries as well as recorded accounts reveal both differences and similarities. The first ones were written down by people who stood out from other farmers and often performed important political or social functions in the communist period. Such a selection for the purposes of the publication

was deliberate and was to show the caring nature of the state, and therefore the progress in agriculture as one of the main branches of the national economy. These memories are often grandiloquent and take the form of a detailed report. Contemporary stories, on the other hand, were collected mainly among individual farmers, sometimes related to socialized agriculture for a short time. Their selection was therefore not dependent on the material or social position of the witness to history and allowed to receive a more free and personal narration about settling down and farming in Żuławy. The narratives are spontaneous and therefore less structured and schematic.

Similarly, it can be noted that the settlers in their diaries and the witnesses of history in their narratives often referred to the transformation and changing work ethos in rural Poland. Many of them had grown up on farms that functioned within the peasant ethos. It was tied to the image of the peasant traditionalist (and the great importance of the family and religiousness), who was attached to his land but at the same time had a low sense of its ownership, whereas rural areas were characterised by stagnation. The period of People's Poland, and especially the subsequent period after 1989, is linked to the ethos of agricultural work. Farmers were identified with entrepreneurs and specialists who increasingly often had an agricultural education and introduced various innovations on their farms. Rural areas were characterised by development and progress, and farmers increasingly willingly invested in better farming equipment and increased the acreage of land they cultivated (Bukraba-Rylska 2008, pp. 362–381; cf. Fedyszak-Radziejowska 1992). This is noticeable in various fragments of the diaries:

Antoni Banaszekiewicz: I'm really happy with the current times [...] Today's farmer is not the same fearful peasant from before the war (Pawlik 1973, p. 138).

Marcin Koszuś: After several years' practice everyone achieved more or less the same crop yields, because the land taught us how it should be cultivated and what it needed (Pawlik 1973, p. 225).

Some of these people also suggested that 25 years after the end of World War II, a "Żuławy farmer" type had developed. According to Jan Pantuła, an accountant at a PGR, they "are promoters of progress in the farming culture" (Pawlik 1973, p. 297), while the farmer Henryk Szyszka underlined that "farmers now oriented their farms towards those segments of crop and animal production that guaranteed the largest income" (Pawlik 1973, p. 409). In the view of Franciszek Komasa, who had come from the Kielce region, agriculture in Żuławy had gained the aspect of an important tradition that he was continuing, which had become a kind of mission for him:

and already after two years here, farming, it turned out that I was the expert farmer. Initially I came here as a poor boy [...] I was a farmer, the son of a farmer, I knew about farming because I had taken it in with my mother's milk. I work, I worked in agriculture, I took over the farm. And I would never exchange it for any other (OPiP AHM-805).

These statements can also be applied to the contemporary understanding of being a farmer. It is most often identified with running a farm and being committed to agricultural work on many planes. In the context of the structure of contemporary societies, agriculture is considered an occupation because it affects the behaviours of individuals. As Maria Halamska (2016, p. 16) has pointed out, "Occupations are the foundation of social identity and of groups; groups of interests are formed around them, too". However, the image of a farmer from Żuławy seems more compatible with the concept of Amanda Krzyworzeka, according to which a farmer is anyone:

who is involved in crop cultivation and animal breeding and to whom this area of life is important: it consumes a large part of their time and energy, absorbs their attention, defines their areas of interest, engages their thoughts and emotions on a daily basis, is not just an occupation to be performed but also a way of life, although it is also increasingly a market venture requiring expertise (Krzyworzeka 2014, p. 61).

In this context and on the basis of the sources analysed in the present paper, we can accept that a Żuławy farmer is someone who, despite their migration experience, does their best to continue the region's pre-war agricultural traditions on their farm – traditions linked to crop growing (especially wheat and sugar beets) and, though increasingly rarely, to dairy cattle breeding. They have experienced the hard work of cultivating the region's heavy but fertile soils. Moreover, they are aware of the constant danger of partial and complete flooding in depression areas. The materials gathered suggest that initially it was only their persistence, determination and consistent effort that enabled the new settlers to become "real farmers", and to continue earning a living in this way over successive decades.

According to the post-war settlers, the profit from running a farm in the region seemed to compensate for the difficulties with which Żuławy's farmers had to contend on a daily basis. There are steadily fewer farmers with their own farms in the villages of Żuławy, and one can speak of the profitability of cultivated land with regard to farms larger than 100 ha. In addition, few farmers continue to specialise in dairy cattle breeding. At the same time, the Vistula river delta area is considered a typically agricultural region, and thus unique in Poland, which is cause for pride for many of the farmers.

With reference to the analysis discussed in the paper, it should be noted that the narratives presented here are linked to the history of rural Poland immediately after the war and in People's Poland, when agriculture and its practice in rural Żuławy was a necessity for the settlers coming there. Moving to Żuławy, particularly during the initial period of great migrations, they and their families most often had to take over former German farms and acquire completely new skills. The systemic and ideological organisation of agricultural and its various segments engaged most of the rural population in farming work, even though not all of them had been involved in agriculture before. Today the changes are obvious and illustrate the dynamic social system of Żuławy's villages. Agriculture can be described in terms of choice, and rural residents as individuals who make conscious decisions in connection with their professional specialisation. One can thus say that contemporary rural Żuławy comprises three social groups: 1) people unconnected with agriculture, who are employed in the countryside and in towns/cities in non-agricultural sectors; 2) people working in agriculture for financial reasons, but devoid of a farmer ethos, i.e. who have no previous connection to this sector of the economy but often work on nearby large-scale private farms or for producer group consortia that buy up land for cultivation – linked to intensive farming; 3) people tied to agriculture by choice: they practice the farmer's work ethos and continue local agricultural traditions in the context of the family and succession on private farms.

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Powojenne rolnictwo na Żuławach a przeobrażenia krajobrazu kulturowego i społecznego regionu w świetle materiałów źródłowych, pamiętnikarskich i narracji rolników

Streszczenie: Artykuł dotyczy problematyki związanej z powojennymi migracjami na Ziemię Zachodnie i Północne na przykładzie Żuław, a także z ich konsekwencjami dla rolnictwa. Skupiono się w nim na kwestiach zagospodarowywania regionu przez nowych osadników oraz zmian zachodzących w krajobrazie kulturowym i społecznym. Zwrócono uwagę na specyfikę i uwarunkowania gospodarcze regionu przed 1945 r. oraz osadnictwo rolne, strukturę agrarną i społeczną po tej dacie. Powojenne rolnictwo w regionie przedstawiono w odniesieniu do dziedzictwa kulturowego prezentowanego w literaturze naukowej, wspomnień pierwszych osadników – spisanych w formie pamiętników na początku lat 70. XX w. – i relacji biograficznych nagranych przez autorkę na Żuławach w 2018 r.

Słowa kluczowe: Ziemia Zachodnie i Północne, Żuławy, krajobraz kulturowy, dziedzictwo kulturowe, migracje po II wojnie światowej, rolnictwo.

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Ownership Changes Through the Eyes of Workers on Large Farms

Abstract: The paper offers an assessment of ownership changes on a large farm from the point of view of the employees. Such farms, some of them operating as companies, are important workplaces for the rural population today. The paper presents the results of a qualitative research (ten free-form interviews) involving people who managed such a farm located in this case in the village of Pągów (Opolskie province, Namysłów county), as well as the farm's employees. The aim of the study was: 1) to reconstruct the employees' work biographies, 2) to evaluate the extent to which they were active participants of the changes or objects of those changes when ownership transformations were carried out without their knowledge, despite affecting them directly, 3) to determine what impact the ownership changes had on the employees' work situation and how they were treated by the owners and managerial staff.

Keywords: large-scale farm, state-owned farm, państwowe gospodarstwo rolne, Opolskie province, ownership changes.

1. Introduction

The state-owned farms, *państwowe gospodarstwo rolne* (PGR), have long been of scientific interest for researchers dealing with the life course of individuals somewhat associated to the state farms through the occupational linkage, as well as with the economic and social consequences of closing down such entities. However, the picture of state farms themselves in the socialist era and the subsequent transition period is yet not complete, since there has not been a broader analysis of the attitudes of the state owned farms' employees towards the ownership changes in PGRs. In the studies conducted so far, employees of state farms have been considered as

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the object rather than the subject of ownership and structural changes. In fact, they were actively involved in this process, while the agricultural holdings established during and after the transition period on the basis and assets of the former state-owned farms, for example in the form of share-holding companies, have so far been an important labour market for the rural population. The paper aims to fill this cognitive gap. To this end, some research questions dedicated to the reconstruction of professional biographies of employees of one of the state farms, assessment of their activity (the extent to which they were active participants of changes or the objects of such changes, when the ownership transformations occurred without their knowledge and/or influence, though they directly impacted on them), and determining how the transformations influenced their situation in the labour market and the way they were approached by the farm's owners and managers. The case-study area was the former state-owned farm in the village of Pągów in the Opolskie province in southern Poland.

2. A Brief History of State-owned Farms in Poland

The state-owned farms, a form of managing state land, were established in 1949. They were founded on the basis of the State Land Properties (PNZ), State Horse Breeding Facility (PZHK) and State Plant Cultivation Facility (PZHR) institutions. Most PGRs were formed in the "Regained Territories" of what had become western Poland after the war.

As the literature underlines, PGRs fulfilled political, economic and social functions. "In the years 1986–1990, i.e. on the eve of the [political] changes, they accounted for about 19% of arable land nationwide, and the sector yielded 18% of overall agricultural production, over 18% of gross final production, and 21% of commercial production" (Suliborski and Kulawiak 2017, p. 6). In county units where PGRs operated, they formed the axis around which social life was organised. A closed community formed within them, often isolated from its surroundings, the reasons for this including the concentration of employees and management in closed residential estates (territory) and the formation of social, educational and cultural institutions (community centres, schools, health centres) within the farms, which made PGRs in a way self-sufficient:

in fact, PGR workers usually constituted [...] a closed community, which actually functioned according to different rules than the surrounding traditional rural areas. The sources of this difference had several aspects: (a) the standard of living (PGR blocks of flats represented a much higher standard of fittings than the average surrounding homes); (b) the block of flats itself was a new

trend: single-family houses predominated in the countryside; the residential blocks redefined neighbourly relations and introduced new architectural forms into the rural landscape; (c) a completely different – compared to the neighbouring farms of private farmers – mode of economic functioning (welfare benefits, hired labour); (d) in an ideological aspect, PGRs were symbols of “communism” (Giza-Poleszczuk and Kościeszka-Jaworski 2008).

The claim of the PGR communities’ isolation should probably be supplemented with an outline of the relationships in many villages in which PGR residents coexisted with those who owned various-sized farms. From the 1960s, only one peasant child could inherit the family farm (Dziennik Ustaw 1963) while the rest had to seek a different living: they found jobs in the countryside that were not necessarily connected with agriculture, e.g. in a shop, or they married into a farm. They could choose to emigrate to the city or take a job at a PGR.

Another argument that PGRs were not such isolated worlds as may appear is the fact that private farmers took advantage – officially and unofficially – of PGR services (crop spraying, harvesting, using machinery etc.). Complete isolation was only present in strictly PGR villages at a significant distance from other villages or towns.

In the initial years of the state farm, PGR workers (agricultural labourers) came from among people with less than a primary education. According to I. Bukraba-Rylska (2008, p. 352), 64.1% of PGR employees had an incomplete primary education; in 1980 it was just 9.8%. During the same period, the proportion of agricultural workers with a complete primary education grew from 30.3% to 56.3%, while those with a basic vocational education increased from 2.1% to 15.9%. Those with a general or vocational secondary education accounted for 1.2% in 1958 and 15.9% in 1980, and those with a higher education for 0.8% and 3.1%, respectively. As time went by, the managerial staff of PGRs were also better educated: in 1956, 4.5% of managers had a university education, while in 1988 it was 66%.

Employment at a PGR was not a particularly desirable career path in the 1950s and 1960s, which meant labour was in short supply. Despite noticeable improvement, there was a shortage of workers even in the 1970s, and it “was not until the 1980s that an in-house reproduction effect was achieved, which might be proof of growing social approval of this type of employment” (Bukraba-Rylska 2008, p. 352).

There were about 435,000 people working on PGRs in 1989, including 188,000 directly in agricultural production, the rest being employed in non-agricultural segments. This translated into 13 people per 100 hectares of arable land; by comparison, the figure for private farms was 27 people (Parlińska 2000, p. 25).

Unprofitable almost from the moment they were formed, over time PGRs improved their efficiency; the average pace of this improvement was 4% in the years 1981–1988 and was higher than that of private farms, which reached 1%.

Another indicator of improved effectiveness of operation was increased work productivity, especially when counted in net production. In the five-year period 1986–1990, it was almost double that from the five-year period 1976–1980. The comparison with peasant farms also improved significantly. Whereas work productivity at PGRs was over a quarter lower than in the peasant agricultural sector in the period 1976–1980, it was higher by about a half in the years 1986–1990. This means that PGRs surpassed the peasant sector in terms of net production per employee, while being behind in terms of net production per hectare of arable land (Zgliński 1997, p. 7).

The political transformation and reforms implemented at that time led to the dissolution of PGRs in 1991. Based on a law from 1991 (Dziennik Ustaw 1991) their assets were taken over, partially distributed and partially developed by the State Treasury Agricultural Property Agency (AWRSP) (Zgliński 1997, p. 5). The dissolution of PGRs was completed in 1994. About 3.75 million hectares of former PGR land had been taken over by the State Treasury Agricultural Property Reserve by the end of 1996 (Dzun 2015, p. 51). However, this meant not just simple ownership changes, but also the dismantling of a type of order that had existed in rural Poland for 40 years. “As PGRs were closed down, it was not only workplaces that ceased to exist, but the entire social and living environment of the post-PGR community [...] as well as the provision of numerous services related to education and culture” (Gajowiak 2013, p. 72). With the closing of PGRs, 327,000 people lost their jobs (Dzun 2015, p. 308) and were then left to their own devices.

As researchers underline, both the formation and the closure of PGRs were based on political considerations, which were coupled to varying degrees with economic and social ones. Disputes over the reasons behind the decision, the methods of its implementation and its effects still continue today (Niedzielski 2017, p. 129). However, it is often believed that the reform “was not based on rational premises, it did not take into account the economic and social consequences, the territorial distribution of PGRs, demand for land etc.” (Zgliński 1997, p. 8). Simply put, there was no room for state ownership in the newly drafted transformation reforms, and any manifestations of such ownership were treated as a communist thing, even though state ownership had already existed in agriculture in inter-war Poland.

This sudden change led to “a drastic deterioration of residents’ standard of living caused by a lack of income due to job loss as well as diminished accessibility of basic goods and services” (Suliborski and Kulawiak 2017, p. 7), affecting their daily

functioning, but also their perception by other participants of social life. In practice, the closure of PGRs meant the destruction of an existing social order as well as disrupting the functioning of local communities built on the basis of these farms (Binder 2014, p. 97), while the situation and social position of (former) PGR workers changed radically when their jobs were wiped out (Giza-Poleszczuk and Kościeszajaworski 2008). The ownership changes in state-owned (nationalised) agriculture and their social effects have been studied by researchers from different disciplines.¹ They underline the varied fortunes of people connected with PGRs (e.g. Hałamska 2001; Psyk-Piotrowska 2004), and also the diversity of consequences of PGR closure from an economic (Dzun 2005; Guzewicz et al. 2005; Ziętara 2000) as well as a social (Psyk-Piotrowska 1998; Zgliński 1997) point of view, but the image of the state farms themselves and the process of their transformation does not reflect the complexity of the situation. There is a lack of broader analyses related to the PGR workforces' attitude to the ownership transformation; in existing research, they are the objects rather than active subjects of the changes.

3. The Image of the PGR Community

In the political transformation period a particular labelling of the former state-farm workers was intensified. PGRs employed the former manor-farm worker population, people devoid of any tradition of owning a farm and being responsible for the effects of their own farm management. The workers were characterised by a very low level of education and qualifications, or none at all. When state farms were being set up, Polish farmers also had low cultural capital (number of years of education), and in this respect were no different from PGR workers. Their expertise came from the training they obtained through working on the family farm. In later years (especially the 1970s and 1980s), due to their privileged position in terms of access to machinery, PGRs attracted workers with relatively higher skill levels. Up to the 1970s, the great majority of Polish peasants did their ploughing with horses, and second-hand tractors from PGRs appearing on the market were often coveted by private farmers. The problem was thus not so much the level of education and skills of PGR workers as the type of skills: they had specialist training that suddenly ceased to be needed (animal husbandry specialist, cowherd, crop production foreman etc.).

Nor do the discussions on the lives of former PGR workers take sufficient account of situations in which they had to cope with the loss of practically everything they had, especially since the hardships caused by the political transformation affected

¹ Listed in detail by, among others, Suliborski and Kulawiak 2017, pp. 7–8.

not just agriculture but also the non-agricultural labour market, which was unable to absorb this sudden surplus workforce. Furthermore, state enterprises undergoing restructuring added further groups of unemployed to the supply side of the labour market. This also affected the limited geographical mobility of former PGR workers, an issue often mentioned in this context. PGR villages, which had been formed as separate, isolated units, functioned in a space where the network of towns was not (and is still not) particularly dense, which made it very difficult to seek jobs outside the area because of problems with commuting. At the same time, renting accommodation in a larger urban centre made working there unprofitable due to high rents; at best, it guaranteed a living for the employees but not their families, who were left behind in the countryside without enough to live on. These factors definitely determined the low level of geographical mobility shown by former PGR workers.

Another theory from the transformation period spoke of the self-reproduction of this social category, and even of the emergence of an underclass. “Learned helplessness, PGR worker syndrome, anti-enterprise ‘cages’, ‘black holes’ on the map of Poland, the underclass, a culture of poverty, are just some of the many terms used to describe the situation of former PGR residents” (Gajowiak 2013, p. 71; see also: Jabłoński 2017; *Regionalny Program Operacyjny...*, p. 27). However, the research by P. Binder suggests that “the young generation growing up on post-PGR housing estates did not ‘inherit’ ‘learned helplessness’ from their parents and do not wait idly for government aid” (*Ludzie bez głosu...*). A more appropriate term in relation to former PGR workers might be J. Grzelak’s (1993) concept of “social helplessness”, referring to an entire social category existing in detrimental external conditions. Before 1989, it was not uncommon for PGR households to be financially better off than the average peasant family. The main reason behind this advantage in the standard of living was the mostly regular payment of monthly wages. The similarity between the peasant and PGR way of life was that, in both cases, whole families worked on the farm. This was especially true wherever entire villages were isolated.

Another reason why PGR workers had an advantage was that they received an allowance in kind, or *deputat*. Originally this was an actual in-kind payment (milk, meat, free use of PGR machinery on the PGR worker’s private plot), which later changed to a cash benefit. The naturalisation of consumption would become one of the ways of surviving the most difficult period of the political transformation and high unemployment. The differentiation between private and cooperative or state property was not clear-cut. Possibilities for the informal flow of goods from state farms to the private farms of their employees were enormous. As this was such a widespread occurrence, it was hard to control. The income situation of the state-farm employees, regardless of their cultural resources, was a consequence of the economic condition of a state farm. The better managed and the higher

the efficiency by factors of production, the better the income in the households of PGR wage workers. An ideological myth is the claim about the low economic efficiency of state farms, for instance, in the Opolskie province their economic performance measured by effectiveness was high (Prof. Jerzy Wilkin..., p. 1).

Work on a state farm was hard, but whether it brought results or not was largely determined by the way the PGR was managed, not by the actual work of its employees. The more centralised the management, the less effective was its operation. It may be assumed that the more freedom a well-educated PGR manager had, the greater the farm's efficiency, including in terms of labour management in changing economic conditions. The analyses by agricultural economists show that in from 1990 to 1996, legal farms established on the basis of former state farms were increasing their advantage over individual/family farms mainly in terms of yields, livestock productivity and labour productivity (Dzun 2014, p. 35).

4. State Farms in the Opolskie Province

In the Opolskie province, PGRs had mainly been formed in areas where the population immediately after World War II was mostly composed of new settlers (Brzeg, Kluczbork, Namysłów and Nysa counties).

No state farms went bankrupt during the transformation. The State Treasury Agricultural Property Reserve took over 95 agricultural enterprises in Opolskie province, with a total area of approx. 140,000 hectares² [...] Each PGR was taken over by a new owner, who signed a 'social pact' with the employees. The region includes examples of very good management of former PGR estates. Local communities often become integrated, taking over assets and carrying out joint projects, for example. One such example is the village of Frączków, which won a competition in the Rural Renewal Programme. Another example of best practice in this area might be the Kietrz Agricultural Complex – a State Treasury joint-stock company formed from a former PGR. This company is in very good financial condition (*Regionalny Program Operacyjny...*, p. 27).

Among other post-PGR farms in the region that found a place for themselves in the new economic circumstances was Pagro in Pağów (*Gospodarstwo Pagro z Pağowa...*).

From 1889 until the end of World War II the farm properties in Pağów belonged to Paul Scholz. In 1954, Pağów was included in the Bukowie Commune National

² The total area of agricultural land in the Opolskie province in 1989 accounted for 540,000 ha (Opole Statistical Office 1990).

Council. At that time, the Pągów PGR employed over 130 people. In 1993, the Pagro limited liability company was established on the basis of the former state-owned farm. Pagro was founded by employees of the former PGR and for its own purposes leased the property of the already closed PGR Pągów from the Agricultural Property of the State Treasury Agency (AWRSP). In 1993, the company employed 51 people. On 8 July 2009, Alku – a Danish commercial company – became the shareholder of Pagro. In 2012, it employed 25 people, while in 2020 there were only ten. On 8 June 2020, there was another change in ownership, when German capital was invested.

5. The Village of Pągów

The locality is peripheral in relation to the nearest provincial capitals, 55 km from Wrocław and 70 km from Opole. The value of the agricultural production area in the Wilków municipality is highly favourable. The agricultural area quality index, amounting to 90.8 points, is one of the highest in Opolskie province. Agricultural land covers 90%, and forest land 2% of the total area of Wilków municipality, in which Pągów village is located. The Wilków municipality is characterised by a predominance of large-scale farms and a low synthetic indicator of the local community's cohesion and affluence as adopted in the Rural Development Monitoring project (Stanny et al. 2018, pp. 230, 196).

Pągów is a village dating back to the Middle Ages. Alongside peasant farms, there was a landed estate here before the war, providing employment for residents who did not have their own farms or whose farms were too small. In the inter-war period, Pągów was part of Germany; it has been under Polish administration since 1945.

The economic structure of the rural part of the Namysłów county, within which Pągów is located, is highly-dependent upon agriculture (Halamska, Hoffmann and Stanny 2017, p. 63). The 2009 Pągów Revival Plan reported that of the total of 144 households, 82 pursued agricultural activity (*Plan Odnowy...* 2009, p. 5). Depopulation processes are also noted, i.e. a tendency for people from the municipality to migrate to big cities in Poland and to other countries in search of work. Pągów had 559 residents in 1978, 502 in 1988, 470 in 1998, 468 in 2011, and 415 in 2019.

A SWOT analysis of the village reported strengths such as the operations of the Pagro company, a large number of working-age residents, a high soil-quality index, and high farming productivity. Weaknesses included a low level of social integration, residents' low educational level, as well as the social and economic consequences of unemployment, e.g. households' difficult financial situation, worsening living standards and inefficiently used human resource). The major threats were young people's migration from the countryside, residents' emigration in search of a livelihood, and a lack of investment capital (*Plan Odnowy...*, pp. 20–22).

6. Methodology

Free-form interviews with ten former and current employees of the large farm in Pańków were conducted between March and June 2020. The people surveyed were all individuals who worked on the farm and agreed to participate. One of them was a former shareholder. The interviews involved the director (who was also the agronomist at the time), two office workers, a combine-harvester operator, two tractor drivers, a machine operator, a mechanic, a person responsible for the technical functioning of buildings, and a person responsible for the storehouses. Two of them were women.

Most of the respondents had spent their whole working lives on the farm and remembered the ownership changes very well, having been active participants in them, or at least observers. The youngest respondent was 44, the oldest 67. The respondents declared the following education: vocational – six people; secondary – three people; including two with a specialisation in agricultural economics; higher – one person.

At the time of the study, two people were retired but continued to stay in touch with the agronomist and the farm employees (for consultation, expert assistance).

Most of the respondents lived in Pańków or Pszeniczna; the majority of the farm's fields and meadows are on land within these two villages. Some of the employees lived on the farm, in buildings that were once part of the manor farm, others in a block of flats for new workers built in the 1970s, located some 150 metres from the palace in Pańków. Managerial-level employees lived in Namysłów (15 km) and Oleśnica (30 km).

The guidelines to the free-form interviews covered the following research questions: 1) reconstructing the work biographies of the PGR employees, 2) evaluating their level of activity, i.e. the extent to which they were active participants in the changes or objects of them when ownership transformations were carried out without their knowledge, despite affecting them directly, 3) determining what effect the ownership changes had on their work situation, how they were treated by the owners and managerial staff.

7. Pagro Gospodarstwo Rolno-Nasienne: From PGR to a Company under Danish Law

From 1889 until the end of World War II, the Pańków estate was the property of Paul Scholz's family. The estate was nationalised after 1945, and a PGR was set up on the basis of the former manor farm; the residence was turned into offices and accommodation for the workers. Pańków became part of the Bukowie *gromada/commune* unit (the smallest administrative unit at that time) in 1954.

In the Wilków municipality, the PGR accounted for about 3,000 hectares of arable land. The individual state farms were components of the Namysłów Complex. In the early stage of the PGR's existence, the separate units were: Pągów, Pszeniczna, Bukowie, Barski Dwór, Idzikowice, Jakubowice, Młokicie, Krzyków. The farms were later merged: Pszeniczna with Pągów, Bukowie with Barski Dwór, Idzikowice with Jakubowice, Młokicie with Przeczów. These were high-productivity farms with high quality soil. On 1 September 1959, *Trybuna Opolaska* newspaper reported that

a meeting of party activists, worker self-government and self-regulatory organisations from the PGRs of Namysłów county was held on 1 September. The meeting summarised the PGRs' achievements in the year 1958/1959. It shows that PGR Pągów increased its income by 1 million compared to the previous year. Yield per hectare grew by 1.5 quintals. The leader in milk production is PGR Pszeniczna, achieving an average of 3,883 litres per cow (Maliński 2012, pp. 96–97).

A “dormitory” for the agricultural complex was built at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s; these were residential blocks comprising over 140 flats. Their standard was no worse than that of housing being built in cities. The block of flats in Pągów was built during the same period.

Zbigniew Maliński, the author of a monograph on Wilków municipality, writes that in its first dozen or so years of existence, the PGR was not always fortunate to have good management. Only the second-to-last manager of the Pągów farm, JS, is considered to have run the PGR well: “a specialist taking good care of the farm and the people, he was respected as a person, not just in the workplace” (Maliński 2012, p. 97).

The political transformation also initiated changes at PGR Pągów. The main legislation regulating ownership changes in agriculture included the following acts:

- on state enterprises and on the self-government of state enterprise staff, 25 September 1981 (Dziennik Ustaw 1981),
- on the privatisation of state enterprises, 13 July 1990 (Dziennik Ustaw 1990),
- on the management of State Treasury agricultural real estate and on amendments to some acts, 19 October 1991, as amended (Dziennik Ustaw 1991).

The key law in this regard was the act on the privatisation of state enterprises, which provided for direct and indirect privatisation.

Indirect privatisation consisted in transforming [an enterprise] into a joint-stock company wholly owned by the Treasury and then putting the shares on the market. Direct privatisation involved liquidating an enterprise and then selling it as a whole or in parts, contributing it to a company, or leasing it out.

The law did not fulfil its purpose, because its provisions did not account for the uniqueness of agriculture. Privatisation via the capital-based method was made impossible by the low profitability of capital invested in agriculture. Direct privatisation imposed terms that prospective lessees were unable to meet (Kraciński 2013, p. 55).

Consequently, the road to privatisation in agriculture was only opened by the act on the management of State Treasury agricultural real estate, which provided for four modes of handling PGR assets, including privatisation through employee shareholding, which was the path followed in Pağów.

In 1993 the newly formed Pagro company, founded by former PGR Pağów employees, leased the assets of the closed PGR from the AWRSP. The company was set up by 14 people, 12 of whom had been the former PGR's employees. Such a small number of shareholders may indicate three interrelated issues. First, the lack of capital necessary to run the company; second, the fear of economic risk, and thirdly the reluctance combined with a lack of knowledge about new market realities. This company could be described as an employee-owned company, although such a legal form did not exist; only a limited-liability company could be set up, which was what happened in this case. The farm's operations within the new company were the responsibility of the CEO – the PGR's last director, AP – who decided on the type of production, among other things. Experimental fields continued to function on the farm. PGR Pağów had been a producer of certified seed, which suggests a high standard of agriculture, and this activity was continued after 1993. The company was successful, accumulating a lot of financial capital over the years, which enabled it to purchase a sizable amount of land (602 hectares). The main product was seed grain; at the start of the 21st century, 80% of the farm area was used to produce seed of all types of grain. Grain and seed production was based on cooperation with the best growers in Poland (i.e. Hodowla Roślin Kobierzyce, Hodowla Roślin Strzelce) and abroad.

Company operation and management was largely controlled by the CEO, who enjoyed a very high level of trust. After a time, he decided that this form of business was no longer viable, which resulted in a decision to sell the company. Alku spółka z o.o., a limited-liability company based in Pağów, became the Pagro shareholder on 8 July 2009. It was owned by a company under Danish law. The management board comprised two Poles and two Danish citizens. The total area of the farm, including the fields leased from the AWRSP, was 1,026 hectares, including 995 hectares of grassland.

In 2012 the company employed 25 people. Alongside seed production, the farm also had some livestock: calves, heifers and young beef cattle. The new owners

focused on the company's financial results (profitability). This was approached in many different ways. The workforce was further reduced and the new management invested in new machinery, among other things taking advantage of farm modernisation programmes financed from the 2013–2020 Rural Development Programme. This is when the decision was reached to abandon animal breeding and focus exclusively on crop production.

In recent years, the post of director was filled by a former agronomist, KB, who was responsible for the company's operations under especially difficult conditions. For a few years, the Danish owners declared their willingness to allocate capital, then the farm was put up for sale, which meant the company was in a state of limbo to some extent. On 8 June 2020, the farm changed owners again (German capital).

7.1. Motives for Taking a Job at the Farm

As a biographical theme discussed extensively by the respondents, the motivation to take a job at the farm varied. There were two variables involved. One was family background, as some of the workers had grown up in a PGR family. In some cases, a person had worked "outside" the PGR and then their biographical trajectory brought them back to work on the large farm years later. The other variable was working on the PGR: some respondents had tied their entire working lives to the PGR and to the entities that emerged as a result of ownership changes, within which the farm continued to operate.

One of the most frequent reasons for taking a job on the farm was a desire to improve one's financial situation (see Szpak 2005, p. 64). "After military service, Mr JS hired me at Pańków. They provided housing on the PGR, it was a better start in life" (R_8). Benefits connected with the chance to become independent and to obtain housing were not specific to this type of community alone. There was a very large housing deficit in Poland throughout the communist period.

Another major reason that all the respondents mentioned was the in-kind allowances that workers received, e.g. milk, coal or potatoes. The volume of these and their distribution was not always rational. "Whether you wanted it or not, you were entitled to the milk" (R_7). Besides material benefits, the respondents also listed cultural and tourist attractions that the PGR offered its workers' children and which were unavailable to the children of private farmers: "The PGR sent me to summer camp, to the circus, to fun fairs, to Chorzów every year, and I went to the seaside through the PGR some five times" (R_3). It can be assumed that the standard of living in this village, measured by the level of consumption in the respondents' families, was no worse than on the average farm.

The next reason for taking a job there was family tradition. “Right after school, at the age of 16, I was hired first as a manual labourer and then completed courses on the job. The times were tough, my brothers already worked here, I had to get a job” (R_6).

Another thing that made the PGR an attractive workplace was its location and the impossibility for people to travel any greater distance. “I was the eldest at home; right after school my first job was at the PGR in Bukowie, I had a friend there and it was close by. Later I got married in Pszeniczna and moved to a job here. I didn’t want to commute any more” (R_2).

7.2. Education and Acquisition of Qualifications

If one assumes that the PGRs showed a much greater take-up of agricultural progress than peasant farms, it is justified to hypothesise that this required production staff with higher qualifications. These were obtained in a number of ways. Firstly, the children of PGR farm labourers went to agricultural schools. Some of the respondents graduated from the agricultural technical college in Bierutów; the last two directors are Agricultural University graduates. A second option was to get a job at the PGR after leaving vocational school. The higher the level of mechanisation and adoption of technical progress, the greater the demand for mechanics, electricians and other workers with higher qualifications. Sometimes obtaining a specialist vocational education took a lot of determination. “For three years I went by bicycle from Bukowie to Bierutów to catch the train to the school in Oleśnica; autumn was the worst. A car was unheard of” (R_2). The third path to acquiring knowledge and practical skills was training by example, i.e. learning from those who had already mastered the skills. “I was always drawn to mechanical engineering, to repairing stuff. When I was 17, I made my first working vehicle, I designed it. As a kid, I’d go to the smithy; the blacksmith was from Idzikowice, I wanted him to teach me welding; he clobbered me over the head so many times. I kept coming back, I was stubborn. I still do welding today” (R_6). Sending a child off to residential secondary school often meant that sacrifices had to be made by the whole family. Sometimes chance or parents’ arbitrary decisions determined the career paths of siblings (consequently, one brother might become a white-collar worker and another a blue-collar one).

In the period when the oldest respondents were getting a job at the farm (the 1970s and 1980s), completed education played a significant role at the moment of hiring. “When I first started, most people had an elementary education, but I already had a vocational education, and thanks to this I was paid a tiny bit more” (R_8).

The employees’ qualifications improved with the time they spent on the farm. Their workplace offered participation in training courses (for operators of new

machinery and equipment, for plant production specialists etc.). A reconstruction of the workers' career paths very often produces an image of someone who first helped on the PGR farm (e.g. by helping their parents or as a seasonal worker) and later advanced to the rank of specialist and more prestigious posts (e.g. a combine-harvester operator running a piece of equipment worth two million zlotys).

The respondents willingly and in great detail outlined their reasons for getting a job on the farm, and also their process of upgrading their qualifications. On the other hand, they left out the pathologies that are widely discussed in the literature, i.e. theft or alcohol abuse – problems that are common both among private farmers and PGR workers. Successive ownership changes, which had enormous consequences for the farm workers and the whole village community, were a topic that the respondents brought up and elaborated upon much more readily.

7.3. Three Eras in the Farm's History: Acting Subjects or Objects of Change

The image emerging from the interviews conducted in the study is that of three leaders, each representing a different period and a different form of operation of the large farm under consideration.

The first stage was the PGR era, a time when the above-mentioned JS was at the helm. "He was a regular guy, he knew how to set up the work, a great bloke, I'll always praise him" (R_10). The great majority of the respondents thought very highly of him. He appears as a model example of a PGR director from the 1970s and 1980s. A symbolic ending to this period on the farm came with JS's death in 1992. Like the farm itself in his time and under his management, he was highly idealised. The relationships within the enterprise were described in terms of community and a sense of responsibility for one another. The employees' attachment to the PGR as a workplace was very strong (cf. Dzun 1991, pp. 166–172).

The next manager, AP, represented a different generation. He is an example of a PGR manager who felt very much at home in the new reality during and after the transformation, while not having the employees' best interests at heart. Former PGR workers: "did not form their own employee representation, they were dispersed, not organised. Their interests were represented neither by political parties nor by the managers of the enterprises where they worked. The truth is, PGR managers were searching for a place for themselves in the new socio-economic reality" (Marks-Bielska 2005, p. 9).

Becoming the CEO of a limited-liability company, the PGR's last director treated his role in very narrow terms, professionally; he saw himself as a true executive. His most important considerations were income, financial status and career opportunities. Focusing on such values enabled him to function extremely

well in the transformation reality of the 1990s, and was conducive to the farm's restructuring.

In the peak period of the PGR, the state farms in Pszeniczna and Pańków employed 130 people (more during the season; there were two worker hostels in Pańków and Barski Dwór; school pupils and youngsters from the Voluntary Labour Corps (OHP) helped out at grain and root-crop harvest time). The total area of arable land exceeded 1,000 hectares, and there were a few hundred head of cattle housed in several cowsheds. Thanks to the company being set up, not everyone lost their jobs in the 1990s. There were 51 employees in 1993.

The company CEO's stance in the 1990s appears ambivalent: on the one hand, a "good crew" was an important factor in the farm's functioning, while on the other there were steady and consistent layoffs (cf. Fedyszak-Radziejowska 1997, p. 147).

According to the respondents, the biggest winners of the transformation process and changes at the start of the 21st century were those who had joined the company as shareholders and then, after some years, achieved significant financial success. The risk they had taken turned out to be worthwhile in the longer term. The necessary condition for joining the company was a certain level of financial capital. However, there is no common denominator among the shareholders, as they included both manual labourers and office workers.

Some of the respondents voiced the suspicion that it was AP who ultimately decided to sell the company to the Danes, as they had guaranteed that he would keep his position on the farm, something the other prospective buyers were not prepared to do. "AP was the main initiator of setting up the company and then selling it. AP claims that the company had to be sold; the only thing is, there were these brothers from Silesia who were interested, they wanted to buy it, but when the Danes bought it, AP got more money. The other thing is, those Poles didn't want AP to continue as manager, while with the Danes, he negotiated that he'd still be the CEO" (R_5).

The fact that the sale was made to this specific buyer needs underlining, because it indicates that the CEO was guided by his own interests, which would have been made possible by the fact that he had a substantial freedom of decision on management issues. If the company's management style had provided for greater control, the outcome might have been different or the sale might not have come about at all. In the situation at the time, the profits from the sale convinced the shareholders to make the decision. It is worth mentioning that this style of farm management was nothing unusual, as over 50% of new owners of former PGRs (irrespective of the form of management) did not allow staff to have a share in running the business (Fedyszak-Radziejowska 1997, p. 151). After the sale in 2009, some of the staff changed their position at the company from shareholders to Alku employees. For a long time,

former shareholders sometimes defined themselves as employees with a higher standing in the company, though this was not actually true. The former shareholders invested the money from the sale of their shares in real estate for themselves and their families; some used it for their children's education.

Production success was one aspect of the farm running as a company; the workers' situation was another. Employees had no influence over what happened to the assets that had been taken over; in addition, without any trade union in place, their interests were not the most important. There was no one to negotiate working conditions and wage issues. For many years, AP took shrewd advantage of the fact that for some people working on the farm was a functional necessity: unemployment being relatively high, they were not very attractive on the labour market. Even before Poland joined the European Union, Opolskie province's high unemployment had been alleviated by economic emigration, but this was not particularly significant in the area under consideration (it predominated in regions mainly inhabited by the indigenous population).

KB was the farm's last leader, employed there as an agronomist for many years and serving as the director for the last three years. Throughout this time, the company was up for sale. There were practically no decisions he could have made that would have affected the farm's future. Achieving the best production results in the province did not change the company owners' plans to sell. "The Danes wanted to withdraw, and they did; the only issue was when they would ultimately do it and on what terms" (R_5).

Employees remember the three different eras and compare them. The middle, theoretically participatory period (when the employees had a share in managing the business) comes out the worst in their opinions. This seems a paradox, as this stage should have been the best time, since it was when the shareholders had a say in management and the executive running the company was controlled by the shareholders.

7.4. Ownership Changes' Effect on the Work Situation and the Way the Owners Communicated with and Treated Employees

During the era of People's Poland, every PGR director was subordinate to a well-developed control system. "If anyone was oppressed, they could go to the conglomerate [higher up] and complain. It was worse later on; there was no one to complain to" (R_8). Conversations with the respondents show that in the PGR times, even someone without competence or financial means had not been completely helpless in the face of an in-house conflict and had someone to go to for help. Possible complaints and potential interventions resulting from them went through several channels:

political – complaints to the relevant instances of the PZPR or PSL (municipal committees, provincial committees had agricultural departments in their structure); state administration – municipality, county, if it existed at that time; and perhaps above all, to higher links in the management structure of state farms.

In a situation in which a director is running what is almost his own company or running a business on behalf of the owners who are thousands of kilometres away, and additionally show no interest in employee issues, it is very hard to get help in case of a conflict in the company. Two statements offer an excellent illustration of how the manager proceeded: “I had conflicts with AP, I disagreed with him, we both went to legal counsellors, only he had a [high] position and didn’t have to pay for this, while I did. [...] I wanted to leave because of it all, and so did another guy. But I wanted a transfer, which he wouldn’t give me, telling me to resign. But I wanted continuity of employment. In the end I stayed” (R_2). “There were situations when I wanted to find new work, AP’s approach to workers was iffy. You sort of stifled it in you. There were some job options, but with commutes. Here, you had blended into the community and in the end you couldn’t be bothered” (R_8).

Another style of management and communication with employees is best illustrated by the following passages: “When KB was boss, that was my best time; he supported people, he didn’t just grab everything for himself like AP. He knew how to negotiate more money for us, he was on our side” (R_4). “In AP’s time, winter or no winter, we stood outside the office and waited. Now it’s all nice, in the canteen, everyone together” (R_8). “In the old CEO’s day there was assembly in front of the palace at 6:45 and everyone had to be at work at 7:00. But recently, assembly was in the canteen, it was like a hotel even, coffee being served and everyone sitting down at the table, at one table. The changes under KB were huge, but short-lived; good things never last. He wasn’t stuck up; he was demanding, but he understood everyone and you could come to an agreement with him. [It was] only three years. He was a director, manager, agronomist, sometimes even combine-harvester operator and tractor driver. He didn’t wear a white shirt or a tie. A regular guy, but with vast knowledge; lots of people came to him or called to ask for advice. Right now the new manager doesn’t even want to talk to people” (R_5). “It was best working under KB; everyone did what they were supposed to, no one moaned. The work was meant to get done and that was it” (R_6).

8. Conclusion

The paper has given a brief outline of the attitude of PGR staff towards ownership changes as well as showing how farm employees became the object of the changes in the long term. In the case of the Pańków farm considered here, an employee-owned

company was formed after the state-farm period; its successive transformations were not due to poor economic results, debts or a lack of development opportunities, but largely to the interests of the company's boss and the poor control the employee shareholders exercised over his activity. It is hard to say whether this was a matter of their excessive trust or their lack of competence; the fact remains that, in a way, they withdrew from co-managing their shared workplace. The conclusion could be that this may be the difference between private farmers, who control the present and future of their farm from the very beginning (as far as this is possible in specific economic conditions), and the employees considered here, who had the PGR experience in their own or their family's past and who were more inclined to hand over management matters to others, themselves concentrating on the immediate tasks and economic benefits (wages, in-kind allowances etc.) of the work they performed. It needs noting that given the economic and ownership situation of Pańków, neither qualifications nor length of work experience affected these people's place in the business's hierarchical structure; there were practically no opportunities for advancement. A real-term change in their situation was only possible if they left the farm and found employment elsewhere, which was difficult at least for some – those whose skills were closely tied to agriculture.

Most of the respondents have high qualifications and enormous work experience. They are aware of the limitations involved in going back on the labour market. These include limitations of a geographical nature: in theory, jobs are available in Namysłów 15 km away, but not everyone has a means of getting there. The other limitation, in a paradox, is the respondents' qualifications. Most of them are defined by being agricultural workers (office workers have slightly different identifications, but these are still occupations tied to agriculture: agronomist, specialist in farm accounting etc.).

Justification of their actions is a major theme in the respondents' statements. They explain their decisions to get a job and continue working in terms of strictly rational choices. A detailed analysis of outlays and incomes suggests that they could not have done any differently in the conditions in which they were functioning. At the same time, assessing the local labour market and the changing demand for desirable occupations, all of these people support their children in obtaining an education and finding jobs outside agriculture.

Evaluating the ownership changes, the respondents accurately indicate the main problems of the individual eras: the blurred boundary between private and state-owned property during the communist period, pursuing one's own interest instead of the group's in the first stage of functioning as a company (the 1990s), and the subsequent owners' focus on profit and their favourable opinion of the work of the (essentially dubious) director. An idealisation of the pre-transformation times is evident, both regarding the living conditions back then and the person who managed the farm.

The way this business was managed and how it functioned was largely the consequence of the professional and personal traits of the managers/owners of Pańsów. The respondents clearly point to differences between the various management styles, communication and the way the managers treated employees, at the same time indicating the influence that the individual interests of the person at the helm always had on the farm's management. When analysing ownership changes, attention should be paid to the role of structural conditions considered two-fold: first, as legal regulations changing over time and influencing the transformation of the entity; second, as factors influencing the production structure of a farm. The changes in the farm's production profile over time, complementing this profile of other production departments, influenced the structure of employees and their level of professional competence, especially of production employees.

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Pracownicy wielkoobszarowego gospodarstwa rolnego wobec zmian własnościowych

Streszczenie: W artykule dokonano oceny zmian własnościowych wielkoobszarowego gospodarstwa rolnego z perspektywy jego pracowników. Gospodarstwa te, funkcjonujące np. w formie spółek kapitałowych, są obecnie ważnym miejscem pracy dla ludności wiejskiej. W tekście przedstawiono wyniki badań jakościowych (10 wywiadów swobodnych) przeprowadzonych wśród osób zarządzających tego typu gospodarstwami zlokalizowanymi w miejscowości Pągów (województwo opolskie, powiat namysłowski), a także z osobami zatrudnionymi w takich gospodarstwach. Badania miały na celu: rekonstrukcję biografii zawodowych pracowników; próbę oceny ich aktywności – w jakim stopniu byli oni podmiotowymi uczestnikami zmian, a w jakim przedmiotowymi, gdy przekształcenia własnościowe następowały bez ich wiedzy, chociaż bezpośrednio ich dotyczyły; ustalenie, jak przekształcenia wpływały na sytuację pracowników, traktowanie ich przez właścicieli oraz kadrę zarządzającą.

Słowa kluczowe: wielkoobszarowe gospodarstwa rolne, państwowe gospodarstwa rolne, województwo opolskie, zmiany własnościowe.

Amanda Krzyworzeka

Changes in Farmers' Modes of Work in Podlasie*

Abstract: Over a long time, a unique peasant mode of work developed in rural areas, which has been described in substantial detail by scholars including ethnographers, historians and rural sociologists. It was largely based on concentrating on the process and not the result, affirming work as such, cooperation with family members and neighbours, and work being embedded in a social context. This model underwent substantial change already under communism, but recent decades have accelerated the process. In the face of the structural transformation of rural areas, but also wider changes related to the sphere of work in late modernity, values once fundamental to peasants no longer play such an important role in the lives of present-day farmers. They have been replaced with other attitudes; different skills have become necessary, different attitudes have become valuable. The reasons for this include the fact that farmers realise that their children will probably seek their life's path outside agriculture, and therefore they bring them up differently. The paper discusses not only new modes of work in agriculture and the system of values behind them, but also the sources from which farmers draw such new models.

Keywords: ethnography, farmers' modes of work, agricultural work, deagrarianisation, Poland.

1. Introduction

Centuries of working on the land resulted in a unique mode of farmers' work that we could observe in late 20th century, and which recently underwent significant changes with the extremely rapidly changing conditions in agriculture. Some researchers believe it is possible to trace the influence of earlier circumstances in subsequent modes of work; for example, attitudes that developed under serfdom continued to affect the way peasants worked and the values they professed for a long time afterwards (cf.

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Dobrowolski and Woźniak 1976). Sources of certain types of behaviour might also be sought in folk religiousness, the social relations between the peasants and other classes, including the landed gentry and intelligentsia, and, finally, in the unique role that was officially ascribed to farmers under communism (in People's Poland).

Farming has been always changing, adapting to current circumstances (Dobrowolski and Woźniak 1976; Harris 2005); sometimes those transformations were rather smooth and slow, while in other times they were rapid and drastic (e.g. after the World War II). However, there were never very sharp boundaries; some elements of previous customs, values and modes of operation remain for a long time and can be traced back to the past. That is why in this article I show the older sources of farmers' modes of work, as they are still relevant for understanding some modern phenomena.

Today we are dealing with an extraordinarily dynamic period of changes in the modes of work in rural areas, which began with the collapse of People's Poland and the shift to a market economy. Further changes followed almost 15 years later, with Poland's accession to the European Union. The last 15 years, i.e. the time when Poland has been subject to the EU's common agricultural policy (CAP), have brought Polish farmers many structural changes, which have resulted, among other things, in the depopulation of rural areas, an increase in the average farm size, and new requirements related to the quality of food produced.

Economic, legal, technological and social changes have had a significant impact on farmer attitudes as well as work strategies and modes. The paper will discuss the changes in farmers' modes of work from the point of view of anthropology (particularly economic anthropology and the anthropology of work),¹ starting with a presentation of the traditional model of working on the land. This will be followed by the contemporary, very different mode of work pursued by those farmers who have adjusted their farms to EU requirements and have been successful in staying on the market. Alongside the literature on the subject, the conclusions related to recent decades will also be based on the author's own, long ethnographic fieldwork conducted among farmers in the Podlasie, Roztocze, Mazovia and Podhale regions² over the past 20 years.

¹ Wilk and Cliggett 2009; Applebaum 1992; for the review of Polish tradition in anthropology of work see Krzyworzeka 2019.

² The Podlasie and Mazovia projects in particular focused on issues of the work of farmers; they were carried out in the years 2004–2008 (Podlasie), 2015–2018 (Podlasie), and 2015–2019 (Mazovia). Among other publications, their effects can be found in Krzyworzeka 2014, 2017 and 2018. In accordance with the methodology of ethnographic fieldwork, I spent weeks or months living in the *gmina*/commune units involved in the studies, conducting participant observation, in-depth ethnographic interviews and casual conversations with residents.

2. What Moulded Farmers' Modes of Work?

A farmer's workplace is where his home is. This trivial observation has far-reaching consequences: if you work where you live, it is hard to strictly set working time apart; it is often impossible to mark the boundary between activities that are part of work (e.g. repairing the paving around the cowshed) and those belonging to family life (e.g. repairing the paving around the house).

To some extent, the fusion of workplace and home also determines the family character of farming, which still predominates in Poland. Wherever the household and the farm are one, professional life largely overlaps with family life: not only do work issues permeate easily into family life (dinnertime discussions on farming-related plans), but often all the family members work or help on the farm. However, the farm relies on family members' labour not only because they live in one household or are emotionally committed. It is often a necessity, because it is very hard to find outside workers/helpers on the market, and even with the extent of mechanisation today, in many cases a farmer would be unable to run the farm single-handed; extra hands are needed.

Another unique feature of agriculture with a definite impact on farmers' modes of work, both in the past and today, is dependence on external factors. Of course, external factors like market fluctuations, the weather, consumer trends etc. have to be taken into consideration in any occupation, but dependence on nature is greater in agriculture than in other sectors. A few weeks of drought can obliterate months of work, while the African swine fever (ASF) outbreak can destroy all a farmer owns and leave him with multi-million loans and no resources to repay them.

In her already classic study on the changing model of work among the rural population, Anna Zadrożyńska wrote about the self-evident character of work in the countryside (1983, p. 13 et seq.). This was not a voluntary sphere subject to reflection. According to her, work in the traditional culture model was:

activity of great social, economic, psychological, worldview significance [...] it organised daily life [...] it did not have to have standardised time assigned to the performance of particular actions, which were carried out throughout the day with varying intensity [...] it was supplemented with recreation and fun which, however, were not a part of free time but were necessary activities complementing work³ [...] so free time did not exist [...]

³ This was the case with *tłoka*, a traditional form of mutual help in which neighbours would gather at one of their farms and spend the day working in the field there, after which they feasted together, moving on to another neighbour's farm the next day and repeating the cycle. *Tłoka* was a frequently used form of help for jobs requiring a greater number of people, and was especially popular in eastern Poland (cf. Zawistowicz-Adamska 1951, 1976).

all time outside work was qualitatively its opposite, it was a time of non-work [...] non-work time as a value was equivalent to work time, enabling both work and non-work to be acknowledged as values [...] the notion of non-work contained elements of fun, rest, recreation, made use of content stemming from work in a way reminiscent of a game or a competition (Zadrożyńska 1983, pp. 19–20).

It is worth noting that Zadrożyńska considers non-work as the key category, enabling work to be balanced, set apart and given shape. In a sense, it is a necessary condition of the existence of a balanced work sphere (Krzyworzeka 2019). A reference to the supernatural sphere also appears here: work was part of the cosmological vision of the world, it arose from it, and it was this religious aspect that gave work meaning and its very important place in farmers' lives. Hence peasants' attitude towards the land, as described extensively in the literature (e.g. Buchowski 2006; Bukraba-Rylska 2012; Bystroń 1947; Cancian 1989; Chałasiński 1938; Halamska 2000; Wolf 1957), could not be reduced to purely economic or rational calculations and was characterised by a sense of duty and responsibility.

Another characteristic feature of the rural population in olden times was an attachment to tradition, as described extensively by Kazimierz Dobrowolski and Andrzej Woźniak (1976; cf. Zadrożyńska 1983, p. 16). Of course, we are not speaking about an objective tradition or the inflexible repetition of patterns inherited from parents and grandparents, but about the conviction that these patterns must be repeated, and the importance given to them. Thus, regardless of the changes actually taking place, peasants believed they were performing most work in the same way their ancestors had, and invoking the past in itself was often sufficient legitimisation of the activities they undertook.

The economic aspect of agricultural work was also unique, as William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki described so well:

One of the reasons why the relation between work and wages is not taken into account is certainly the attitude of the Polish peasant toward work. While among handworkers a long tradition [...] attracted the attention to the results of the work, the peasant is fundamentally interested, positively or negatively, principally in the process of work. Many factors collaborated to develop this attitude. First of all, the compulsory work under the system of serfdom could hardly awaken any interest in the results. What did the serf care whether his work for the lord was efficient or not? [...] another factor hindered the development of an appreciation of efficiency. The ultimate result of farm-work does not depend exclusively upon the worker himself; his best efforts can be frustrated by unforeseen circumstances, and in a particularly good year even negligent work may be well repaid.

On a rich background of religious and magical beliefs this incalculable element gives birth to a particular kind of fatalism (Thomas and Znaniecki 1918, pp. 172–173).

This focus on the process and not the result was, in my view, one of the key elements of the peasant mode of work. It enabled people to distance themselves from the influence of uncertain external elements and concentrate on the things that depended on themselves, on their will, skills and wishes. This meant that the local hierarchy could be moulded on the basis of attitudes and work put into the farm, and not the final result achieved. This system was much more objective and fair to farmers, as it was independent of such irrelevant factors as the whims of the market, the decisions of politicians or the weather.⁴ If someone was lazy or took “irrational” decisions, i.e. ones that were unpopular in their particular community (e.g. sowing a sorghum and Sudan grass mix as forage for cattle, at the beginning of the 21st century in Podlasie, as one of my respondents did, to all of his neighbours’ amazement),⁵ they did not win approval even if they managed to obtain quite a high crop and feed their cattle successfully.

Of course, the model in which the rural population functions has always been dynamic, changing throughout the 19th as well as the 20th century. However, I would like to focus on the changes that have occurred within the last 15 years, i.e. more or less since Poland joined the EU, as they seem the most interesting from the point of view of farmers’ changing modes of work.

3. What Has Changed?

Many of the aforementioned factors have not changed despite the new legal, economic and social circumstances. Farmers still work where they live, they are still dependent on the weather, on epidemics affecting their herds etc. Nevertheless, noticeable changes have taken place in farmers’ predominant modes of work over recent decades. Almost 15 years have passed since my first studies on farmers’ strategies of work and survival in Podlasie (Krzyworzeka 2014), and it is very clear

⁴ Nonetheless, it is worth noting that some results of work have been and still are subject to local judgement, e.g. the amount of weeds or even the height of corn, if this testifies to someone’s ability to apply fertilisers correctly. More about the nuances of judging neighbours’ work based on its visible effects can be found in papers by Anna Jakubowska (2020), Maria Bolek and Anna Jakubowska (2019). However, such judgements do not depend on unpredictable external influences.

⁵ He himself was very happy about his decision: he had three harvests in one year and claimed that the sorghum and Sudan grass mix was very good forage for cows. However, most of the local farmers I spoke to thought his idea was weird to say the least, and some even saw it as harmfully risky (cf. Krzyworzeka 2014, p. 200). Over the subsequent several years of my research in the region, no one followed his example.

how the way that most farmers in the region function has changed.⁶ Many of my respondents from the years 2006–2007 have since retired, and if their farms have been taken over by their children, quite a few changes have been made. The younger ones who still work have adjusted to the changing reality and work differently today. The main difference is in the scale of operations. These are not drastic changes: Podlasie does not offer opportunities to buy 300 ha of land overnight and set up a really large farm; the process moves forward slowly. For example, one year a farmer might start leasing 5 ha from a neighbour who has retired, and the next year – buy 2 ha from a deceased farmer’s children uninterested in keeping the land.

A continuation of my research in Podlasie has shown that the deagrarianisation of rural areas in eastern Poland has deviated from the intended model, which included plans to bring other, non-agricultural operations to the countryside (Rosner and Stanny 2018;⁷ Kołodziejczak 2017; Szymańska 2008). For now, people who give up farming either retire or migrate to urban areas or foreign countries. Those who stay on, work on increasingly large farms, but the employment structure does not change: it is still just the farmer, sometimes helped by family members.⁸ As a result, farmers show a growing level of frustration, exhaustion and discouragement.

It might appear to be a paradox that with the decreasing number of farms and simultaneously increasing farm area, the group of former farmer owners thus freed does not automatically move to the hired agricultural worker sector. This was undoubtedly the effect expected by some observers when EU agricultural policy first started being introduced. In this case, however, a much stronger factor than economic stimuli emerged: cultural baggage. Reluctance to work for another farm owner is a very deeply rooted attitude among Polish farmers; to this day, such a person is referred to locally by the derogatory term *parobek* (farmhand). Ethnographers have actually observed this for a long time. For example, Michał Buchowski wrote that “working for farmers is [...] considered a last resort” (Buchowski 1996, p. 39), while Zadrożyńska noted: “for residents of the Podlasie countryside, for example, working on someone else’s land was perceived in terms of humiliation” (Zadrożyńska 1983, p. 75; cf. also Harris 2005, p. 435; Jaworska and Pieniążek 1995, p. 17; Pine 2002, p. 87 et seq.). Being a hired worker on a neighbour’s farm is such a sensitive issue that it is not only

⁶ I would like to underline that the conclusions and observations offered here apply to several regions in Podlaskie province. I would not be prepared to make any generalisations about Polish agriculture as a whole on their basis, as it is too varied for this to make sense. The mechanisms I outline might, of course, apply to many farmers, but a lot would depend on the specific circumstances of a particular farm and region.

⁷ As Andrzej Rosner and Monika Stanny rightly point out, deagrarianisation is a very old phenomenon; today we are simply witnessing its considerable intensification.

⁸ For analysis of other countries from the region see: Amersdorffer et al. 2015; Balezentis et al. 2020; Juska, Poviliunas and Pozzuto 2006; Mincyte 2011; Swain 1999; Věžník, Král and Svobodová 2013.

extremely rare, but also seldom talked about; most of my respondents did not cite this motivation directly, but spoke of other factors that might have influenced their decision (cf. Krzyworzeka 2014, p. 198). In the face of a significant increase in farm area and scale of production, therefore, farm owners cannot rely on finding workers easily.⁹ Nor can they count on neighbourly help, something that used to work well for many decades, if not centuries (Zawistowicz-Adamska 1951, 1976). However, as Richard Wilk points out, wherever the role of paid employment (and also production for sale) increases in agriculture, cooperation networks within the community grow weaker (Wilk 1987, p. 305). There are many reasons for this, including mechanisation, which means that not everyone has the qualifications to help with a given job, but also – in a paradox – the enlargement of farms, as this means everyone has more work on their own farm and is unable to help their neighbours. As a result, farmers are thrust into a vicious circle. They expand their farms without a functioning agricultural-worker labour market and in a situation in which few elements of their operations are subject to outsourcing.

In addition, farmers increasingly cannot really count on help from their own family. This is connected with the multifaceted social changes occurring in recent decades: periods when the situation in agriculture was one of uncertainty, operating in the sector was not very profitable, and parents strongly supported their children's aspirations to break free of the countryside, helped them obtain the necessary education and supported their decisions to move to the city. Today as well, even though farming seems quite a good option financially, compared to an uncertain job in the city, many owners of successful farms are preparing for a scenario in which none of their children will take it over in future, and they do not particularly seem to encourage them to do so. That is an enormous change compared to several decades ago, when the upbringing of young people in the countryside virtually consisted in adapting them to their future work in agriculture (Harasimowicz 2019). On the one hand, it was obvious that not all the children¹⁰ would be able to stay

⁹ Increasingly often, though still on a small scale, one can find Ukrainians or Belarusians employed illegally as seasonal workers. However, this is not an option used on a mass scale, among other things because it requires providing the workers with lodging, which in the rural reality – given its lack of real estate for rent – means having the workers live with the farmer's family in the family home. For many farmers, that is the deciding argument against this option. In the community I studied, the only exception known to me was the owners of a very large poultry farm, who simply put up a separate residential building for workers from across the eastern border, something the average farmer in the region could not afford.

¹⁰ Or, more accurately, all the sons, because a daughter might marry a farmer and stay in the countryside, without depleting the family farm. It was not until recent decades that mothers started strongly discouraging their daughters from remaining in the countryside. Their opinion of the life of a farmer's wife is often very negative, and they want their daughters to be spared such a fate. In a paradox, this leads to another problem, namely a sex imbalance in rural areas as well as the fact that the sons cannot find a life partner (of course, there are other reasons for this as well) (cf. Dąbrowska 2020).

in the countryside, but on the other, it was equally obvious that one of them would have to, so all of them needed to be taught farming just in case. It was thus natural that children had a lot of duties on the farm from an early age; their work provided measurable help that lightened the parents' burden. Today there are ever fewer children in families and everyone acknowledges the importance of an education, so parents and grandparents do not dare interrupt a child who is learning (or, more precisely, sitting in front of the computer), and as a result, teenage children do not help on the farm at all in many families. Since women increasingly often work outside the farm and the countryside (as teachers, clerks, shop assistants etc.), they do not perform jobs on the farm to the extent they used to either.¹¹ Consequently, I have seen a growing number of situations in which a farm that has been significantly expanded over the past dozen or so years is operated almost completely by one person. Of course, this is coupled with growing mechanisation, but this in turn means further necessary investment, and also, though it enables the scale of production to be increased, it does not serve to reduce the overall amount of work.

The situation outlined above not only leads to overwork, frustration and a feeling of meaninglessness, but also has a significant impact on social relations within the rural community. Of course, rural residents have never been a homogeneous group; the differences have been based on different criteria in different periods, whether it was family background, wealth or, in some regions, religious and ethnic issues (cf. Buchowski 1996; Bystron 1947; Dobrowolski and Woźniak 1976; Cancian 1989; Roseberry 1989; Harris 2005). In the post-transformation period, Michał Buchowski (1996) used the classical language of class differences to describe a certain village in the Wielkopolska region.¹² A slightly different distinction has appeared in Podlasie most recently, only seemingly invoking the category of ownership. This has been interestingly described by Magda Kalinowska (2020), who suggests that the category of the "large-scale farmer" is a new figure for the "Other" in the countryside. This is a potent claim, which the author illustrates with even stronger material from her research, citing recurring opinions about neighbours that include terms like "labour camps" as well as figures of speech denying them humanity (p. 136 et seq.). This new stratification, which began in 2004 and has been gradually building up,¹³ is currently felt very strongly and commented upon by rural

¹¹ Women are often responsible for maintaining the increasingly complicated farm documentation and for contacts with the administration, banks etc., i.e. the part of agricultural operations that has emerged and developed relatively recently.

¹² Which might not necessarily be applicable to other villages in Poland (see Krzyworzeka 2014, p. 61).

¹³ As mentioned earlier, farms were usually expanded slowly, with the purchase or tenancy of a few hectares at a time and gradual investment in machinery, new buildings and fittings.

residents themselves. Those who have not entered the spiral of farm modernisation and expansion watch their neighbours' actions with incomprehension and horror, thinking they have voluntarily given up their freedom, that they work like carthorses, with the threat of over-investment constantly hanging over their heads in the form of loans that are impossible to pay off. Kalinowska also shows that "large-scale farmers" are often spoken of with compassion, in the belief that they must have come to regret their decisions to expand and step on the path of continuous farm development, but are unable to give it up because it is a one-way street.

Farmers who have invested in enlarging and mechanising their farms are losing control not only over how and how long they work, but also over the effects of their labour. On the example of milk producers from Podlasie, Agnieszka Kosiorowska (2019) shows that today's farmers have been excluded from the process of evaluating the quality of the food they produce. Whereas in the past they were able to judge if the milk "was not sour and was not too warm" (p. 19), i.e. they performed the same process as the person at the milk collection point, today this evaluation is carried out far away from them, in a dairy laboratory, by means of scientific methods and special equipment whose workings they are not familiar with and do not understand, using non-intuitive concepts difficult to translate into their daily activity (bacteria count and somatic cell count). Kosiorowska writes that farmers have lost control over the milk production process despite maintaining ownership of the means of production. The proliferation of legal regulations, norms and rules based on scientific knowledge that is external to the agricultural world, and their introduction as the only worthy criteria of assessing a farmer's work, strips farmers of their agency. They now have to perform their own work on their own farm according to unfamiliar categories that are not necessarily compatible with locally recognised and socially acceptable norms.

On top of that, there is a multitude of non-agricultural duties that complement farming operations: the necessity to keep all kinds of documentation for every animal on the farm and every investment, inspections of different aspects of the farm's operations, applications to be submitted, subsidies to be accounted for; in other words, lots of paperwork. As a result, an issue that Witold Pieniżek and Grażyna Jaworska's respondents complained about in the early 1990s, namely that farmers had to demonstrate non-agricultural skills in trading in order for their work to bring the anticipated effects, is now greatly compounded. A successful farmer not only has to be a good salesperson/businessperson who understands how the market works, predicts price fluctuations etc., but also an efficient bookkeeper, lawyer, clerk and veterinarian. Despite increasing specialisation in purely agricultural work, farmers constantly have to take training courses and upgrade their skills in many areas they never considered when they were deciding to become farmers. Many

find it overwhelming. Some delegate these tasks to specialists (but this is costly and requires a very high level of trust), or at least to other family members who seem to be better suited to them (e.g. university student children; the paperwork also often falls to farmers' wives). For many, though, this is extra work that they carry out in the evenings or when they are less busy, which leads to frustration and no time left for any activities unrelated to work.

In the olden days, work lasting all day long was nothing unusual for farmers, but – as Zadrożyńska points out – it is worth noting that particular actions “were performed throughout the day with varying intensity” (1983, p. 20), the effect actually being a feeling of constant bustling about (Jaworska and Pieniążek 1995, p. 16), but not a sense of inhuman and pointless work (people’s sense of the “obviousness” or “naturalness” of work helped).¹⁴ In the present-day reality, there is a shortage of non-work time, i.e. those moments that enabled people to uphold relationships through socialising, to rest and have fun, without disturbing the work order. In other words, just a few decades ago, despite bustling around all day long, working without a standardised time for work and also having duties to perform on Sundays and holidays, farmers had non-work time at their disposal (though this was not free time in today’s sense of the term), which balanced out those work duties. Current structural changes have led to a situation in which steadily expanding farms are burdening farmers to a much greater extent, not only physically but also mentally, and the ever-shrinking space of non-work has become insufficient to balance out the huge work load. This has happened not only due to pure arithmetic (number of work hours versus number of non-work hours), but also because rural residents – following the example of urban residents – have started using the concept of free time. An hour’s breather at breakfast, an afternoon meeting with a neighbour or watching TV are activities that are not treated as a balance for work, because while being non-work, they are not separately distinguished free time either. And free time as they know it from the media and their ideas about life in the city, e.g. a two-week holiday at a resort abroad, is something farmers are unable to afford. Their frustration is compounded by the fact that it is not money which constrains them (most of the farmers described here, with extensive farms, would easily be able to bear such an expense once a year), but the unique character of agricultural operations and the fact that farm expansion has changed the way this work is performed. You can no longer ask a neighbour to watch over a couple of cows for a few days, nor will your city-based brother-in-law be able to lend a hand,

¹⁴ This applies to the 20th century. We do not have many good “first-hand” sources to be able to say much about the feelings of serfs, but there is every indication that their work was incomparably harder than the work of farmers in communist Poland (cf. Szpak 2013), and also farmers in the two inter-war decades.

because there is too much responsibility connected with hygienic and technological requirements, and too much work to cope with, even temporarily, for someone who does not usually work on the farm.¹⁵

To all appearances, farmers' modes of work have thus not diverged much from the traditional model characterised by constant bustling around,¹⁶ but the details have changed considerably: the intensity of work, social relations with neighbours, the possibility of getting away from the farm even for just a few days. Loneliness has also appeared, increasingly affecting farmers today. Most importantly, however, the farmers' own assessment has changed: much more than before, today their aspirations are shaped by the urban mode of work and consumerism, familiar to them from personal local experience and from the media. Comparing themselves to the average office worker, who puts in the required eight hours without much stress and then goes home to spend free time on fun pastimes, obviously gives rise to frustration among farmers, and opposition to the mode of work they themselves pursue. What was once essentially a religious obligation towards the land, things sacred and society, has ceased to be the main point of reference; it has been replaced by the modes of work and consumption determined by other members of society.

4. Conclusion

As a result of structural changes in rural areas, such as deagrarianisation, the resultant migrations and also the professional emancipation of women, work in agriculture has lost its social character. Instead of connecting people with one another and serving as a pretext for building and maintaining neighbourly and social relations, it has become an isolating element. Most often, farmers no longer work on the farm with other family members (who are busy with other things: their education, a job in the city), nor do they take advantage of help from their neighbours (who either have their own farm keeping them very busy

¹⁵ Just a dozen or so years ago, the wife of a local administration member in Podlasie, herself the operator of a sizable dairy farm together with her son, told me about the agreement she had with her husband: she went away with friends to Masuria or the mountains for two weeks twice a year, and her husband stood in for her, helping the son run the farm. However, this arrangement was not seen as ideal, as it did not enable the family members to go away on holiday together.

¹⁶ As Zadrożyńska notes, in the present-day mode, tradition "is probably an inspiration for cultural transformations and variants". Despite a fascination with the dynamic changes of recent years, or perhaps precisely because of them, it is worth remembering that "the continuity of our culture is an indisputable fact", and that both in olden times and today, "tradition (or, more precisely: its power of influence) plays a major role as a mechanism of the transfer, continuance and ties between individual components of culture" (1983, pp. 16–17). Earlier models do not simply vanish; they are transformed, they remain in the memory as a point of reference and an element helpful for judging contemporary reality etc.

or have already retired, or work in the city, so the old system of exchanging work no longer includes them). Consequently, performing a growing number of duties is taking up so much of farmers' time and costing them so much energy that there is no room left for socialising, neighbourly relations, or even family activities. Even necessary professional contacts, e.g. with commune officials, employees of the Agency for Restructuring and Modernisation of Agriculture (ARiMR), people from the dairy or the bank, do not fill this social void, because they are increasingly marked by mutual haste as well as being squeezed into the rather restrictive scripts of contacts between officials and petitioners. On the one hand, this ensures greater professionalism in customer service, but on the other it deprives farmers of yet another opportunity to talk about their problems, share their dilemmas etc. (in earlier times, such contacts abounded in personal elements; these relations often resembled friendship, and every meeting offered an excuse to have a conversation). Loneliness is a new aspect of agricultural work, and we will likely start seeing its effects in the near future.

Today's farmers can make enough profit on their operations to guarantee their families quite a good standard of living. At the same time, though, their work has lost its importance in the eyes of society, both among representatives of other social groups (the farmer occupation's prestige, the role of "those who feed the nation" ascribed to them) and in their immediate environment. A steadily decreasing proportion of rural residents are involved in agriculture, and they consequently stop assigning it a key role. By treating agriculture in rather a bureaucratised way, defining all its aspects down to the smallest detail, even institutions dedicated to agriculture (like the ARiMR) are, in a way, stripping it of references to the sacred sphere, of the religious dimension that lent working in agriculture special meaning in olden times. The fact that farmers no longer have to pass on their knowledge and skills to the next generation, since their children will probably choose a more comfortable life in the city and will not take over the farm, is not just another fact diminishing the importance of what they do for a living. In a sense, (as they accept their children's life choices) it also forces farmers to adopt this way of thinking about agriculture, to agree with the arguments of those who see farming as nothing more than just one of many occupations.

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Zmiany rolniczego modelu pracy

Streszczenie: Na wsi przez długi czas wytwarzał się specyficzny chłopski model pracy, opisywany dość szczegółowo m.in. przez etnografów, historyków czy socjologów wsi. Charakteryzował się on takimi aspektami, jak: skupienie na procesie, a nie efekcie, afirmacja pracy jako takiej, współpraca z członkami rodziny i sąsiadami, zanurzenie pracy w kontekście społecznym. Model ten podlegał znacznym zmianom już w Polsce Ludowej, a ostatnie dekady tylko przyspieszyły ten proces. W obliczu przekształceń strukturalnych wsi, ale też szerszych zmian dotyczących sfery pracy w późnej nowoczesności, wartości dawniej podstawowe dla chłopów przestały odgrywać już tak istotną rolę w życiu współczesnych rolników. Ich miejsce zajęło inne nastawienie, inne umiejętności stały się konieczne, inne postawy zaczęły być cenne, m.in. dlatego że rolnicy są świadomi, iż ich dzieci prawdopodobnie będą musiały odnaleźć swoją ścieżkę zawodową poza rolnictwem i z myślą o tym inaczej je wychowują. W prezentowanym artykule ukazano nie tylko nowe modele pracy rolniczej i związany z nimi system wartości, lecz także źródła, z których rolnicy czerpią takie wzorce.

Słowa kluczowe: etnografia, rolniczy model pracy, praca rolnicza, dezagraryzacja, Polska.

Ilona Matysiak

Between Passion and Rejection – Attitudes to Farming among Young University Graduates in Rural Areas of Poland*

Abstract: The aim of the article is to analyse the significance of farming and agriculture in the lives of young rural university graduates in Poland. Their educational and professional choices are discussed. How many of them graduated from agricultural higher education institutions and agricultural disciplines? Do such decisions translate into taking up farming after having completed the studies? What are the reasons that young people with higher education living in rural areas may be or may not be interested in farming? Another objective is to identify the main factors potentially “pulling” them towards agriculture and those “pushing” them out of this sector. The article is based on 92 in-depth interviews with university graduates aged 25–34 and 27 in-depth interviews with competent local informants conducted in ten purposely selected rural municipalities across Poland. The results show that farming and agriculture are more present in young university graduates than their educational and professional choices suggest. However, the interviews reflect the dominance of the modernisation paradigm shaping the perceptions of farmers and agriculture in Poland.

Keywords: young people, university graduates, higher education, farming, agriculture, rural areas.

1. Introduction

The aim of the article is to analyse the extent to which farming is present in the lives of young rural university graduates in Poland. What role does it play in their educational and professional choices? Are they interested in fields and disciplines related to agriculture? Are they willing to take up farming?

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The objective is also to identify factors potentially “pulling” rural young university graduates into farming, i.e., making them enter the agricultural sector, and factors that may discourage them from doing so (“pushing” ones), thus shaping their overall attitudes to agriculture and farming.

In the most recent decades, marked by Poland’s transition to democracy and free markets, as well as accession to the European Union, Polish rural areas have been changing significantly in terms of their functions as well as the socio-economic structure of their population (Wilkin 2018). Recently intensified deagrarianisation results in a greater diversification of rural space functions—alongside the productive one focused on agriculture, others, such as recreational and residential, become increasingly important (Kłodziński 2010). As the number of rural residents living off farming alone has decreased significantly, farmers are no longer a dominant professional group within the rural population, giving way to workers employed outside of agriculture and a growing rural “middle class”, in some areas also reinforced by newcomers from the cities (Halamska 2016).

However, this does not mean that agriculture has lost its significance in terms of the economy, food provision, as well as local community life. The concept of a multifunctional development of agriculture emphasises its other than productive functions: social ones (maintaining vitality and social cohesion in rural areas; providing stability and security), cultural ones (including protection and enrichment of rural cultural traditions, strengthening of rural identity and creating of cultural capital), as well as natural ones (e.g., preventing soil erosion and degradation of agricultural land) (Wilkin 2008, p. 9–21). Globally, the dominant “industrial” model of agriculture, assuming the transformation of small-scale farmers into entrepreneurs running agricultural businesses involved in global trade relationships, is increasingly being challenged by alternatives focused on the resilience of small-scale “peasant” farms and their positive impact on rural communities (Ploeg van der 2008; Zegar 2012) or promoting agricultural cooperatives (Ermanno, Valentinov and Iliopoulos 2013), as well as other collective forms, such as agricultural producers’ groups (Tomczak 2009).

Therefore, one cannot say that agriculture is in a lost position. Different paradigms related to agriculture are competing and clashing, creating barriers but also new opportunities for those who are fond of the countryside and are willing to take up farming, either in a form of a highly modernised agricultural enterprise, or a small-scale farm of a less commercial character. Undoubtedly, advanced knowledge, skills and competences are needed to be able to farm, as well as to operate successfully within the complex legal frameworks and modern markets, and wisely draw on existing possibilities of support.

In interwar as well as post-war Poland, younger generations were the ones more likely to take up the challenge of introducing new ideas and approaches to agriculture (Mróz 2008). In the case of the former, members of the peasant youth movement taking part in courses on agriculture were the vanguard of its pending modernisation (Chałasiński 1984). As for the latter, young people, often graduates of agricultural schools, greatly contributed to further modernising and mechanising agriculture, in many cases against older generations (Chałasiński 1969; Siemieńska and Bijak-Żochowski 1975).

As a consequence, it is important to explore whether and to what extent young university graduates living in rural areas in Poland are interested in becoming farmers. Are those who undertake agricultural activity genuinely attracted to it or rather pressed to do so by their families? What factors may prevent them from running a farm? The questions posed above will be answered on the basis of reflections and experiences of young university graduates living in rural areas, as well as statements by other local informants reflecting on local rural economies and their future development. This fits well with the ongoing debate about the ageing of European farmers and problems with passing on family farms to younger generations due to the lack of young people's interest in farming, especially in a small-scale agriculture (White 2012). According to existing evidence, however, age is one of the most influential factors in a farmer's attitudes towards sustainable and efficient agriculture, as well as the welfare of farm animals (Zagata and Sutherland 2015).

The empirical material in this article is drawn from the qualitative part of the author's own research on young university graduates in rural areas of Poland. 92 in-depth interviews were conducted with rural residents aged 25–34 who had a university degree. Another 27 interviews were conducted with representatives of local government, local public institutions, and local leaders. The research covered ten purposely selected rural municipalities across Poland.

Firstly, a brief literature review on young highly educated rural residents and agriculture will be presented. Secondly, the methodology of the study will be discussed in detail. Thirdly, the research findings will be displayed, focusing on young university graduates' socio-demographic characteristics, the position of agriculture in their educational and professional choices, as well as factors "pulling" them towards and "pushing" them out of farming. These will be followed by conclusions.

2. Young Highly Educated Rural People and Agriculture

In Poland, historically speaking, the share of young people of peasant or rural origin among university students was rather low, due to various barriers related to structural inequalities on the one hand (e.g., differences in quality of rural and urban primary schools or the post-war Polish state prioritising industrialisation, needing workforce), and socio-cultural factors (e.g., lower cultural capital in rural families, poverty) on the other (Wasielewski 2013). For example, in the 1934/35 academic year, students of rural origin constituted 20.9% of students at all 24 public and private universities (Wasielewski 2006, p. 284). In post-war Poland, despite incentives introduced by the state, in 1964/65 youth of peasant origin constituted 21.0% of all students at all faculties, and in 1973/74 it was 18.8% (Wasielewski 2006, p. 286).

Institutions and fields of study related to agriculture were perceived as among the most appropriate for rural youth. In the interwar period, above-average shares of students of rural origin were found at such faculties as agriculture (35.8%) and mining (32.0%). The only faculty/specialisation in which rural students predominated was theology (61.4%) (Wasielewski 2006, p. 285). In post-war Poland, the tendency for educational choices with a strong preference for agriculture was sustained. In the 1969/1970 academic year, the percentage of students of peasant origin in higher education institutions focusing on agriculture reached 39.7% – more than twice as much as in regular universities and higher education institutions with a technical profile (Siemieńska and Bijak-Żochowski 1975, p. 37). However, the majority of these students used agricultural higher education institutions as a vehicle for social mobility, aiming to move to the city or find a clerical job. Only about a third of their graduates settled in the countryside and worked as agronomists, veterinarians or other specialists directly related to agriculture (Siemieńska and Bijak-Żochowski 1975, p. 37).

After the systemic transformation of 1989, higher education became much more accessible for rural youth due a growing number of local public and private higher education institutions, as well as the possibilities of extension studies – paid, but not requiring a permanent residence in the city (Wasielewski 2013). In addition, the increasing educational aspirations among the rural population contributed to increased participation in higher education by rural youth (Domalewski 2015). According to the most recent estimates of the Central Statistical Office, rural residents amount to about a third of all students in Polish higher education institutions (HEI). In the 2018/2019 academic year, the highest percentages of such students were in agricultural higher education institutions (45.5%), HEIs affiliated with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration (44.6%), and pedagogical HEIs (41.5%). The lowest percentage of students from rural areas was in artistic

HEIs – 22.0% (CSO 2019, p. 15). It seems that agricultural higher institutions are still a popular choice among rural youth, however, not a dominant one but equal to several other types of HEI. Presumably, just as in the past, the selection of such a school does not translate into a willingness to run a farm. Piotr Pietrzak's recent pilot study on 1,935 graduates of ten public higher education institutions who obtained their MAs or MScs in agricultural sciences in 2015 showed that the great majority of them (83.4% on average) were registered in a general social security system (ZUS) (Pietrzak 2018, p. 106–107). It is unknown how many of the remainder would be registered in the Agricultural Social Insurance Fund (KRUS) for farmers.

On the other hand, there is some evidence that young farmers (up to 34 years) taking over family farms are increasingly better educated. The share of HEI graduates among this group increased from 2.1% in 2003 to 8.9% in 2009 (Szafraniec 2012, p. 206). However, in general, since the mid-1990s, work in the agriculture sector has attracted fewer and fewer young people from subsequent generations entering the labour market. Recently, the shares of young people employed in agriculture have reached record lows. In 2018, such a share among those aged 20–24 amounted to ca. 5% for men and ca. 2% for women, and among those aged 25–29 it was 6% and 3% respectively (Stanny and Strzelecki 2020, p. 48). According to existing evidence, young people are the most interested in taking over family farms in central and eastern parts of Poland and in Wielkopolska, i.e., where there are no significant local alternatives to agriculture or in a region characterised by well-established traditions of successful farming (Szafraniec 2012).

3. Methodology of the Study

The empirical data analysed in the text is derived from 92 individual in-depth interviews with young adults with a higher education, i.e., graduates with a BA or BSc or an MA or MSc, living in rural areas. The research covered those aged 25–34. At this age, people aim to achieve their aspirations and make decisions which are of significance for their “life strategies” (family, place of residence, job) (Szafraniec 2010, p. 16–17). The interviewees' socio-demographic characteristics are described in detail in the next section of this article. The interview script included questions related to their origins and family background, educational and professional choices, motivations for living in the countryside, as well as local community engagement.

Apart from this, 27 in-depth interviews with competent local informants were also analysed. These interviewees included: village representatives (7), mayors (5), directors of a local cultural centre (5), municipal clerks (4), municipal councillors (2), village councillors (1), members of volunteer fire brigades (1), members of local NGOs (1), a parish priest (1). This group of interviewees consisted of 16 women

and 11 men. In this case, the interview script included questions about the strengths and weaknesses of a given area, characteristics of its local economy, as well as the level of its attractiveness for young people, and possible directions of future local development.

The interviews were carried out in ten selected rural municipalities in provinces belonging to four historic macro-regions differing in terms of agriculture, population and the direction of local development (e.g. Stanny, Rosner and Komorowski 2018). The municipalities were selected according to the following criteria: the share of the population with higher education in the district (*powiat*), the type of the local economy, and the distance from larger urban centres. Consequently, two municipalities were selected in each region – an “agricultural” municipality (with more than 60% of its area as farmland according to the 2010 National Agricultural Census) and a “tourist” municipality (e.g., with nature-related tourist attractions or heritage monuments, or located close to them). These represent two main types of rural areas: those focusing on production and those focusing on consumption (Gorlach 2004). In order to avoid large suburbs, all the municipalities are located at least 80 km from a town or city with a population of over 100,000. Between eight and ten interviews were carried out with university graduates, and two or three competent local informants were interviewed in each municipality (see Table 1).

The first young university graduates interviewed were indicated by competent local informants, while others were identified via snowball sampling. The research was carried out between June and September 2016 and in May and June 2017.¹ The interviews were transcribed, coded using MAXQDA 12 software and subjected to a qualitative analysis.

It has to be emphasised that farming and agriculture were important, but just one of many other themes touched upon in this research. It therefore allowed for the identification of some interesting tendencies, but the group of highly educated young farmers definitely requires further and more systematic investigation. The results of the study are not representative of all rural municipalities in Poland but the selection of municipalities for research makes it possible to make generalisations limited to particular types of local context.

¹ At first, the research was to be conducted only in eight rural municipalities located in different parts of Poland. However, in 2017 two more municipalities from the Warmińsko-Mazurskie province were included in order to ensure the diversification of western and northern areas added to the Polish territory after WWII.

Table 1. List of rural municipalities selected for the research and number of interviews
Tabela 1. Wykaz gmin wiejskich wybranych do badania wraz z liczbą przeprowadzonych w nich wywiadów

Region	Western and northern areas		Former Russian partition		Former Prussian partition		Former Galicia (Austrian partition)	
	Province	District	Province	District	Province	District	Province	District
	dolnośląskie	walbrzyski	warmińsko-mazurskie	etcki	mazowieckie	siedlecki	wielkopolskie	małopolskie
	głogowski	walbrzyski	szczyeciński	pułtuski	koniński	leszczyński	gorlicki	nowosądecki
Municipality	Pęcław	Walim	Kalinowo	Świątajno	Gzy	Mokobody	Krzymów	Wijewo
Type of municipality	agricultural	tourist	agricultural	tourist	agricultural	tourist	agricultural	tourist
Interviews with university graduates	8	10	9	9	10	9	10	10
Interviews with local informants	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	2

Source: Own study.
 Źródło: Opracowanie własne.

4. Characteristics of the Local Context

In general, from the interviewees' perspective, the local economies and employment opportunities in the municipalities examined vary to some extent. Usually, the most important employers outside the agriculture sector are local public institutions and small local industrial entities, as well as retail. Agrotourism seems to be most developed in Gródek nad Dunajcem (Małopolska). Economic emigration to the cities or abroad was most frequently mentioned in municipalities in Małopolska and Warmińsko-Mazurskie. In the municipalities examined in Wielkopolska and Dolny Śląsk, especially in case of Pęcław and Krzymów, a significant number of people work in nearby industry, in the towns or cities or in Germany. The municipality of Wijewo (Wielkopolska) is described as having an entrepreneurial spirit – characterised by numerous small businesses providing various services, such as carpentry, construction and transport.

As for agriculture, Gzy and Mokobody (Mazowieckie) are characterised by relatively small family farms, usually up to about a dozen hectares, and production includes various types of crops, some corn and some beef-cattle rearing. Additionally, in Mokobody there are some dairy farms and mushroom production. In both municipalities in Małopolska (Gródek nad Dunajcem and Moszczenica), typically for this region of Poland, farms are often very small (just a few hectares) and highly fragmented, including a variety of plant production and breeding. In Dolnośląskie, the municipality of Pęcław is characterised by large-acreage farms of several hundred hectares owned by “outsiders” (joint-ventures or a German owner). In Walim agriculture production is really scattered, as the area is hilly and arable land is used mostly as grassland. In Wielkopolska, the agricultural sector in the municipalities of Krzymów and Wijewo consists of small family farms and few larger ones. Both municipalities in Warmińsko-Mazurskie, Kalinowo and Świętajno are characterised by the largest farms of several hundred hectares, focused on milk production, as well as some crops and rapeseed oil. In Kalinowo, there are several farms of over 1,000 ha, previously belonging to state-owned farms (PGR) and now managed privately. In Świętajno, there is also a large-scale mushroom-production business (several dozen production halls).

In all the municipalities examined, the processes characteristic of rural areas across Poland (e.g. Bukraba-Rylska 2008; Halamska 2016) were also mentioned: concentration of agricultural activity within few larger farms in the area, a tendency by smallholders to keep the land as a safety net or due to EU subsidies, the improvement of the farmers' quality of life and further modernisation of their farms after the Poland's accession to the EU (especially in the municipalities in Warmińsko-Mazurskie and Dolnośląskie, where the farms' acreage is the largest).

In each municipality some examples of young people taking over family farms were mentioned. However, these were often described rather as exceptions than a broader trend.

5. Socio-demographic Characteristics of Young University Graduates

The interviewees were 63 women and 29 men. About half of the men and women belonged to each of the categories of over-20-year-olds and over-30-year-olds. The great majority of the interviewees, particularly men, originate from villages where they currently live. In many cases, their parents and grandparents often also come from the area. The interviewees are therefore usually well “rooted” in their respective local communities.

The majority of the interviewees held an MA or MSc: 41 women and 16 men. It is worth pointing out that the men had tended to leave higher education with a BA or BSc degree more often than the women. The great majority of my interviewees, especially the women, indicated that they were among the first generation of university graduates in their families. Their parents usually had a basic vocational or secondary vocational education and had mostly been in working-class jobs as craftsmen, minor officials or farmers.

As for the interviewees’ own family life, the majority of women were married with children, a few of them had informal relationships and ten women were single. As many as 15 of the 29 men were unmarried/without partners. This result fits the documented tendency of young rural women to leave the countryside more often than young men, due to education and professional aspirations (Michalska 2013).

Importantly, nearly all the interviewees were in work. Most of them had found employment no more than 20 km from their place of residence, mostly in local public institutions (municipal public offices, cultural centres, social welfare centres, schools). Interviewees running their own businesses or family farms are not too numerous – nine people (five men and four women) in the case of the former and six (two men and four women) in the case of the latter.

6. Young University Graduates: Educational Choices and Agriculture

The interviewees had no significant preference in agricultural higher education institutions (HEI). The relatively most numerous group (about a fifth of all interviewees) were graduates of private HEIs focusing mostly on social sciences. Other, less frequently selected HEIs included: public universities, state higher vocational schools (*państwowe wyższe szkoły zawodowe*), public HEIs focusing on

life sciences or agriculture,² as well as polytechnics and other HEIs with a technical profile. Few interviewees had graduated from public economic and pedagogical universities or physical education universities.

The low position of agricultural studies among the interviewees' educational preferences is also clearly visible when looking at fields of study from which they graduated. The most frequently chosen fields included: pedagogy, special education, public administration, management, and technical studies, such as land management and planning, geodesy, transport, information and communications technology, as well as production engineering. Agricultural sciences (agriculture, horticulture, forestry and veterinary) were not among them. The underlying reasons in opting for these varied. In the case of a few men interviewed, selecting agricultural studies was directly related with their plans to take over a family farm and expand it in the future: "I think that university studies are essential, because agriculture has changed significantly, the pace of robotization in this sector has been increasing. [...] Someone who worked on a farm all his/her life, if such person tried to use a modern tractor, they wouldn't even be able to start the engine and get it moving" [8.Kalinowo_M.27]. However, a few female interviewees who were agricultural studies graduates foresaw their professional career not on a family farm, but in public administration institutions supporting farmers and the agricultural sector: "I thought that, after Poland's accession to the European Union, there would be many jobs related to supporting farmers in terms of funds and knowledge, namely in agricultural advisory centres, The Agency for Restructuring and Modernization of Agriculture, that they would need specialists" [2.Mokobody_K.30].

7. Young University Graduates: Professional Choices and Agriculture

As mentioned above, the interviewees describing themselves as farmers are not numerous, six of them altogether (two men and four women). Their farms vary in terms of size and type of production, including both small, ecological family farms and large-scale, highly modernised "farming enterprises". In case of the former, a spouse of an interviewee working on a farm is employed outside agriculture, whereas in the latter, both an interviewee and his/her spouse work on a farm. For one female interviewee, her ownership of a farm exists only "on paper". In fact, her father still does all the farming, but the property transfer was necessary in order to apply for EU funds for young farmers. The interviewee was focused on raising her daughter and did not feel confident enough to be able to truly take over managing the farm in the future.

² The selection of an agricultural higher education institution, however, does not mean studying a field related to agricultural sciences, as such schools offer also a variety of other disciplines.

Interestingly, agriculture and farming are present in the lives of over a dozen interviewees other than those who described themselves as farmers. Several men work on farms owned by other family members (parents, siblings) and combine that with a job outside agriculture. Other interviewees mentioned a family farm owned by their parents or in-laws, although they are not engaged in daily farm work. A few indicated that they help their parents or in-laws from time to time, when the farm work is particularly intense or when such help is requested as farm owners cannot do certain work by themselves: “Only sometimes [...] During the harvest” [3.Wijewo_M.32]; “We go there and help, during digging up potatoes, harvest, haymaking and so on. When my in-laws are invited to the wedding, they cannot tell their cows: ‘We are sorry, but nobody will milk you today’” [5.Kalinowo_K.31]. They help in farm work due to a sense of a family obligation, but they do not plan to become more involved in agriculture in the future. A few others use a family farm as a means to stay in the social security system for farmers (KRUS) while working elsewhere. The KRUS is highly subsidised by the government and therefore requires much lower premiums in comparison with the Social Security Institution (ZUS) covering everybody else but farmers. Several interviewees had witnessed the disappearance of farming activity from their families. A few of them mentioned that their grandparents were the last generation in their family cultivating the land. In other cases, the interviewees’ parents were the ones who had stopped farming. Often, such a process was seen as an inevitable: “A life in the countryside was different back then, it was different when I was a child. There were more farms and people could live off farming. We do not maintain our family farm anymore” [8.Krzymów_K.25].

8. “Pulling” Factors

8.1. Farming as a Profession and a Source of Income

Only two interviewees, a man and a woman, are engaged full-time in farm work and agriculture is their only source of income. Both live in Kalinowo, where the farm acreage is the largest among the rural municipalities examined, and with their spouses they run family farms of about 100 ha, focusing on dairy (ca. 200 cows) and crop production. In both cases the farms were inherited within a family. The current owners developed the farms further and advanced their modernisation through investments based on the EU funds available e.g., for new machines. Their stories show the complexity of modern farming, requiring not only professional knowledge and skills related to agricultural production and breeding, but also laws and regulations regarding managing a farm and its finances. The male interviewee is a graduate of agricultural sciences who always knew that he would like to be a farmer in the future. The female interviewee, a law graduate specialising

in civil law and regulations related to agriculture, runs a farm with her husband, who inherited it from his parents. She chose her specialisation deliberately, because, back then, she was about to marry a farmer and knew that they would stay in the village: “today, working in the countryside doesn’t mean only working in the field or tending animals. There is a plenty of writing and paperwork, too” [4.Kalinowo_K.33].

In other cases, family farms where the interviewees work are much smaller (from a few to a dozen hectares), and therefore the income from agriculture is combined with other sources from outside the sector. Sometimes, various sources of income create a “patchwork” of different jobs and activities performed by family members (Halamska 2016). For example, one male interviewee is involved in a small family farm focusing on ecological production based on a small herd of six cows, selling milk and homemade cheese combined with agrotourism services. The interviewee runs it together with his parents, whereas his wife works in a private company in a nearby city and occasionally helps with running the farm and attending to guests. For others, combining different sources of income takes the form of a more “classical” two-job model, where one spouse is responsible for farm work while the other is employed outside agriculture. An example is a small-scale cattle farm run by an interviewee and her husband, who also works as a postman. This is reminiscent of the “peasant-workers” model well-known from the past (Gałaj 1964).

According to competent informants, the most successful stories of family-farm successions are related to large-scale and already prosperous farms: “When a farm is large, young people are more willing to come back and take it over” [12. Mokobody_K.40]; “I know a graduate from the University of Agriculture in Cracow who inherited a horticulture farm from her parents. [...] She took over a family business including flowers, vegetables, greenhouses, and she is doing very well” [11.Gródek_K.54]. A farm needs to provide a sufficient income in order to attract younger generation of potential farmers.

8.2. Farming as a Passion

Interestingly, some male interviewees involved in agriculture do not describe themselves as farmers and do not see farming as an important source of income. A family farm and agricultural activity are important parts of their lifestyle and family history, as well as the rural landscape. They work outside agriculture, but at the same time want to preserve it in their lives as well as local communities. The family farm they work on is not their property yet and, in some cases, never will be, as their sibling was appointed as an heir.

One example is a male interviewee, a professional fireman, who also works on a family farm owned by his parents. For him, farming is a passion and a relaxing

activity allowing him to put his mind at ease: “this is more a hobby than a job, because I am just helping my parents. I can escape from my stressful everyday obligations” [9.Świątajno_M.27]. In terms of a professional identity, he describes himself as a fireman, not a farmer. Farming, however, plays an important, almost therapeutic role in his life. Even though the farm will be inherited by his brother, the interviewee completed a postgraduate course in agricultural sciences and plans to stay involved in the farm in the future. Another example is an interviewee employed full time as a guard in a pre-trial detention unit in the city where he commutes according to his shifts. At the same time, he works regularly on his parents’ 30-ha farm. Farming is his passion and a way of showing his respect for his family’s legacy as well as rural traditions. He wants to develop the farm further and is thinking about applying for EU funds to modernise it. However, he would like to keep his city job, as farming itself would not provide sufficient income. Such tendencies to relate farming with rural traditions that should be kept are also reflected in some interviewees’ stories about other family members.

The part-time or hobby connection of young adults with farming was also observed in Northern Ireland. Even when the farm is too small to be commercially viable, farming provides them with a bond with the land and previous generations of their families (Stockdale and Ferguson 2020). A sense of comfort provided by “doing some farming” may also reflect the interviewees’ feelings of belonging to a rural space, a village and local community (Farrugia 2016).

8.3. Farming as a Family Obligation

In some cases, interviewees taking over or getting more involved in a family farm were motivated primarily by their sense of obligation towards their parents, the respect for their lifetime achievements and willingness to preserve a family legacy. However, such attitudes were accompanied with a genuine interest in agriculture or even a passion for it. Clearly, the interviewees were not to become family farm heirs against their will.

Nevertheless, statements indicating strong family pressure for taking over a farm, sometimes against a young person’s plans, were mentioned by competent informants. A good example of this is a story of a young man with ambitions in terms of education and leaving the countryside, who felt forced to take over a family farm due to a tragic set of circumstances:

He was always keen to study. He was attending a secondary vocational school. Back then, it was something, because only few attended such a school, most people went to basic vocational schools. He wanted to live in the city. But

then, a family tragedy occurred, because his brother had a fatal car accident, a brother who was to take over the family farm. In consequence, he was the only child and became the heir. He took over the farm after his father and grandfather [13.Mokobody_K.35].

However, despite the tragic and unwanted beginnings, the man in this case, now aged slightly over 40, successfully manages the inherited farm.

9. “Pushing” Factors

9.1. Farming as an Unprofitable Activity

According to many interviewees, nowadays, farming just does not pay off. The hard work it requires does not translate into a satisfactory income. One should either invest in developing a large-scale and highly modernised farm or not go into agriculture at all: “Hard work and low earnings, right? All the equipment is really costly, maybe you could make ends meet, but it would be difficult to live off it” [7.Moszczenica_K.25]. In several localities, such as the Gzy municipality in Mazowieckie or the municipalities examined in Wielkopolska, the low quality of arable land was also mentioned (between fourth and sixth class) as a serious obstacle to developing economically viable agriculture.

In interviews with competent informants, cases of dissolving inherited farms were mentioned. One example from the Moszczenica municipality in Małopolska was a graduate of Cracow University of Technology, aged about 40, who took over a family farm, but used it as a basis for developing a business related to the manufacture and sale of furniture: “He knew that farming would be a risky business, so he smartly used existing farm buildings and converted them into space for his new entrepreneurial activity” [11.Moszczenica_M.48]. The furniture is exported to Austria and, according to the interviewee, the business does really well. In other cases mentioned in the interviews, family farms have been given up by their heirs and such decisions have not been opposed by older family members. Other interviewees, especially from municipalities in south-eastern Poland, indicated that combining farming on an acreage of a few hectares with working outside of agriculture is just not worth the effort any more. In the past, a “peasant-worker” model assumed farming done by a wife combined with a husband’s employment in industry and his secondary involvement in a farm work (Gałaj 1964) contributed to the feminisation of the farming profession (Tryfan 1976). Today, it is difficult to live off just one “external” salary, many jobs in industry have disappeared, and women would be much less willing to farm. These results are in line with the above-mentioned modernisation paradigm highly accepted in Poland and other Western countries.

9.2. Farming as an Obstacle to Social Mobility

The interviews indicate a tendency to associate farming with hard physical work and low social status. A university degree is perceived as making it possible to find a job outside of the agricultural sector and as a vehicle for upward social mobility.

In some cases, parents were pushing the interviewees, especially women, towards a university education as they saw no future for them in the agricultural sector: “So, my parents run a farm, but they do everything they can so that I would not have to work on a farm. [...] The work is very hard and it brings little income, right? [...] it would be very hard to live from farming alone” [7.Moszczénica_K.25]. This quotation is from an interviewee living in a south-eastern part of Poland, where farms are often small and fragmented. However, such tendencies were also visible in statements of interviewees from areas with a more favourable farm structure. This is illustrated by the example of a female interviewee from Kalinowo, the most agricultural municipality of the localities examined, whose parents prioritised the importance of her school education over socialisation to farm work: “You know, during the summer, when I had summer holidays and there was no school. I used to be more involved on a farm then. Otherwise, much less often, maybe on weekends, when I was at home, then yes” [4.Kalinowo_K.33].

In few other cases, the interviewees explicitly stated that an intense childhood involvement in agriculture resulted in their rejecting it later on, as one becomes more aware of other professional opportunities which are less time-consuming and physically demanding. An example of this is referred to in an interviewee’s husband coming from a farming family: “No, [he is not interested in taking over a family farm], because, since he was a boy, he had to do a lot of things there before he went out to school, milk the cows and so on. He did not have free summer holidays, because he had to work” [5.Kalinowo_K.31]. Such rejection attitudes began to appear in the post-war Poland, when living in a city and an urban lifestyle started to be perceived as alternatives within the reach of rural youth (Mróz 2008).

9.3. Negative Perceptions of Farmers

According to the interviews, mostly with competent informants but also with young university graduates, farmers are often perceived negatively in Polish society.

Their biased images circulate in the media, contributing to dissemination of myths and misunderstandings regarding the nature of today’s farm work, its costs, level of complexity, and the efforts necessary to succeed. In particular, the lack of knowledge of how cost-intensive modern farming is, distorts the farmers’ image as always dissatisfied, complaining and demanding more support despite

the constant inflow of EU funds: “What makes me angry the most is that when someone is not familiar with agriculture, lives in the city and hears that 14 or 16 billion euro in direct subsidies are transferred to the countryside, to farmers, a typical city resident thinks: ‘what do they want, they receive so much money’” [12.Kalinowo_M.67]. In relation to this, another interviewee pointed out that farmers’ work is not appreciated enough by the government, politicians and decision-makers.

Interestingly, negative attitudes and stereotypes regarding farmers are also clearly visible among the interviewees themselves. One interviewee, a successful large-scale farmer himself, pointed out that other farmers from his area are incapable of using EU funds wisely. They spend too much on consumption and improvement of their quality of life instead of investing everything in modernising the farm as he and his wife did: “We spent every penny on farm development and modernisation, while others were more focused on buying a new car or house renovation” [8.Kalinowo_M.27]. In other statements farmers are directly associated with conservatism, the lack of openness and aversion to novelty. Farming communities are perceived as very religious and averse to changes. “Demanding attitudes” were emphasised, especially by the interviewees from the areas where state-owned farms (PGR) used to operate. Their statements repeated well-known themes about “learned helplessness”, laziness and carelessness of their former workers, as well as their descendants.

9.4. Negative Perceptions of Agriculture

When asked about their municipality’s strengths and weaknesses, as well as the area’s most important characteristics, the competent local informants often highlighted agriculture and farming as obstacles to further economic development or one of the key reasons for a municipality’s poor economic condition.

For example, in Mokobody, a rural municipality in Mazowsze with significant tourism potential, agriculture is perceived as interfering with an inflow of tourists. A decreasing number of farms and no free-range stock in the area is perceived as making it possible to provide the comfort and aesthetics expected from a genuine tourist destination:

Lots of tourists from Warsaw come for kayaking. Many people gave up farming and there are not as many animals as there used to be. [...] In the past, each farmer had about five cows. They were wandering everywhere and left their droppings. Now, you can easily go to the river, barefoot, and you won’t get in anything. There are no unpleasant surprises, and the air is different, right? It smells different [13.Mokobody_K.35].

Several interviewees representing local authorities pointed out that the current system of municipal income provision results in a significant economic disadvantage for areas where agriculture predominates, and larger corporate entities are lacking. Such a local economy structure translates into less financial contributions to the local budget as agricultural land tax is much lower than corporate income tax. For areas where the soil is of a particularly poor quality, tax contributions to the municipal budget are even lower.

Moreover, the agricultural sector is rarely seen as important in terms of creating jobs locally. For example, modernised agricultural enterprises operating in place of former state-owned farms employ significantly fewer people than their predecessors. However, the owners or managers of the largest farms in Kalinowo and Świętajno municipalities often complain that local people are reluctant to work for them. As other authors in this volume have indicated, such reluctance can be explained as rooted in the peasant culture's sense of independence and dignity (see Krzyworzeka 2021).

Importantly, none of the interviewees, both competent local informants and university graduates, see agriculture as a strength or a potential basis for local development, even in Kalinowo, where farms are often large, highly modernised and successful. Local development is associated with attracting outside investors, especially industry, through developed infrastructure and a favourable legal framework, or developing tourism. Even the most successful young farmers interviewed were focused primarily on their own farms and did not refer to a broader context of the local economy in the area.

10. Conclusions

According to the results of the study, agricultural higher education institutions and agricultural studies were not among the most preferred options for the interviewees when making their choices about tertiary education. Moreover, selecting them does not translate into a willingness to farm. Agricultural higher education institutions also offer studies in other disciplines, not related to the agricultural sector. Even graduating from agricultural sciences, however, may only in some cases be linked with plans for farming in the future, and in others with planning employment in services supporting farmers or no plans related to farming or agriculture whatsoever. The interviewees rather tended to choose pedagogy, public administration, management or certain technical studies, such as geodesy, which they expected to increase their chances of finding a decent job, preferably in the local public sector (Matysiak 2019).

Only a very small group of interviewees described themselves as farmers by trade. Interestingly, however, more of them were in fact engaged in agriculture in one way or the other, working regularly on farms owned by other family members, helping them from time to time or coming from farming families, even though a farm no longer exists. The few who live from farming claimed that only large-scale highly modernised farms provide sufficient income and are worth the effort. Such claims reflect the modernisation paradigm, assuming a necessary shift from both peasant culture and identity towards entrepreneurial agriculture and agricultural entrepreneurs (Bilewicz 2020). This perspective seems to be shared by most interviewees, not only university graduates but also competent informants, who implied that the disappearance of small-scale peasant family farms is not only inevitable, but also necessary. However, other tendencies were also identified in the study. Examples of young male interviewees involved in farming but not perceiving it in terms of an important source of income are in line with phenomena described in the literature as “lifestyle farming” or “hobby farming”, associated with small-scale and non-commercial agricultural activity, in the latter case also something done in somebody’s spare time. It characterises rural residents (both local and newcomers from towns or cities) who are fond of living in the countryside and are willing to take care of the rural landscape and provide land stewardship (Gennai-Schott et al. 2020). This is also typical among rural young adults in Northern Ireland, who often perceive farming, regardless of its economic viability, as a way of remaining physically and emotionally connected to previous generations of the farming family, as well as their place of origin (Stockdale and Ferguson 2020). A strong rooting in the countryside and farming culture may explain why young people from farming families take over family farms, sometimes against economic calculations. They are aware of the unbroken line of farmers within the family, as well as a requirement that one child from a farming family should take over the farm (Kuehne 2013). Depending on one’s perspective on farming, the most important “pulling” factors would therefore be related to choosing it as one’s profession, a space to pursue one’s passions, and a way of continuing both family and rural traditions.

The most important “pushing” factors identified are related to associating farming with low income and low social prestige on the one hand, and negative social perceptions of farmers in general, as well as the agricultural sector. The low prestige of the farming profession has its roots in ideologies justifying serfdom, and, later, the negative stereotyping of peasants, visible especially in post-war Poland for political reasons but also following the systemic transformation (Bujak 2009). Since the systemic transformation of 1989, the mainstream media discourse presents small-scale farmers as hampering development, and farmers’ protests as

expressions of their “demanding attitudes” (Bilewicz 2020). The agricultural sector, especially in terms of small-scale farms, is depicted as an obstacle to the socio-economic development of rural areas in Poland and also the country as a whole (Bukraba-Rylska 2008).

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Pomiędzy pasją a odrzuceniem – postawy wobec rolnictwa wśród młodych absolwentów studiów wyższych na terenach wiejskich w Polsce

Streszczenie: Głównym celem artykułu jest analiza znaczenia rolnictwa w życiu młodych absolwentów studiów wyższych mieszkających na terenach wiejskich w Polsce. Omawiane są ich wybory edukacyjne oraz zawodowe. Jak wielu/wiele z nich ukończyło wyższe szkoły rolnicze oraz kierunki należące do dyscypliny nauk rolniczych? Czy decyzje te przekładają się na podejmowanie działalności rolniczej po ukończeniu studiów? Z jakich powodów młodzi mieszkańcy wsi z wyższym wykształceniem mogą interesować się działalnością rolniczą? Kolejny cel artykułu zakłada identyfikację głównych czynników potencjalnie „przyciągających” tego typu młodych ludzi do rolnictwa oraz „odpychających” ich od tego sektora. Podstawę empirycznej części tekstu stanowią 92 indywidualne wywiady pogłębiane z młodymi absolwentami studiów wyższych w wieku 25–34 lata oraz 27 wywiadów z kompetentnymi lokalnymi informatorami, przeprowadzone w 10 celowo dobranych gminach wiejskich położonych w różnych częściach Polski. Wyniki pokazują, że rolnictwo jest bardziej obecne w życiu młodych mieszkańców wsi z wyższym wykształceniem niż można by się tego spodziewać z ich wyborów edukacyjnych i zawodowych. Jednocześnie wywiady odzwierciedlają dominację paradygmatu modernizacji, kształtującego w Polsce społeczną percepcję rolników i rolnictwa.

Słowa kluczowe: młodzi ludzie, absolwenci studiów wyższych, wyższe wykształcenie, rolnictwo, obszary wiejskie.

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Does a Demographic Crisis Threaten European and Polish Agriculture?

Abstract: In recent decades, problems in family farming have been coupled with a demographic crisis. In the face of unfavourable demographic forecasts and processes, the EU's agricultural policy has consistently underlined the strategic importance of family farming and the need for its development as a vital segment of the economy and the core of rural communities. The paper aims to assess the grounds for policies focusing on alleviation of the demographic crisis in EU agriculture as well as giving a preliminary presentation of the effects of implementing the instrument involving subsidies for young farmers' farms, on the example of Poland. The analyses suggest that the mechanisms for accelerating generational changes in EU agriculture have been based on questionable premises and have been not adjusted to the needs at national and regional level. In the EU policy documents and public debate, the support for generational turnover is based on arguments diagnosing a particularly adverse demographic situation in the agricultural sector. The article shows that this position is too general and unnuanced, because it does not include the general long-term population changes, other economic sectors and the different socio-economic and institutional contexts in member states, as well as being limited to a narrow range and often non-comparable public statistics. At present it is also hard to find justification for claims that instruments like subsidies for young farmers have resolved the problem of farms without successors and contributed to generational renewal in agriculture. Varied sources of data and information have been used, including EU and Polish legislation, thematic and expert studies related to demographic issues in agriculture, and empirical material gathered by public institutions.

Keywords: age, demographic crisis in agriculture, family farms, young farmers, CAP.

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, problems in family farming have been coupled with a demographic crisis. The number of farms as well as the number of people working on them is decreasing. Farmers are finding it increasingly difficult to deal with the market environment's pressure to boost the economies of scale and the concentration and intensification of production. This is why more and more often, people consider the launch of agricultural activity to be economically unviable, while the continued running of many operating farms by successors is associated with uncertainty (Wojewodzik 2013). The tough financial situation of a large group of producers is compounded by socio-cultural changes that consolidate the non-agricultural and non-rural model of life and professional aspirations (Gorlach and Starosta 2018). The aforementioned economic and social factors have caused the future of the family model of business activity in the agricultural sector to be questioned (Tomczak 2005; Michalska 2015; Figiel 2019). On the other hand, food-producing organisations that are an alternative to family farms, such as agricultural corporations, group farms, urban agriculture and hobby farming, are mentioned as being promising (Jarosz 2008; Ziętara 2018; Sroka et al. 2019).

In the face of unfavourable demographic forecasts and processes, the EU's common agricultural policy (CAP) underlines the strategic importance of family farming and the need for its development as a vital segment of the economy and the core of rural communities (European Commission 2012). Maintaining this form of farming and improving its chances of continued functioning is meant to be served by specially designed interventions in the form of support for young farmers' investments and incomes as well as welfare support for retiring farm owners.¹ Direct support for generational turnover is founded on arguments invoking dangers related to food security, maintaining the competitive position of European agriculture on global markets, and challenges linked to climate change and progressive degradation of the natural environment (European Commission 2010). Activities aimed at preventing a demographic crisis have thus become an important element of the EU's agricultural and rural-development policies. Including resources contributed by the member states, the sum of EUR 18.3 billion was earmarked for their implementation in the years 2007–2020 (European Court of Auditors 2017). The aforementioned interventions also gained importance in Poland's agricultural and rural development policies (Stępień and Czyżewski 2016; Wieliczko et al. 2017). The aim of the article was to analyse and assess

¹ The present paper does not discuss the principles and effects of implementation of structural pensions in the EU and in Poland, due to the paper's limited framework and the fact that this instrument was withdrawn from implementation in the CAP in the period 2014–2020.

the premises and assumptions of EU policy aimed at generational renewal in agriculture. In particular, the research task was to present the different arguments on the reasons for the ageing process in the agricultural sector and mechanisms aimed at countering it that have been raised in the public and expert debate. This discussion relates to the context of generational changes in the Polish agriculture through the analysis of motives and effects of using the CAP pro-demographic instrument, namely setting up aid for young farmers.

The following sources of data and information have been used for the purpose of this paper: EU and Polish legislation, the results of evaluation studies and reports on agricultural and rural policy containing assessments of the effects of implementing instruments that support generational changes in agriculture, and scientific literature. The discussion is also based on quantitative empirical material made available by public institutions, including Eurostat, the Polish FADN², MARD and AMRA. The conclusions of the present study have been based on an analysis of the content of the above documents and a statistical analysis of quantitative data.

2. The premises of selected CAP interventions aimed at counteracting the demographic crisis in EU agriculture

The strategic assumptions of the EU's CAP are directed towards increasing the productivity and profitability of agriculture. At the same time, they devote a lot of attention to achieving positive environmental and social effects (European Commission 2010). According to policy makers, achieving these goals depends not only on the effective operation of farms, but also on the commitment of the young generation of farmers to agricultural activity (European Commission 2015, 2017). The trend observed in agriculture in the member states in recent decades has seen a decreasing number of farms and the increasing average age of their managers, which has usually been explained by the depopulation of rural areas, intensified by the migration of young women to urban areas, older farm owners' reluctance to withdraw from economic activeness, young people's low willingness to pursue agricultural activity due to the high costs of launching it, and the difficult economic situation of the agricultural sector (European Commission 1996; Ross Gordon Consultants SPRL 2000). These factors as well as the drive to improve EU agriculture's competitive edge have become reasons for public intervention aimed at generational renewal in the sector (Regulation EU No. 1307/2013 2013; European Commission 2015, 2019).

² Authors would like to thank to the Polish FADN for providing access to data used in the study, as well as for preparing the data set for statistical analysis.

The demographic aspect, which has been present in the CAP for the last four decades, is gradually being expanded and intensified. Previously, policy interventions focusing on the modernisation of agricultural production favoured its concentration and specialisation, which was coupled with decreasing employment in agriculture and the depopulation of some rural areas. That is why, from the times of the reforms of McSharry, Agenda 2000 and Fischler, relatively greater emphasis has been placed on rural development and environmental protection, including issues of structural adaptation and support for young farmers³ (Moehler 2008; European Commission 2019). The CAP's second pillar offered EU member states voluntary instruments of subsidies for investments, intended for the farms of young farmers; most countries and regions took advantage of these instruments through national rural development programmes (European Court of Auditors 2017). Even greater emphasis on overcoming the demographic crisis in agriculture was placed in the EU budgetary framework for the years 2014–2020. It introduced additional area payments increasing the incomes of young farmers, while rural development programmes saw the expansion of the pro-demographic focus of some previously existing actions (including consulting services, investments in fixed assets) and increased levels of public financial support for selected operations undertaken by this category of agricultural producers (Regulation EU No. 1305/2013 2013).

However, the EU's activity involving intensive support for generational changes in agriculture has caused controversy. Analyses assessing the effectiveness of the implementation of individual instruments have yielded inconclusive results, raising doubts concerning the arguments on which interventions were based and the interventions' effectiveness in accomplishing the planned objectives (Davies, Caskie and Wallace 2013; European Court of Auditors 2017). Different stances towards EU policies supporting generational changes in agriculture can be distinguished in the public, expert and scientific debate. One of them, which

³ Implemented in the period 1992–1998, McSharry's reform of the CAP primarily consisted in shifting from a policy of price support for agriculture towards income support for the sector (direct payments) and in boosting the possibilities for extensification and withdrawal from production, the aim being to achieve a balance on agricultural markets and to secure the foundations of operation of large as well as small farms. As part of the subsequent reform (Agenda 2000, the years 1999–2001), two main areas of activity were defined within the CAP, namely the first pillar, which involved market policy, and the second pillar, which concerned rural development policy. The instruments within these pillars were designed to foster the implementation of the European Model of Agriculture concept, founded on multifunctional family farms and a varied rural economy. Fischler's reform (2003–2007) included the introduction of a uniform area payment system, the separation of direct payments from agricultural production as well as working towards environmental goals on the basis of cross-compliance, which made payments contingent upon farmers keeping arable land in good agricultural condition and following basic management requirements (public health, animal and plant health, environmental protection, and animal welfare) (Tomczak 2009; Adamowicz 2015).

is shared by EU institutions, farmer organisations as well as some researchers, notes the rapid rate of farmers' ageing and sees it as a key challenge for agricultural policy (Fischer and Burton 2014; Adamowicz and Szepeluk 2016; European Council of Young Farmers 2017; European Parliament 2018). According to this approach, the cause of the breakdown of generational turnover in the agricultural sector is multifaceted, involving many different factors: economic (growing price scissors in agriculture, high demand for arable land, a relative decrease in the profitability of agricultural production), regulatory (legislation restricting land mobility, a lack of town-and-country planning), and socio-cultural (a disrupted successor socialisation process, the low prestige of the farmer's occupation, land being treated as a precious good, the widespread non-market transfer of land by inheritance of ownership) (Ross Gordon Consultants SPRL 2000; Zondag et al. 2015b). For these reasons, it has been suggested that it is necessary to continue and expand interventions aimed at accelerating and facilitating farm succession (Zondag et al. 2015a; European Council of Young Farmers 2017; European Parliament 2018).

Another view that notes farmers' ageing points out that this process has been taking place for a long time, and sees it as part of a general European and long-standing trend (Matthews 2018). Among other things, it is caused by the generation of the post-war demographic boom reaching retirement age, the dropping number of births and growing life expectancy (Rachel et al. 2013). According to this viewpoint, demographic changes affect most sectors, but are also concurrent with longer professional activity (due to the population's improving health, among other factors) and labour-saving technological changes (mechanisation of labour), which help alleviate unfavourable demographic trends. That is why it is believed that a wide range of remedial measures undertaken by public authorities might turn out to be ineffective, uneconomical, or result in effects opposite to those intended (Davies, Caskie and Wallace 2013). One cited example of such interventions is the area payments provided under the CAP, which result in an increase in land prices, making it harder for younger people to gain access to land (whether by purchase or tenancy) (The World Bank 2017). In this context, the growing average age of farmers is largely the result of structural transformations in the sector, as well as stemming from the necessity for it to adjust to the changing economic situation and from accumulating ownership problems in agriculture (Bernstein et al. 2018). That is why problems with the emergence of successors on some farms are also considered in terms of a chance for expanding the possibilities for the young generation of farming family members to freely shape their career path. On the other hand, unwillingness to take over some farms offers the possibility for the agricultural sector to gain new entrants, with non-agricultural qualifications and professional experience, who could trigger processes of the multifunctional

development of agriculture and rural areas on a local scale (Lobley 2010; Joosse and Grubbstrom 2017).

The discussion on the demographic situation of European agriculture also features views stating that hard and general statements about a demographic crisis should not be made in relation to this sector. To support this point of view, its proponents cite the results of quantitative studies conducted on large samples in different countries and regions. Among other things, they show that the proportion of older and young farmers varies between regions and EU member states, and the continuance of most currently operating farms is mostly unthreatened (Chiswell and Lobley 2018). For example, according to studies carried out in the *Farmtransfer* project, farms functioning in many EU member states usually had designated successors. This applied especially to modern, efficient and profitable farms, which determine the current condition and future development of agriculture (Zagata and Sutherland 2015; Chiswell and Lobley 2015). In this context, a demographic problem stemming from a lack of successors is observed mainly on smaller farms.

Different opinions on the demographic crisis in EU agriculture as regards its reach, depth and the right ways to respond to it should be juxtaposed with empirical data from a structural survey of agriculture gathered by Eurostat (*Farm Structure Survey*). These data suggest a large scale of changes in the European agricultural sector (Figure 1). They show that in the period 2005–2016, the number of farms in the EU-27 decreased from 14.5 to 10.3 million, or by almost 29%. This decrease in the number of farms progressed with varying intensity in different farm manager age categories. The biggest relative drop in the number of farms was recorded in the youngest group of farmers, i.e. aged up to 34. In the EU-27, this group diminished by 47%, i.e. 469,000 (relatively the biggest drop was in Denmark – 76%, followed by Czechia with 72%, Finland with 71%, Romania and Poland with 53%). The size of the other agricultural producer age groups diminished relatively less, although also significantly. The number of EU-27 farmers aged 65 and over decreased by 27% (i.e. 1.2 million), in the 45–54 age group by 29% (949,000), and in the 35–44 group by 39% (909,000).

An analysis of Eurostat data on demographic changes in the EU's agricultural sector in the years 2005–2016 in a relative approach indicated progressive transformations in the farmer age structure (Figure 2). However, the changes observed were not one-directional, although they usually involved a decreasing proportion of the younger categories of agricultural producers (age groups: up to 34 and 35–44) and a growing share of older farmer groups (age groups: 45–54, 55–64, 65 and over). In all the member states (EU-26), the biggest drop was in the percentage share of young farmers, i.e. those aged 35–44 (a decrease of 2.5 pp), whereas there was an increase in the share of older farmers, i.e. those aged 45–54

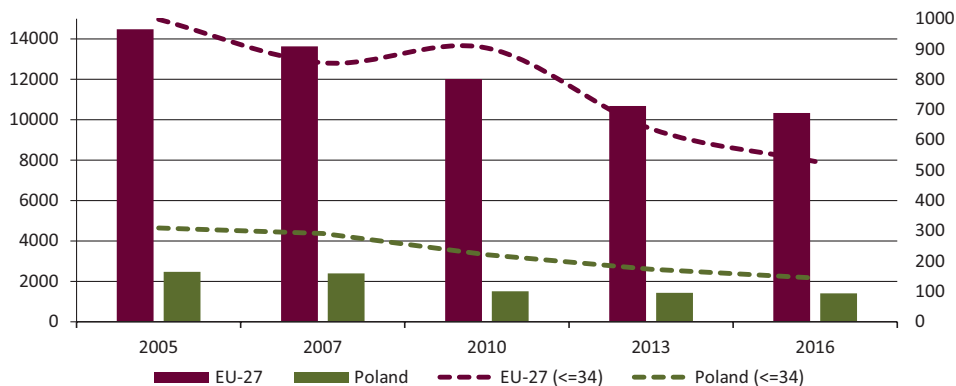


Figure 1. Changes in the number of farms overall (left-hand side) and young farmers' farms (right-hand side) in selected groups of EU-27 member states* and in Poland (in thousands)

Rysunek 1. Zmiany w liczebności gospodarstw rolnych ogółem (lewa strona) i gospodarstw rolnych młodych rolników (prawa strona) w wybranych grupach państw członkowskich UE-27* i w Polsce (w tysiącach)

*The data presented for the EU-27 included the United Kingdom but did not include Croatia (EU accession in 2013).

*Przedstawione dane dla UE-27 obejmowały Wielką Brytanię, a nie uwzględniały Chorwacji (przystąpienie do UE w 2013 roku).

Source: Own calculations based on Eurostat data.

Źródło: Obliczenia własne na podstawie danych Eurostatu.

(an increase of 0.9 pp), 55–64 (an increase of 1.5 pp), and 65 and over (an increase of 1.6 pp). By comparison, Poland recorded different and relatively more noticeable changes in the farmer age structure. There was a significant increase in the size of the 55–64 category (by 9.4 pp), and a decrease in the group of the oldest farmers (by 5.2 pp). On the other hand, the proportion of the youngest farmers (aged up to 34) shrank more than in the EU-26 (by 2.3 pp versus 1.4 pp).

The changes in the farm manager age structure presented above, consisting in a decreasing proportion of young people, reflected the general demographic trend for ageing of the population observed in most European societies. This process, which is mainly determined by the population's longer life expectancy (retirement age being attained by the post-war baby boom) and decreasing fertility rate, has affected the economy by reducing the group of professionally active people and increasing the group of people who reach retirement age and withdraw from the labour market (Rachel et al. 2013). As a result, most sectors in the EU countries recorded a predominance of older employees over younger ones, and in many

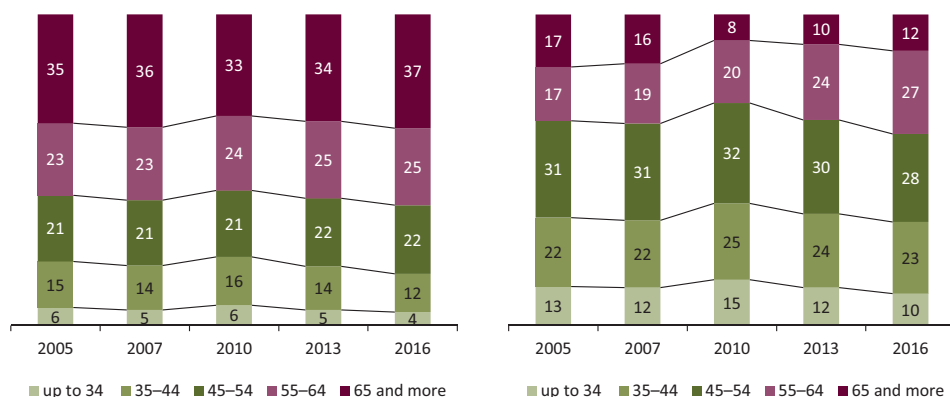


Figure 2. Changes in the age structure of selected farmer categories in the EU-26 member states* (left-hand side) and in Poland (right-hand side) in the years 2005–2016 (%)

Rysunek 2. Zmiany w strukturze wieku wybranych kategorii w państwach członkowskich UE-26* (lewa strona) i w Polsce (prawa strona) w latach 2005–2016 (w %)

*The data for the EU-26 included the United Kingdom but did not include Croatia or Poland.

*Dane dla UE-26 obejmowały Wielką Brytanię, a nie uwzględniały Chorwacji i Polski.

Source: Own calculations based on Eurostat data.

Źródło: Obliczenia własne na podstawie danych Eurostatu.

branches the labour force shortage was partially levelled out by hiring people arriving from outside the EU. *Labour Force Survey* (LFS) data suggested that the outflow of young employees affected not only agriculture, but most occupations and specialisations, especially industrial workers, artisans, office workers, machine and equipment operators and assemblers⁴ (Fargues and McCormick 2013).

When considering changes in the age structure of the farmer population, it is also necessary to take into account the dynamic transformations occurring in the agricultural sector in recent decades, which involved the industrialisation of agriculture, the effects of which included the diminishing total number of farms and a decreasing demand for workers (Zegar 2018). These processes reflected the structural changes in the agricultural sector (increased concentration, automation and specialisation of agricultural production), mainly stemming

⁴ These were labour-intensive occupations, often poorly or inadequately paid, which the automation process was eliminating from the market. The percentage of skilled young agricultural, forestry and fishery workers decreased relatively less noticeably, according to the results of the surveys in question. Meanwhile, a growing proportion of young people was only reported in the case of specialists from different sectors as well as services employees and salespeople (Eurostat 2020a).

from its adaptation to the situation in the business environment, and especially to the situation in the other elements of the agri-food chain. They were thus not exclusively the outcome of unfavourable demographic change, but were also significantly grounded in economic transformations.

Analysing the Eurostat data related to changes in the overall number of farms, the size of different demographic categories of farmers and their proportions in the EU member states, it is also worth noting that they were partially the effect of changes made to the methodology of studying the farm structure (Dudek 2015; Eurostat 2020b). Among other corrections, additional criteria of including farms in the survey were introduced, which usually meant that the population for analysis was narrowed down. At the same time, when considering issues of demographic change in EU agriculture covered in documents related to agricultural and rural policy, it should be taken into account that they were mainly discussed on the basis of a single variable characterising the social-occupational category under investigation, namely the age of farm managers. In addition, FSS data reviewed by EU and national public institutions in the context of policies for generational changes in agriculture usually did not account for other people working on farms, including prospective successors (Milne and Butler 2014; Zagata and Sutherland 2015). Another fact that needs underlining is that the category of the youngest farm managers was the least numerous in all the years under consideration in the EU member states (the other farmer groups were over twice or more than four times larger). That is why studies and documents produced on the basis of FSS studies usually reported relatively the greatest intensity of changes in relative measures.

Looking at policies aimed at generational changes in agriculture, it is worth noting that, usually, neither EU documents nor expert opinions specified any desirable proportion (number) of young farmers. On the other hand, they typically underlined that the enlargement of this group would bring positive effects for the agricultural sector (continued production on family farms, a greater chance of introducing farming innovations or expanding operations) and for rural areas (keeping young people in the countryside, maintaining and developing business activity) (European Commission 2010; European Commission 2015). However, the claim that succession has an unequivocally positive impact on the economic and environmental functioning of farms was usually taken for granted. Studies on the effects of intergenerational succession or analyses of the impact of succession on the economic and environmental situation of transferred farms have not been many so far, and the results have not enabled clear conclusions to be drawn (Zhengfei and Lansik 2006; Bretoni, Cavicchioli and Latruffe 2016). At the same time, it has been rare for the public debate to indicate any possible unfavourable economic

and environmental consequences of intensified succession in the agricultural sector (Milne and Butler 2014).

Preliminary findings on the effects of supporting generational changes through the CAP at the level of all the EU member states indicate that assistance provided under the policy's second pillar so far has had a generally positive although indirect and regionally varied impact on generational renewal. The implementation of relevant instruments has led to increased employment in rural areas and also to increased incomes and economic results on some farms run by young people. At the same time, the CAP's pro-demographic instruments served the transfer of farms among family members rather than the arrival of new entrants in the agricultural sector (Zagata et al. 2017; European Commission 2019). However, it has been difficult to assess the accomplishment of the demographic goal of rural development policy actions, mainly due to the lack of relevant data. Surveys have shown that generational renewal was noticeable in regions where the implementation of CAP instruments was coupled with supplementary initiatives on the local, regional and national levels.⁵

3. The premises and effects of CAP interventions aimed at preventing a demographic crisis in Polish agriculture: The case of subsidies for young farmers

The farms of young farmers received support from the moment Poland joined the EU and its agriculture was included in the CAP mechanisms, regardless of the favourable farmer age structure (Figure 2), a fact that was counted as a developmental opportunity for Polish agriculture. According to policy makers, the demographic differences between farmer groups in Poland and in the EU-15 stemmed from Poland's tough economic situation in the past. Even so, the need to support generational changes in the sector for economic reasons was acknowledged. Assistance for young farmers was supposed to facilitate Polish farms' adaptation to operating on the European single market (Sectoral Operational... 2004). Strategic documents also indicated that replacing managers with younger and, by definition, better-educated people might solve already diagnosed problems of Polish agriculture, such as a shortage of capital, arable land and funding for investments as well as technological stagnation (Sectoral Operational... 2004; Rural Development... 2007). Supporting demographic changes among farm managers

⁵ Among other things, this involved institutional and fiscal support for transfers of arable land, the formation and development of group projects in agricultural production, offering tax breaks on the transfer of capital in agriculture, using land banks, and the activity of social organisations facilitating the takeover of land by new entrants (European Commission 2019).

through subsidies was therefore supposed to contribute to the modernisation of farms and the improvement of their competitiveness (Table 1).

The arguments justifying support for young farmers through bonuses in the years 2014–2020 indicated that Polish agriculture had a substantial excess of labour. In this context, however, it was also noted and seen as a problem that the sector was seeing a population ageing trend, which was stronger in the farmer occupational group than in other economic sectors in rural areas (Rural Development... 2013). Increasing the number of farms with a competitive edge was identified as one of the needs. According to the document's authors, maintaining and increasing the competitiveness of Polish agriculture relied on a favourable structure of the agricultural population. Justifying the bonuses for young farmers, the document presented some general statements related to an inclination for innovation and the ageing of different occupational categories. In this light, generational turnover was recognised as the most important factor contributing to the modernisation and improved competitive edge of farms (Stępień and Czyżewski 2016).

Data from MARD and ARMA show that almost 65,000 beneficiaries took advantage of subsidies for the launch and development of farms in Poland in the years 2004–2019 (Table 1). In the total number of farms, those that received support for young farmers accounted for a small percentage (from around 1% to 3% of the overall number of farms with over one hectare of arable land), and for a slightly larger proportion of farms run by people up to 40 years of age (approx. 10–13%). Subsidies for young farmers undoubtedly contributed to the modernisation of some farms, and also to the improved education level of the beneficiaries. The funding obtained as bonuses was mainly spent on the purchase of machinery, farming equipment and fittings, and on expanding farm animal herds (Wigier 2019). This support likely caused a temporary increase in the value of production output and farms' fixed assets, which translated into higher incomes for some of the beneficiaries. However, it should be assumed that the aid in itself did not have a significant impact on people's decisions to take over a farm.⁶

Support in the amount offered in the period 2004–2020 was usually insufficient to overcome the barriers and problems that successors encountered on farms (the subsidies ranged from PLN 50,000 to PLN 150,000), all the more so in the case of new entrants from outside the sector (Table 1). The aid also bypassed a large

⁶ Any assertions as to the favourable impact of subsidies on the process of generational changes in Polish agriculture need to be backed by in-depth research. The scope of information gathered in the monitoring and reporting system also requires modification in a way that would yield answers to questions about how subsidies influence decisions to take over farms and affect the economic situation in agricultural activity (Zagata et al. 2017).

Table 1. Selected premises and effects of support for young farmers using resources from EU funds in Poland in the years 2004–2020

Tabela 1. Wybrane założenia i efekty wsparcia młodych rolników z wykorzystaniem środków finansowych z funduszy UE w Polsce w latach 2004–2020

Specification	SOP 2004–2006	RDP 2007–2013	RDP 2014–2020
Measure	setting up of young farmers	setting up of young farmers	business start-up aid for young farmers
Objectives	accelerating generational turnover in agriculture; improving the economic condition of farms	stimulating structural changes in the agricultural sector; improving farms' competitive edge	facilitating the entry of farmers with the necessary skills into the agricultural sector
Amount of bonus (PLN)	50,000	50,000/100,000	100,000/150,000
Eligible beneficiaries	age up to 40 years; professional qualifications; minimal economic size of farm; meeting cross-compliance requirements	age up to 40 years; professional qualifications; having a business plan prepared; minimal economic size of farm and amount of arable land; meeting cross-compliance requirements	age (up to 40 years); professional qualifications; having a business plan prepared; minimal economic size of farm and amount of arable land
Number of beneficiaries	14,151	38,857	11,801*
Selection procedure applied	first come, first served	number of points (bonus for arable land area, professional qualifications, unemployment rate in the region)	number of points (bonus for arable land area, qualifications, pro-environmental investments, taking over a farm from an older person)
Total payments in programme (in million PLN)	6,440	74,289	23,811
Total payments in measure (in million PLN)	708	3,165	987
Share of measure's payments in total payments (%)	10.9	4.3	4.1

*Status as of 31 December 2019.

*Stan na dzień 31.12.2019.

Source: Own compilation based on data and studies published by the Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Development (MARD) and the Agency for Restructuring and Modernisation of Agriculture (ARMA): Sectoral Operational Programme Restructuring and modernisation of the food sector and rural development 2004–2006 (2004), Rural Development Programme for 2004–2006 (2007), Rural Development Programme for 2007–2013 (2013), Rural Development Programme for 2014–2020 (2013).

Źródło: Opracowanie własne na podstawie danych i opracowań publikowanych przez Ministerstwo Rolnictwa i Rozwoju Wsi (MRiRW) oraz Agencję Restrukturyzacji i Modernizacji Rolnictwa (ARiMR): Sektorowy Program Operacyjny Restrukturyzacja i Modernizacja Sektora Żywnościowego oraz Rozwój Obszarów Wiejskich 2004–2006 (2004), Plan Rozwoju Obszarów Wiejskich 2004–2006 (2007), Program Rozwoju Obszarów Wiejskich na lata 2007–2013 (2013), Program Rozwoju Obszarów Wiejskich 2014–2020 (2013).

group of small farms run by young people. Preliminary analyses additionally showed that the bonuses improved the economic results of beneficiaries' farms significantly, but only within a very short time from their granting (Dudek and Pawłowska 2020). It is worth pointing out that the support system implemented in Poland, in the form of a uniform subsidy amount across the whole country, did not adequately account for local and regional agricultural development conditions, and rewarded large and medium-sized farms as well as people from farming families (Zagata et al. 2017; European Court of Auditors 2017). Considering the restrictive regulations on land sale/purchase in Poland and unequal terms of access to agricultural land, it would seem advisable to expand the availability of funding to include young farm owners insured in the non-agricultural system and owners of smaller-area farms. In such cases, the subsidy could be conditional upon the quality of the planned project to expand or diversify agricultural activity, and not on rigorously defined criteria of the economic or area size of a farm and the type of insurance the farmer has. Just like in some of the member states, financial support for young farmers in Poland should also be expanded to include advisory assistance, networking support and specialist training specifically targeted at this group of farmers (European Commission 2019).

The Eurostat data cited here, illustrating unfavourable changes in the age structure of Polish farmers, as well as the preliminary information presenting the effects of support for young farmers through subsidies, lead us to consider the scale of the threat of a demographic crisis in Polish agriculture in the longer term. This purpose is served by data from the Polish FADN gathered from farmers aged 50 and over who run commercial farms (Goraj and Olewnik, 2014). These data show that in different years, around half of the farms studied had a designated successor (Table 2). It is not possible to unequivocally estimate the actual level of intergenerational succession on farms solely on the basis of the respondents' answers. Nevertheless, the continued functioning of most of these farms in the coming years seems highly probable.

According to farm life cycle theory, the farms of farmers aged up to 50 should be at the optimal stage of their development, a time when the question of the future of agricultural production assets are far from being fully resolved (depending on the respondent's sex, this is 10–15 years left until retirement age, which usually defines the time when the farm manager and owner changes). At the same time, one needs to take into account that the respondents' declaration that they will transfer the farm to a specific person will not always be fulfilled (Viira, Poder and Varnik 2014). This decision could be changed in future due to many factors, starting with economic determinants (the possible shutdown of farms or land tenancy), through regulatory causes (changes in agricultural policy, the agrarian

Table 2. Changes in the proportion of selected farm groups with a declared successor* among all the farms surveyed in Poland in the years 2009–2015 (in %)

Tabela 2. Zmiany udziału wybranych grup gospodarstw rolnych z zadeklarowanym następcą* wśród ogółu badanych gospodarstw w Polsce w latach 2009–2015 (w %)

Specification	2009 N=4846	2010 N=4762	2011 N=4879	2012 N=4978	2013 N=5463	2014 N=6123	2015 N=6367
By farming type							
Field crops	47.8	46.3	47.0	37.4	46.8	50.0	49.0
Horticulture	38.2	35.1	38.5	47.9	41.1	47.2	53.0
Permanent crops	54.5	48.4	48.8	42.0	49.0	52.4	50.6
Dairy cows	49.2	48.6	49.7	75.3	52.0	54.5	55.5
Grazing livestock	46.5	44.4	37.1	79.9	39.9	42.7	43.8
Granivores	45.1	39.9	44.6	60.7	47.4	54.8	53.5
Mixed	48.0	48.1	47.1	56.7	49.5	53.2	53.2
By economic size**							
Very small	51.5	45.2	50.0	48.5	50.3	44.8	45.2
Small	45.0	43.8	42.8	42.2	43.4	45.7	45.6
Medium small	46.4	45.1	46.5	47.0	46.2	49.6	48.2
Medium large	48.3	48.8	48.8	50.6	53.6	56.8	57.4
Large	57.4	53.2	54.7	54.1	57.3	65.6	67.8
Very large	31.8	62.5	52.9	62.5	55.6	68.2	75.0

* In all the years, the results concerned farms whose owners were aged 50 years and over. ** Economic size in euros: very small – 2,000 to 8,000; small – 8,000 to 25,000; medium small – 25,000 to 50,000; medium large – 50,000 to 100,000; large – 100,000 to 500,000; very large – equal to or greater than 500,000.

* We wszystkich latach podane wyniki dotyczyły gospodarstw rolnych, których posiadacze byli w wieku 50 lat i więcej. ** Zakres wielkości ekonomicznej w tys. euro: bardzo małe – od 2 do 8; małe – od 8 do 25; średnio małe – od 25 do 50; średnio duże – od 50 do 100; duże – od 100 do 500; bardzo duże – większe lub równe 500.

Source: Own calculations based on FADN 2009–2015 data.

Źródło: Obliczenia własne na podstawie danych FADN 2009–2015.

system), all the way to individual motives (the redirection of the prospective successors' career, force majeure).

Nevertheless, an analysis of the data from farms covered by FADN monitoring, related to their characteristics and declarations on succession, does reveal some regularities. First of all, the share of farms run by farmers aged 50 and over increased throughout the period 2009–2015 in the sample surveyed, indicating ageing in the surveyed group of farms covered by agricultural accountancy (Table 2).

Secondly, the scale of declared succession usually grew in consecutive years with the increasing age of those surveyed. The intensified frequency of responses declaring a designated successor thus increased the chances for the continued operation of these farms in the future.

Moreover, data from the Polish FADN documented the fact that the level of declared succession was territorially varied. Farms from western and southern regions (macro-regions: Wielkopolska and Silesia, Małopolska and Pogórze) had a designated successor slightly more often than farms from the eastern and especially the northern parts of the country (macro-regions: Mazovia and Podlasie, Pomerania and Masuria).⁷ The empirical material also suggested that a higher-than-average level of declared succession was present on dairy farms (Table 2). In the years 2009–2015, between 49% and 75% of farms run by farmers aged at least 50 and concentrated on milk production had a designated successor. This noticeably higher trend towards succession should be associated with the special character of this type of production. Dairy farms are usually profitable and have a high value of committed capital, which largely determines the attractiveness of working on such farms in the eyes of prospective successors. At the same time, milk production requires a significant amount of work as well as know-how and high qualifications from the people working on such farms. This means that the process of succession (agricultural socialisation) on dairy farms was lengthy and stretched over many years (Fisher and Burton 2014).

Data from the Polish FADN allow us to say that the succession level was also linked to the economic size of the farms surveyed (Table 2). In most of the years under analysis, in the group of farms of large and very large economic size, the share of entities with a designated successor ranged from 32% to 75% and was higher on average than that for medium-sized and small farms, where this percentage usually did not exceed 50%. Young people are more inclined to take over economically larger farms, as they offer a relatively greater chance of satisfactory income in the future and possibilities for expanding farming operations. Taking over the running of such farms is often a more attractive job for prospective successors than a career in non-agricultural sectors. The above-average level of declared succession on farms with the smallest economic size is also worth noting (Table 2). This trend reflects young people's strong inclination to take over farms as a hobby or as a potential source of extra income or other benefits.

⁷ Differences in the frequency of potential family transfers could be viewed as being due to differences in the strength of farms' market ties (relatively stronger market relations were present on farms operating in the Wielkopolska and Silesia macro-regions), and also socio-demographic and cultural factors in farmer families and rural communities (importance attached to the non-market value of land and the high rural population in the south of Poland), which are conducive to the continuity of farming operations.

4. Conclusion

Support for generational changes will be one of the nine main objectives of the EU's CAP for the years 2021–2027. The intention of policy makers is to make it the core element of strengthening rural communities and the rural economy. Aid will concentrate on small and medium-sized farms and on encouraging young people to take up farming. Moreover, in the EU's newest financial framework, in an effort to overcome the demographic crisis in European agriculture, alongside previously existing instruments of agricultural policy, member states will be encouraged to introduce solutions that would be better adjusted than before to local and regional circumstances. Actions aimed at modifying and increasing the flexibility of national regulations related to fiscal solutions and land sale/purchase are also indicated as being essential. In the face of a demographic crisis, EU institutions are also positing actions conducive to extending the professional activity of workers in the agricultural sector, in the form of measures such as financial incentives, improved work organisation and conditions, and greater support for farmers.

The analyses conducted suggest that, so far, the mechanisms of accelerating generational changes in agriculture in Poland, as in the whole EU, have been based on questionable premises. According to Eurostat data, in the period 2005–2016 in the EU-27, the number of farmers aged up to 34 decreased by 469,000 (47%), although the share of this category in the overall number of farm managers remained relatively stable (down from 6.9% to 5.1%). In Poland, the group of the youngest farmers diminished by 165,000 (53%), while its share dropped by 2.3 pp (from 12.5% to 10.2%). This might suggest that the effectiveness of agricultural policy instruments applied to achieve generational renewal so far has been small. However, the observed direction of change has not allowed an unequivocal conclusion to be drawn about a demographic crisis on a scale that would threaten agricultural development in the coming years. EU documents and national studies related to policies for generational changes in the sector have given inadequate consideration to the causes behind the decreasing number and proportion of the youngest category of farmers. These have included, for example, dynamic structural transformations in agriculture (significant drops in numbers were seen for farms from all the farmer age categories in the period under analysis) and problems with the scope and comparability over time of data gathered during the structural survey of farms. Furthermore, the diagnosis of the agricultural sector's situation ignored the broader context of the ageing of European societies and the factors involved in this, which also have an impact on the problems of other sectors of the economy, sometimes more serious than those emerging in agriculture.

To date, support for young farmers in Poland under the CAP was provided irrespective of Polish agriculture's relatively favourable demographic situation compared to the EU as a whole. It was concentrated on the group of economically stronger farms, with chances for development, and focused on the modernisation of agricultural production assets. In addition, an analysis of Eurostat and Polish FADN data and studies evaluating CAP implementation indicates that at present it is hard to find grounds for the view that subsidies for young farmers have solved the problems of farms without successors and contributed to generational renewal in farming. This means that the inflow of new entrants to the agricultural sector in Poland is largely determined by other factors. These include the overall economic situation in the country, the availability and attractiveness of jobs in non-agricultural sectors, and regulations related to the functioning of farms (including fiscal regulations, social insurance and the agrarian system). Polish FADN data enable us to conclude that on the majority of commercial farms, which decide about agricultural production in the country, generational changes are unlikely to be threatened in the nearest future.

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Czy kryzys demograficzny zagraża europejskiemu i polskiemu rolnictwu?

Streszczenie: W ostatnich dekadach problemy rolnictwa rodzinnego sprzęgają się z kryzysem demograficznym. Na tle niekorzystnych prognoz i procesów ludnościowych polityka rolna UE niezmiennie akcentuje strategiczne znaczenie rolnictwa rodzinnego i potrzebę jego rozwoju jako żywotnego segmentu gospodarki oraz rdzenia społeczności wiejskich. Celem artykułu jest ocena uzasadnień polityki ukierunkowanej na zahamowanie kryzysu demograficznego w rolnictwie UE, jak również wstępne przedstawienie efektów realizacji instrumentu dotacji dla gospodarstw prowadzonych przez młodych rolników na przykładzie Polski. Z przeprowadzonych analiz wynika, że mechanizmy przyspieszenia zmian generacyjnych w rolnictwie w UE miały dyskusyjne przesłanki i nie były dostosowane do potrzeb zaznaczających się na poziomie krajowym i regionalnym. W unijnych dokumentach strategicznych i debacie publicznej wsparcie dla wymiany pokoleniowej w rolnictwie opiera się na argumentach diagnozujących szczególnie niekorzystną sytuację demograficzną tego sektora. Artykuł pokazuje, że stanowisko to jest zbyt ogólne i uproszczone, ponieważ nie uwzględnia długookresowych zmian populacyjnych, sytuacji w innych branżach gospodarki oraz różnych kontekstów społeczno-ekonomicznych i instytucjonalnych w państwach członkowskich, a także ogranicza się do wąskiego zakresu, często nieporównywalnych danych. Obecnie trudno znaleźć podstawy do twierdzeń, iż dotacje dla młodych rolników rozwiązały problemy gospodarstw bez następców i przyczyniały się do odmłodzenia populacji rolników. Na potrzeby artykułu wykorzystano różne źródła danych i informacji, w tym: akty prawa UE i prawa krajowego, opracowania tematyczne i eksperckie dotyczące problematyki demograficznej w rolnictwie oraz materiał empiryczny zgromadzony przez instytucje publiczne.

Słowa kluczowe: wiek, kryzys demograficzny w rolnictwie, rodzinne gospodarstwa rolne, młodzi rolnicy, WPR.

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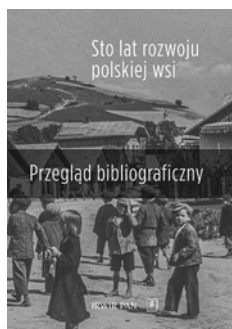


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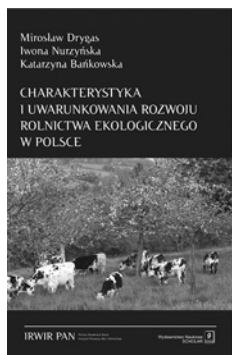


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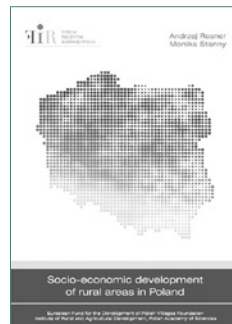


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